

**Students' and Teachers' Views of Transition from  
Secondary Education to Western-Medical University in  
Bahrain**

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## ***Abstract***

This research focuses on the transition of Bahraini students to a Western medical university which has been 'transplanted', with its values and context of practice, to the culture of Bahrain. A socio-cultural model of Communities of Practice was adopted as a theoretical framework in this research for it linked in well with the personal context of this study which suggested that students' transition could be related to the practices in Bahraini schools associated with science and English education, as well as general school pedagogy. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore how different participants perceive the role of school practices, as well as science and English education in transition. In order to explore these different understandings, a case study methodology was adopted and insights into the practices of students' school and university community were gained through the use of focus group and individual interviews, as well as a descriptive questionnaire. The data from the qualitative investigation was analysed deductively under the three themes of science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy, while the questionnaire data was subject to univariate analysis based on mean responses. The key findings indicated high levels of confidence in students' science base and approaches to study, which enabled the students to take a number of strategic actions in order to move through the educational outcomes of the university programme. In terms of the English language, a compromised foreign language (L2) proficiency caused by inadequate school practices was perceived not to play an important role in the transition

process, which suggested a diminished role of L2 in transitions in the context of language change. As far as school pedagogy is concerned, whilst all participants at the secondary level agreed that general memorisation-based pedagogy in secondary schools could play a negative role in the transition, the participants at the university revealed that rote-based approaches to study formed in school could also be strategically used at university. Hence, the findings from this research have specific implications for the model of Communities of Practice and suggest future work within this theory regarding the role of students' individual agency. These findings also suggest a new understanding of transitions in the context of language and culture change.

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## ***Chapter 1 – Introduction***

In this research I explore what it means to undergo the transition from Bahraini national schools to a Western medical university by focusing on the relationship between three areas of academic preparedness – that is the English language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy. These, as will be presented below, are seen by the senior management at the university as factors affecting the transition of Bahraini students, which in this study is understood as the movement through the educational outcomes of the Foundation Year (FY) programme at the medical university.

Considering the specific context of this research, it is not surprising that the senior faculty tend to think that local students from Bahraini schools will find it harder than international students to make a transition to a university which has been transplanted to the culture of Bahrain with its specific programmes, practices and language of instruction. The literature which I will present in Chapter 3 suggests that such transitions are difficult (Bhattacharya, 2010; Serpell, 2007; Druzhilov, 2011) because students from cultures different than the target university find it hard to adapt to the specific ways of teaching and learning this university imposes on them. On the other hand, the ideas that I will present in the context of this research and my own experience working at the medical university had led me to believe that despite the differences in the cultural and pedagogical framework of Bahraini schools and the medical university, there might be aspects of students' school context that in fact facilitate their transition. Therefore, I decided to disregard the pre-conceptions of the management at the university and approach this research without any pre-suppositions. I wished to learn about the factors affecting the



transition of students from the perspectives of key participants, which had led me to adopt an interpretive stance in this research.

Additionally, given that the focus of this study falls on the university transition in the context of different cultures of learning, I adopted a socio-cultural model of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and focused on the participant views regarding how the learning identities of students formed through pedagogical structures and practices of schools might affect students' participation in higher education. I decided that the model of Communities of Practice was the most suitable to guide this research for, when used in transitions, it focuses on the degree of transferability of practices between two educational settings (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). As a result, I focused in this research on school practices in three areas – that is, the English language, science education and general school pedagogy. These were the areas that were most commonly mentioned by the senior management at the university as factors affecting transition and I will discuss this in more details in the section on the context of this research.

In the following sections of this introductory chapter, I begin with presenting the personal context that brought me to this study. I then provide a definition of transition that has been adopted in this study and its link to the socio-cultural framework of the Communities of Practice. I finish this chapter with explaining the rationale and contribution of this research to theory, as well as stating the aims and research questions.

## **1.1. Context of the Current Research**

I began working at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain (RCSI Bahrain), which is the constituent branch of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), in 2009 where I was employed to run and develop English Language courses for students whose language abilities were perceived as insufficient to cope with university study. The admissions criteria at the university require the students to take an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, which is an international examination often used for students' admissions to an English speaking university. The minimum score that is required on entry to RCSI Bahrain is IELTS 5 and all students who fall into IELTS 5-6 category have to attend an English language course offered by the university in order to raise their language proficiency to a required level. Students with initial scores IELTS 6.5 and above are exempt from the English programme for, according to the official descriptors of the benchmarks on the test, learners with this score handle complex language well, understand reasoning and have operational command of the language with only occasional inaccuracies. I will give special attention to the general language proficiency vs. academic language proficiency [otherwise known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)] in the literature review for this has a significant bearing for this study.

The admissions policy in terms of the English language has been adopted by the university in order to address the needs of the majority of our students who, as compared to students admitted in Dublin, the parent campus of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, could not meet the benchmark of IELTS 6.5 (IELTS 6.5 is

the minimum score required on admissions to the campus in Dublin). Weaker language abilities of our students were therefore seen as the major obstacle to learning in the medical programme, which has been entirely transplanted from Ireland to Bahrain, without any local adaptations in the curriculum. Later in the literature review, I discuss the specific language skills students need to develop in order to study science successfully but I also provide some research findings regarding the language education in Bahrain which help to explain why it might be difficult for some students to achieve higher IELTS scores.

Based on some research regarding language education in Bahrain (for example Al-Ahmed, 1998; Al-Ahmed, 1994; Abdulmajeed, 1995) and throughout my own work with Bahraini students, I began to realise that students' difficulties in language might be related to the specificities of language education in the country. My Master's degree in Applied Linguistics also allowed me to develop a better understanding of students' errors and their possible origin, which led me to believe that the current language curriculum in Bahraini schools may not offer opportunities for developing skills that are required in this medical school. Through talking to students, I also learnt that the pedagogical structures and teaching techniques implemented in language classrooms may prevent meaningful acquisition of the language because their language learning is based on memorisation and drill. This was also reflected in the students' work where tasks requiring operational and independent use of the English language caused the greatest difficulties.

Bearing this in mind, I conducted a study in which I sought to understand how the language course offered at the university differs from language teaching in schools and how useful the skills taught in the course were for students' medical studies

(Hayes et al, 2011). Findings from the questionnaire survey showed that Bahraini students lack appropriate language skills in order to use the language independently and that this lack of skills was addressed in the course offered by the university. And while the results were illuminating in that they provided me with a list of skills that needed most attention, they still neglected to explore issues reported by students about pedagogies and sociology of English classrooms in Bahrain. Taken alone, the questionnaire results did not document the totality of issues connected with language education in the country, which formed the need for this study. Consequently, I sought to develop research that would elaborate on the initial findings of the questionnaire survey but that would also investigate experiences of Bahraini learners ahead of finishing secondary education, as well as later after the first year at university has been completed.

Other aspects of my job have also led me to expand on the focus of this research and concentrate on factors other than the English language. The English and Culture Unit for which I work engages in work related to offering support to students through delivering courses in study skills. The results from my recent publication (Hayes et al, 2013) suggested that the study skills programme combined with the gradual introduction of sciences, where students were taught how to manage their study using specific examples of their lectures delivered at the start of the academic year, assisted them in the management of their studies and taught them effective ways of handling the scientific content. The same results also implied that the degree of academic readiness and university resourcefulness of Bahraini students might be low, given that the average responses on the attitudinal

questionnaire and the free comments provided by the students revealed low levels of academic self-efficacy.

Later, in the literature review, I present research findings that indicate how low self-efficacy of students can impact university transition. And while all the discussions by staff at RCSI Bahrain have been focused on the role of the low level of the English language in making the transition, issues related to regulation strategies of students from Bahrain have been neglected. However, by studying work of authors such as, for example Kennett and Reed (2009) or Bragt et al (2010), I became content that this aspect of university transition should not be neglected and that it should be given equal importance in this study. This will also be important for the specific socio-cultural context of Bahrain and its relation to the definition of transition explained in the following section.

Finally, through attending many meetings with science staff in which students' progress was discussed, I learnt that some faculty believe that some Bahraini students do not have sufficient subject-specific knowledge. Staff at RCSI Bahrain claim that students suffer from poor mathematical skills and that their conceptual knowledge is poorer than that of students with A-levels and IB. These claims are very important for the definition of university transition that has been adopted in this study for if they are found true, the intellectual difficulty required to move through the learning outcomes may be difficult to overcome, which will subsequently result in poorer transition into the medical programme.

The perceptions of staff have already been reflected in the general policy adopted at RCSI Bahrain which does not allow students with Tawjihya – that is, the general

secondary qualification in Bahrain and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to enter the five year programme<sup>1</sup>. Instead, these students are enrolled in the Foundation Year which precedes the five year programme and only on successful completion of this year, these students are allowed to progress into the medical course. In Dublin, students with Tawjihiya are not accepted at all and they are required to take the Irish Leaving Certificate in order to be able to study on the campus in Ireland.

The Foundation Year programme delivered in Bahrain is the same as in Ireland but students who study in the Foundation Year in Dublin are those who did not meet the admissions criteria of the five-year programme. It is also worth noting that the minimum admissions criteria in science for students in Bahrain is 90% of the students' final Grade Point Average (GPA) on leaving secondary school, which means that only high-achieving students in the country can study at RCSI Bahrain.

The Foundation Year programme is demanding in terms of the volume of work and method of delivery. The university adopts an outcomes-based curriculum which is lecture-based and which means that large amounts of specialised material are thrown at students in didactic large-group classes. Bhattacharyya (2010) argues that this is often different from what students experience in their schools and explains that students at secondary level interact in smaller groups and have access to teachers who guide them through the mastery of material by coaching and providing study notes. This changes in outcome-based education where the primary role of a lecturer is to deliver the learning programme (ibid).

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<sup>1</sup> The five-year programme is the core undergraduate medical programme. Only students with international qualifications, such as IB or A-levels are granted direct entry into this programme.

That is why, RCSI Bahrain offers an orientation programme to students beginning university, teaching them about the expected practice to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme in the Foundation Year. This involves raising awareness of the importance of independent study, taking appropriate lecture notes and meaningfully engaging with the material through developing literacy strategies that are believed to help students study science in English. These strategies are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis but I mention them here to contextualise this study in relation to the theoretical framework for this research.

This research adopts Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) as its theoretical framework and the fact that university freshmen at RCSI Bahrain are taught about the practice is significant for theorising whether this model is useful for understanding transitions. When Communities of Practice are used in transitions, the focus falls on the transferability of practice between communities (Crafter and Maunder, 2012), which is why it will be interesting to see whether any differences between the old and the expected practice will be indicated by the data in this study and whether this will have implications for students' transition.

Outcomes-based programmes can pose challenges to students for reasons outlined above, but it is also possible that due to the didactic nature of these programmes, especially in the Foundation Year at RCSI Bahrain where the emphasis is on revising the science material from school, not much change in practice may be required. Change in practice may be greater as the students progress from the foundation course and future learning experiences may challenge what will be concluded here about transitioning to the Foundation Year

due to change in the nature of teaching and learning in more senior years at the university. This, however, is beyond the focus of the present study and it will have to be explored in future work.

Despite the possible differences in practice and in contrast to what the staff tend to say about Tawjihiya students, a report on students' progress at RCSI Bahrain prepared by Henari (2009) recorded higher pass rates for students from national schools in the GCC than from private schools<sup>2</sup> in two semesters out of three covered in the study in the academic years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009. These students also recorded higher number of first class honours in all three semesters. Statistics prepared by myself in relation to the cohort of students involved in this research have shown that all Bahraini participants involved in this study passed all subjects in the Foundation Year and that they all progressed into the medical programme.

Thus, the implications from these findings and the contradicting statements stimulated my interest to find out more about the role of the English language and subject-specific knowledge, which in this study refers to science knowledge, in students' transition. This was also informed by the literature I read as a reaction to my observations which suggested specific relationships between foreign language and subject-specific knowledge. This literature will be presented in Chapter 3.

Most importantly, even though the presuppositions of staff at the medical university regarding the English language, science base or levels of university

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<sup>2</sup> Students from private schools are awarded a High School Diploma which is an equivalent of the Tawjihiya certificate and which usually means that students underwent secondary education in English rather than Arabic. Some private schools also award A-levels and IB. No distinction was however made in this report.



resourcefulness of Bahraini students, as well as the research findings from my own studies and from the study by Henari (2009) were useful in contextualizing this research, I as a researcher in this study decided to learn about the transition of Bahraini students from the perspectives and interpretations of those who will be involved in this research and not make any assumptions about the transition studied here. This justifies the interpretive paradigm, the design of the study and the methods of data analysis in this research which will be explained in Chapter 4.

## **1.2. Defining Transition**

Transition is often described in literature as a form of change (Field et al, 2009; Ecclestone, 2009; Hussey and Smith, 2010). In educational contexts, it has been noted that these changes may take place on a more personal level- for example, in terms of new beliefs or developmental growth, or they may involve a physical move from one place to another, such as going from primary to secondary school or leaving a home country to study at the university abroad (see for example Crafter and Maunder, 2012). Parallel observations have been made by Lam and Pollard (2006) who also differentiate between two types of educational transitions and describe them as changes of an institutional setting and as changes of a personal context, the latter one contributing to the development of individuals by forcing them to move from one activity to another. Therefore, 'transition [in education] depicts change and shifts in identity and agency as people progress through the education system' (Ecclestone, 2009, p. 11).

Due to this strong element of change and development in transitions, many researchers propose that transitions can be best understood using various socio-

cultural frameworks which are grounded in the socio-cultural theory that has its origin in the work of Vygotsky (1978). (see for example: Lucy and Reay, 2000; O'Shea, 2013; Osborn et al, 2006). Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory proposes that human development is a mediated process that is organised by cultural artefacts such as language, group activities and understanding of concepts (Lantolf, 2000). It is based on the premise that in their development, individuals reconstruct the cultural knowledge of their communities and that this development is conditioned by interactions with these communities (ibid). When applied in transitions, the socio-cultural theory addresses the socially organised activities and places them in the forefront of the transition process because they determine how much development or change will have to take place when individuals find themselves in a new social and cultural world (Lantolf, 2000). Therefore, depending on how transition is understood, different frameworks are developed from the socio-cultural theory, examples of which include the notion of consequential transitions (Beach, 1999) or Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998), which is the framework adopted in this study and which will be explained in the relevant section in this thesis.

Generally speaking, however, the socio-cultural theory suggests to interpret transition as change in self-identity 'born out of uncertainty in the social and cultural worlds of the individual' (Crafter and Maunder, 2012, p. 10). Previously cited Lam and Pollard (2006), who analysed the transition of children from home to nursery, support this view and discuss transition as socially and contextually moderated.

[transition is] the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another ... to when the child is

more fully established as a member of new setting. It is usually a time of intense and accelerated development demands that are socially regulated.

(ibid. p.125)

And even though the conclusions by Lam and Pollard (2006) have been made in relation to pre-nursery children, parallels can be drawn when defining transition to university such as this one. The meaning of transition proposed by these authors depicts it as a product of social institutions and the outcomes these institutions expect students to achieve. This meaning liaises with the meaning of transition sought in this study and corroborates with the main research questions that seek to explain how specific pedagogical structures of Bahraini schools, cultural framework of students and their knowledge base affect their ability to achieve the desired outcomes at the medical university. From this perspective, transition is seen as educational attainment which is determined by movement through a set of learning outcomes that have normative expectations embedded in them (Ecclestone, 2009). More on this can be found in section 3.1.

Finally, Lam and Pollard's (2006) definition of transition above which states that a transition has been made when individuals become established members of a new setting through shifts in identity and agency fits with the theoretical framework underpinning this study which also assumes that transitions are related to mastering practices that ensure membership in a specific community (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). Therefore, putting all these interpretations together gives a working definition of transition in this study which is undergoing changes in identity and agency to become an established member of the university's community by attaining the educational outcomes of the Foundation Year programme.

### **1.3. Rationale and Contribution**

As it was stated at the beginning of this introductory chapter, this research explores the transition of Bahraini mainstream secondary students into the first year of medical education at a Western medical university. It was also stated that the students whose transition is considered here are those that are thought of by the senior management at the university as disadvantaged because of their low language proficiency and educational background. Therefore, this study was undertaken to gain an insight into what role weaker language abilities, science background knowledge and the pedagogical context of Bahraini schools play in students' transition to Western third level education, and to contribute to knowledge by building an understanding of transitions in terms of change of language and learning culture.

The medical education scene in Bahrain is dominated by two universities, one established regionally by the leaders of the Gulf States, the other being an international partner of Dublin's Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) – that is, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain (RCSI Bahrain), which is the research setting for this study.

The former, the Arabian Gulf University (AGU) was primarily established to accommodate students from the Gulf region and to graduate students who believe in the Mission of the Gulf-Cooperative Council – that is, 'the importance of cooperative work for the benefit and welfare of all citizens in the region' (Hamdy et al, 2010, p. 290). Since its inception, the college has been running an integrated Problem-Based Learning (PBL) curriculum, strongly emphasizing community

needs and life-long learning. In terms of assessment, the AGU uses several student evaluation models that contain problem-based context rich questions, especially in the early stages of undergraduate programmes, in the form of portfolios, log books and observed student interactions with real patients (*ibid*).

On the other hand, the RSCI Bahrain's admission policy is open to more international audience and its learning strategy is described as an integrated outcomes-based curriculum, characterised by a focused, system based and modularised programme (Medical Graduate Profile, 2008). In the first two years of study, assessment procedures at RCSI are based on formative and summative written examinations with high stake summative assessments taking place at the end of each semester. Blueprinting of students examinations is used to match curricular objectives and rigorous marking procedures are applied to all forms of assessment which is internally and externally moderated.

It is logical to assume that the specifically defined programme at RCSI Bahrain may create some difficulties with transition for students, not only from Bahrain, but also from other parts of the world. The programme's high stake summative testing and demanding assessment, or even change in delivery from small class to lecture-type, may pose obstacles to learning for secondary students who are not used to studying large amounts of material and who might find lecture-delivery quite overwhelming (for example, Balduf, 2009). For Bahraini students, however, this programme could be specifically demanding because, according to some voices at the medical university, lack of local adaptations in the programme can cause several problems with the transition of local students, who educated in the Bahraini mainstream schools face problems with having to study in English,

adopting new study strategies and coping with pedagogical structures of the medical university. Therefore, by exploring different views of students, university lecturers and secondary teachers, this study will be able to show, in terms of its broader contribution to knowledge, whether change of language and pedagogical culture means poorer transition. The theory of Communities of Practice suggests this and research cited under the theoretical framework implies that patterns of teaching the language and other subjects affect students' ability and approaches to encountering new situations, which in turn, may affect transition. What role these previously taught patterns played in yet another example of transitions to university in the context of cultural change will be explored in this study.

Hamdy et al (2010), who wrote an overview of medical education in the GCC region, call for research that would focus on how PBL and outcomes-based medical programmes are received by the specific culture of Arab states and how the transition of Arab students to a Western mode of learning may be related to the social aspects of the Islamic nation. The same author, in his previous work on medical education in the GCC region (Hamdy, 2008), calls for investigations into the phenomena of transplanting curricula from what he calls 'a donor institution' to the recipient culture with its specific values, belief systems and contexts of practice. This sets an important rationale for this study, taking into consideration the fact that the medical programme implemented at RCSI Bahrain has been entirely 'transplanted' to the context of Bahrain, with no local adaptations at the level of curriculum and pedagogy. This also increases the value of this study in terms of its contribution to knowledge for it will, using the example of Bahrain, address the gap in knowledge pointed out by Hamdy et al (2010) and uncover

ways in which Islamic views on education affect the transition of students to medical education with Western models and in a different language. This will increase our understanding of transitions in terms of linguistic and cultural change and will also add to the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice as a useful lens of contextualising transitions.

In the two studies conducted for RCSI Bahrain, language abilities and study skills of Bahraini students have been found not to be sufficiently developed to cope with the demands of the study at the medical university (Hayes et al, 2011; Hayes et al, 2013). At the same time, the findings from a study by Henari (2009) suggested that students from mainstream schools in the GCC region perform better than students from private schools. These conflicting results form another rationale for this study which aims at problematising the issue of transition of Bahraini mainstream students by exploring why lower English proficiency and lack of certain study skills may or may not be directly linked to students' transition to university. The current research recognises that transition may also be linked to the cultural framework of schools and the background knowledge students bring with them from school, because, as suggested by the socio-cultural framework, these aspects also play an important role in understanding transitions when cultural change is considered.

While there does exist a large body of literature on freshmen transition to university (please see Chapter 3), such research tends to focus on only one aspect of this potentially multi-faceted phenomenon. For instance, students' transition to university has so far been linked and measured in terms of either appropriate learning strategies (James, 2006; Ates and Cataloglu, 2007; Rose et al., 2008, Kennett and Reed, 2009), second language abilities (Hook and Jones, 2002;

Spector-Cohen et al, 2001; Hyon, 2001) or subject-specific knowledge (Krekeler, 2006; Hailikari and Nevgi, 2010; Wang et al, 2010). However, even though the findings from these researches can be very useful for investigating university transition, this body of literature still calls for projects that are multi-faceted in nature. This increases the value of this research for the socio-cultural theory because, by combining the focus on language, knowledge base and school pedagogies, it encompasses many aspects of communities of practice in one project that may play a role in transition.

This research also contributes to this theory in that, unlike the studies cited above, it tries to understand, rather than measure, the transition. Wenger's (1998) theory of Communities of Practice has been used as a socio-cultural theory to understand, not measure, learning for it focuses on the role of educational practices that ground institutional learning in students' quest for specific goals, rather than an end product of achieving these goals (Wenger, 1998). This study does the same, it looks at the underpinnings of learning in Bahraini schools and the medical university to discuss their role in undergoing the process of transition.

In terms of the particular setting of this study, on the one hand, this research contributes to broader knowledge in that it depicts the experiences with and perspectives on the university transition in the context of cultural and linguistic change, but on the other, it also provides a unique insight into the lives of Bahraini students at a Western medical university, which has not been researched before. The researches that are cited in the literature review and that are concerned with experiences of students with transitions related to changes in language and from home to a Western culture have mostly been conducted in Asian, European and



African contexts (Serpell, 2007; Jin, 2011; Druzhilov, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2010), however, I have been unable to find any researches of this type that consider Arab students and Western organizations. This is therefore an under-researched area and this study will contribute to knowledge by addressing this gap.

By doing so, this study will also make a separate contribution specifically in relation to Bahrain and will open a discussion about the value of the recent reforms in science education which are based on internationalisation of programmes in Bahrain with Western models of learning. Internationalising Bahrain's education is the aim of the Ministry of Education in the country (please see Chapter 2), however, as also pointed out in Chapter 2, research in Bahrain has not been sufficiently developed to establish any direction in this area. It is therefore hoped that by addressing the issue of Bahraini students starting Western medical education and considering the relevance of Bahraini education for third level learning, the fit between Bahrain's education and the pedagogical structures at the medical university will be explored. This will be discussed in the section on Practical Implications.

Communities of Practice emphasise the need for an investigation of wider cultural aspects of students' learning and this research does this by capturing far more than achieving or not achieving a passing grade. Consequently, while the core focus of this research lies in capturing factors that play a role in the students' movement through educational outcomes at the university, the research also takes into account all the important issues found in the cultural framework of schools. These can later be applied to any research or university transition in the context of change of culture. Developing an understanding of these factors in this study will

assist in explaining why, and whether rightly so, Bahraini students have been thought of as disadvantaged by the medical university. However, in terms of broader theoretical knowledge, the findings obtained here will help in contextualising the role of language and pedagogical structures in future work of others, whenever change in language and culture will become part of transition. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore different understandings of Bahraini students' transition into the FY at a Western medical university and the main research questions that have been posed here include:

1. What are the perspectives on transition of:

a) secondary teachers?

b) students?

c) university lecturers?

2. How do participants perceive the role of school practices, English language and science background knowledge in students' identity and agency change to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university?

These aims and questions will be answered by adopting an interpretive case study methodology and data will be collected through focus group and semi-structured interviews, as well as a descriptive questionnaire. Before I discuss in detail the methodology and methods used in this research in Chapter 4, I will first focus in Chapter 2 on the essential background information regarding Bahrain and the medical university and in Chapter 3 I will present the literature review, focusing on some perspectives on university transition, the role of the cultural context in making

the transition and the three aspects inherent to this research of language, background knowledge (which in this study is science) and school pedagogy. I will also focus in Chapter 3 on explaining the theoretical framework, the concepts of identity and agency and I will finish with explaining how the focus of the current research arose. Chapter 4 will elaborate on the research paradigm, the case study methodology, participants, as well as means of data collection and data analysis. In Chapter 5, I will focus on answering the research questions by reporting the findings from each participant group, organising them according to the three themes of science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy. Chapter 6 will provide a discussion of the main finding and their value for contributing to understanding of transition in terms of culture and language change. This chapter will also evaluate the usefulness of Communities of Practice as a model for looking at transitions. Finally, in Chapter 7, I will restate the significance of my findings, discuss the limitations of this research and provide some practical implications for future research and current reform in Bahrain.

## ***Chapter 2 – Background Information***

Since the transition of students considered in this study is viewed through the lens of cultural and pedagogical frameworks of Bahraini schools and the medical university, I provide some background information regarding these two settings in this chapter. The categories presented under this section present some information about the social and cultural aspects of Bahraini education and broader societal views on the English language, considering the socio-cultural theory in this study and its main contribution to knowledge which aims at increasing the understanding of transitions in the context of language and culture change. I begin this chapter by presenting a brief history of education in Bahrain and by discussing the school structure in Bahraini national schools. I then move on to presenting background information about the English and Science education in these schools for these are important areas explored in this research. The last section on Bahrain focuses on the educational reform in the Kingdom since the early 90s and outlines its possible consequences for students beginning higher education. As far as RCSI Bahrain is concerned, a brief history is presented, along with the information on the curriculum and pedagogy, which will be referred to many times in the analysis of the findings to highlight how the data indicate the importance of change in learning culture for the transition considered here.

### **2.1. Bahrain**

#### **2.1.1. History of Education**

The date on which formal education began in Bahrain is disputable. First records of education in Bahrain appeared in the account of Al-Tajer (1982, cited in Al-

Hawatchi, 1990) who reports on the teaching practices of Kuttab, literate people who taught the Holy Quran. According to Rumaihi and Winder (cited in Qaddumi, 1995) the first school in Bahrain was opened in 1892 by the American Arabian Mission. At the same time, 1919 is believed to be a year in which modern education in Bahrain began and between then and 1932 various other schools opened, including schools for girls and for other than Sunni religious sects (Qaddumi, 1995). The first secondary school in Bahrain (boys Technical School) opened in 1938.

The official Department of Education was established in 1931 and teachers from Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, along with the local citizens who could read and write were employed to teach in Bahrain public schools. This happened due to the rapid growth of the population which created greater demand for schools and required bigger number of workforce. As a result, the government employed unqualified secondary graduates to teach mainly at the primary level (Al-Hawatchi, 1990). In 1940s Bahrain had their first graduates who were considered as qualified teachers.

These teachers were trained in Manama College, which was opened in 1940, as part of their secondary education and were allowed to teach in primary schools. Later on, a Teacher Training College for men was opened in 1966 and in the following year a similar college opened its doors to women. With the opening of these two colleges, two major developments took place in Bahrain, one teaching became the profession in which women could legally work and second, men were provided with additional employment opportunities. At that time, graduates of the

college could teach in primary and intermediate schools and only holders of higher degrees could teach at secondary level (Qaddumi, 1995).

In the years 1973/74, out of 168 male teachers and 169 female teachers, only 11 Bahraini teachers and 156 expatriate teachers were found to have higher degrees which showed that a lot of Bahraini teachers had no relevant training. It was also reported that 170 teachers employed in secondary schools did not have higher degrees (Qaddumi, 1995). Al – Arayed (1969, cited in Al-Hawatchi, 1990) claims that teachers training in Bahrain began in 1928 when a group of students was sent to the American University in Beirut to study the latest educational trends and to gain professional knowledge in order to maintain high standards of education in Bahrain schools. Later in 1945, another group which consisted of students and teachers was sent to Egypt to broaden their teaching horizons at the University of Cairo. However, based on the poor performance of unqualified teachers who remained in the country, the Department of Education in Bahrain adopted a policy to employ more experienced expatriate teachers that were hoped to raise the standards of existing teachers by providing appropriate training and by sharing their classroom experiences (Al-Saleh, 1992). To date, the percentage of expatriate teachers in Bahrain is still bigger than Bahraini teachers.

The information presented above helps in contextualizing this study for, as it will be shown in Chapter 3, literature that deals with the state of education in Bahrain, especially in terms of the English language (Al-Ahmed, 1988; Al-Ahmed, 1994) suggests that weak language abilities of Bahraini students and poor science teaching (Shirawi, 1989) are linked to professional training of teachers who work in Bahraini schools. One of the outcomes of this research, therefore, might be that

the role of the social context in students' transition will be linked to professional training of teachers.

### 2.1.2. School Structure

The structure of schooling in Bahrain has changed several times over the years. At the start of education in Bahrain, there was no official age at which students could be admitted to or graduate from school, the youngest could be six and the oldest could be ten or twelve or even older. The schooling programme at that time followed two years at the preparatory, four years at the primary and four years at the secondary level. Students who had been taking extra tuitions could join higher classes after being tested and those who finished the primary level could be employed as clerks and teachers (Al-Hawatchi, 1990). Many reforms have taken place since then and Figure 2.1. below presents the current pattern of schooling in Bahrain.

Grades	Age					Religious Education: Primary, Intermediate, Secondary
12	17	* Secondary Education				
11	16	General		Vocational Apprenticeship		
10	15	Sciences	Literary	Commercial	Technical Textile	
9	14	Basic Third Cycle (Intermediate) Education				
8	13					
7	12					
6	11	Second Cycle (Primary)				
5	10					
4	9					
3	8	First Cycle (Primary)				
2	7					
1	6					

Figure 2.1: Education Ladder in Bahrain, adapted from: <http://www.moe.gov.bh/en/education/ladder.aspx>

According to the official website of the Ministry of Education in Bahrain ([www.moe.gov.bh](http://www.moe.gov.bh)), today, there are 110 state primary schools in the Kingdom of

Bahrain. The number of state intermediate schools equals 36, whereas the number of state secondary schools is 34. Some primary and intermediate schools are joined together and their number is 22. There are also 2 intermediate-secondary schools. Additionally, Bahrain has 72 private schools, some of which are national – that is run by the Ministry of Education and some of them are foreign. 2 schools in Bahrain are community schools which only children of foreign communities are allowed to attend. As far as higher education is concerned, there is one state institution in Bahrain, the University of Bahrain (consisting of 7 colleges), and 2 public higher education associations: the College of Health Sciences (affiliated to the Ministry of Health) and the Bahrain Training Institute (affiliated to the Ministry of Labour). Additionally, there are also 12 private universities that, apart from national qualifications, offer diplomas from countries such as the USA, Ireland, Malaysia and the UAE. The medical university considered in this study is one of the private universities and its position in relation to higher education and the medical scene in Bahrain has already been discussed in Chapter 1. More details will be provided again in section 2.2. of this chapter.

State schools in Bahrain are not co-educational and all students follow a compulsory state curriculum throughout their primary, intermediate and secondary education which is taught in Arabic. The duration of compulsory education is 9 years and is split into primary education that lasts 6 years and intermediate education lasting 3 years. Children start school at the age of 6 and finish their compulsory track at the age of 14. This has its significance for this study because not only can the students' level of preparation for university be affected by the fact that secondary education in Bahrain is not compulsory, but their adaptation to



university might also be influenced by the fact that they will be forced to work and learn in a mixed-gender environment and in a different language.

After being awarded the Intermediate Education Certificate, the students can progress to secondary education which lasts 3 years and which, until 2005, was split into three educational tracks: general (science or literary), commercial and technical. In the academic year 2004/2005, the unification of academic secondary education project was applied in some schools and sciences, literary and commercial tracks were unified which replaced the separated tracks system. However, some schools still continued with the track system. This reform may also have some bearing for this study for, as explained by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2008), it was aimed at aligning secondary education in Bahrain with university programmes. This was going to be achieved by introducing learning outcomes at secondary level that were similar to the outcomes of early university programmes. The new learning outcomes were believed to open access to higher education for those students who wanted to continue at universities in the country or abroad (ibid).

It is also worth noting that 2009/2010 was when the tracks unification project was to be applied to all schools in Bahrain. The Ministry of Education aimed at generalising the project in all secondary schools to give all students equal opportunities to study all courses regardless of their interests or potentials. It ensures that all students receive the same amount of knowledge and skills and is believed to solve the problems in Maths and English secondary school leavers in Bahrain have (The Development of Education: National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2008). This system will result in the change of the science curriculum in

2012/2013, which will be highlighted in the interviews with science teachers and the broader aim of this study will be able to show if the goal of creating better university opportunities through the unified system has been achieved, which was already explained in the contribution of this research in Chapter 1.

### **2.1.3. Place of the English Language in the Bahraini Society**

Considering the fact that the role of English in students' transition is one of the categories inherent to this research and that the socio-cultural theory highlights the impact of broader societal approaches to learning, some information on the significance of the English language for Bahraini people is presented below.

The socio-linguistic background shaped by the British protection of Bahrain between 1869-1971, as well as the geographical location of the Kingdom of Bahrain creates a favourable English learning environment in the country. Due to its strategic position in the Gulf region and its economic developments, Bahrain invites entrepreneurs from all over the world to invest into and utilize its natural resources. The extraction of Oil in 1931, with the help of the American Eastern Gulf Oil Company, and the formation of the aluminium smelter in 1969 necessitated close relationships between Bahrain and the West creating the need for Bahrainis to learn the English language (Sinclair, 1977).

The blend of many nationalities in Bahrain gave the English language a certain status. English is officially the second recognized language in Bahrain and is used in business, industry, the medical profession and university departments. As early as in 1970s, the demand for the English language in Bahrain's industry was stressed at a seminar of employers and government by a representative of the

Aluminium Bahrain who said that good command of English was necessary to progress to supervisory positions at the company. More chances of recruitment were also found among those trainees that had graduated from schools where the language of instruction was English (Sinclair, 1977). Since then, the Ministry of Education has constantly strived to create multiple opportunities that would aim at upgrading the students' and teachers' level of the English language, hoping that this will contribute to their own and the country's development.

Therefore, English became compulsory in Bahraini schools, first at intermediate and secondary levels but in 2005 it was introduced in primary schools as well. Apart from formal schooling, there are other opportunities of learning the English language in Bahrain. The country has a number of educational institutes that provide extra language lessons at all levels. The most popular ones include the British Council, Berlitz, American Cultural & Educational Centre, Awal Institute of Training & Languages, British Language Centre and English Language Skills Centre.

On the other hand, Arabic remains the official language of the country and is used in all governmental institutions. According to Abdulmajeed (1995), some Bahraini people are reluctant to accept English as an official language because they see Westernising of national institutions through introducing English as an official language as an attack on the Islamic society and values. This attitude is also partially reflected in the approach of some families towards language education in schools. These families argue that English is not necessary for their children, who are preparing to work in government sectors and therefore do not need English for work and communication purposes (ibid). Since the socio-cultural theory adopted

in this study stresses the role of the history and culture of societies in understanding how certain practices might be impacted by specific societal views, this attitude of the Bahraini people towards the English language might have its significance for this study for investigating the societal and pedagogical underpinnings of language education in the country will be undertaken in this study in order to understand the transition.

#### **2.1.4. System of Education**

The system of education in Bahrain has been largely influenced by the cultural views of the people in the country that have led to certain perceptions of education and the purposes it should serve (Al-Sulaiti, 2002). This matches the socio-cultural perspective in this study which states that views on education of a particular society exert external effects on how the schools operate (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996). It was therefore felt important to present some of the major societal influences on the Bahraini education in this section.

At the very beginning, the emphasis of the school was on the mastery of certain subjects to respond as quickly as possible to the growing demand for literate people who could teach and work in offices. Those who could not do it, automatically dropped out of school. Therefore, the Ministry of Education saw the provision of schools and universities as a means of supplying government servants and good citizens (Al-Sulaiti, 2002).

The system of education in the Kingdom has long been characterized by the authoritarian role of the teacher, rote learning, inculcation and the adverse effects of such education on the student's cognitive development and the promotion of

critical and analytical skills. This is so because influences of the teacher substituting for the father outside the family circle and the school being the institution that teaches discipline and obedience had led to the creation of the system that insisted on dependence and compliance with family and society's morale (ibid).

Qaddummi (1995) explains how such approaches were reflected in the rote learning and inculcation methods to teaching:

Such method is, in fact, made to strengthen the teacher's power and to ensure the subjugation of the students to his power. It emphasizes memory related activities which would eventually lead to assist the training that the child had received in the family when his mental development was directed towards speech competency rather than questioning and investigation.

(Qaddummi, 1995, p. 317)

However, the concerned voices of parents and educators called for the change of this system as the deteriorating effects of inculcating education on the personality of an individual and on the shaping of his or her critical thinking skills had been noticed. As explained by Sharaby (1983, cited in Qaddummi, 1995) methods that relied on repetition and memorization left no room for questioning, research and experimenting. On the other hand, lack of questioning and disobedience towards what was being taught was an easy way to ensure academic success and rote learning approaches to teaching have been observed useful for students who were very weak, for example, in written and spoken English. Qaddummi (1995) found that such teaching worked with students who were afraid of making mistakes in front of others and who felt more confident after memorizing samples of language they could reproduce in case they were unable to use the language freely.

Nevertheless, following the call for change, the Ministry of Education in Bahrain has made constant efforts to improve the system of education in the Kingdom. As early as in 1960/70s, the government decided to improve the internal effectiveness of the system and since then many educational reforms have taken place in all areas of education. In 1995, the Working Group for Educational Innovation Project working for the Ministry of Education published a report in which information about innovative projects in education in Bahrain was presented. For the main focus of this study falls on students' transition into higher education in the context of pedagogical change, but also on two subject areas of language and science, summaries of only selected documents will be presented in section 2.1.6. Below, I present some background information regarding the English and science curricula.

### **2.1.5. Curriculum**

The Ministry of Education is responsible for ratifying and supervising the curriculum offered in state schools. It has a deciding voice not only in what should be taught but also in what should be assessed. It is also in charge of any matter regarding pedagogy and teaching (Macintosh, 1994).

As stated in the report on the seminar on the management of curriculum change and adaptation in the Gulf Region, Bahrain has been developing its curriculum for the past twenty years to meet the growing needs of the society. New subjects, such as health and family education, have been introduced and exchange programmes with other Gulf States have been organised (Rassekh and Thomas, 2001).

### **2.1.5.1. Developments in English Education in Bahrain**

One major change in language education in Bahrain took place in the 90s where new developments in the English language syllabi in basic and secondary education took place. As a result, all new textbooks were revised, tested and modified in secondary schools and new series in English for intermediate education were introduced. The theoretical background to this project stemmed from the weakness in the educational system that promoted learning separate skills in separate courses. Instead, a new project that responded to new trends in English teaching was proposed and an integrated skills language programme was implemented. An eclectic approach was adopted and emphasis was put on integration and correlation in the communicative methods to teaching English. The implementation of the new project was going to take two years and all language teachers welcomed the project and favoured new communicative ways of teaching over the old, skill-focussed ones (Al – Saleh, 1992).

The most recent developments in the area of teaching English took place in 2004/2005 when the Ministry of Education introduced English as a class subject in primary schools. The Directorate of Curricula decided to revise the English syllabus according to the Common European Framework and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) standards and chose twenty pilot schools to test the new project. Since the teachers had no experience in teaching young learners, substantial training was provided with cooperation of the British Council in Bahrain to prepare primary teachers for the challenges of the new way of teaching. Parents were also involved to be able to help their children at home. After the pilot study, primary students were found to acquire new language and skills, such as risk

taking and critical thinking, more easily. Teachers were also reported to benefit from the training after developing a pedagogic understanding of the new syllabus. The pilot was extended to another 20 schools in 2005/2006 (Ministry of Education, 2011)

5 years earlier, in 2000, the scholastic Guided Reading Programme was also introduced in 25 primary schools and in each subsequent year new primary schools joined the programme. The guided reading programme aimed at developing learners' reading skills by reading levelled story books in order to develop independent and silent reading. It gave the students and the teachers an opportunity to interact in a relaxed manner and to develop hypothesising, predicting and problem solving skills in learners (ibid).

Last but not least, to address the reported gaps in the linguistic knowledge of the English language teachers in the country (Shirawi, 1989), the Ministry of Education initiated an English Language Development Programme in 1994 which targeted 401 English teachers of all levels of education. The Ministry decided that the minimum language requirement for graduate and non-graduate English teachers should be at the FCE level<sup>3</sup>, which was later raised to CAE<sup>4</sup>. With this decision, language developments programmes were launched by the British Council in Bahrain to advance the English level of language teachers by teaching them how to master reading and writing skills, how to understand and analyse basic rules of the language and how to develop linguistic acquisition by learning language

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<sup>3</sup> First Certificate in English (FCE) – is an exam for people who need to prove that they can use written and spoken English for work or study purposes.

<sup>4</sup> Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) – is a high level qualification in English demanded in work and academic contexts.



functions. Despite substantial funding and encouragement from the government, some teachers did not attend the training as it was held outside their working hours and the heavy workload at school resulted in the lack of time for any extracurricular activities (Al – Saleh, 1992).

### **2.1.5.2. English Curriculum**

The framework for the English Language Curriculum in Bahrain is based on three educational approaches - that is constructivism, multiple intelligences and critical thinking. These theories have been adopted by the Ministry of Education in order to shift English education in the country from discrete language items to developing students' communication skills in English, self-expression and thinking (Al-Baharna, 2005).

The theoretical concepts underpinning the curriculum framework bring knowledge construction, skills development, and intelligent meaning-making and negotiation to the centre of classroom practice. Teaching and learning should, therefore, be guided by a clear definition of learning in terms of outcomes that can be translated into competencies and meaningful language tasks.

(Al-Baharna, 2005, p.1)

As a result, students in Bahrain are expected to become competent listeners and readers by practising such comprehension skills as listening and reading for gist, predicting outcomes of the passage, identifying main ideas, inferring meaning and analysing. It is also assumed that the same students will be able to demonstrate good productive skills and will excel in a variety of writing tasks which address different purposes and different audiences. Additionally, they are expected to participate in a variety of school events and community projects in order to develop appropriate speaking skills that can be applied to real-life contexts and that can

contribute to their self-esteem (*ibid.* p.30). Such curriculum has important implications for this study because, as will be presented in the literature review, students who study language programmes similar to the one described in this paragraph are expected to do well at university. Interestingly, it should be noticed that the pillars of this curriculum do not match the traditional view on education presented in section 2.1.4., which might be significant for the theoretical framework in this study in that the findings will demonstrate whether the traditional or the new view of language education prevails in Bahraini schools. This might have several consequences for students' transition.

Significant changes in Bahrain's framework for teaching foreign languages, specifically for writing, took place in 2002 when a new genre based syllabus was proposed for Bahraini schools. This initiative was undertaken in order to introduce a pilot programme which was later used for evaluation and implementation of new course books. These text books were bought from publishers with experience in the Gulf and were adapted to suit the needs of Bahraini students (Bax, 2006). Following the main pillars of the Bahraini curriculum described above, it was decided that genre based syllabuses were more suitable for they provided opportunities for a more systematic approach to texts, as opposed to the old curriculum which was characterised by the lack of systematicity in learning and by a very random selection of teaching materials. Moreover, it was also concluded that genre based curricula supported the teachers better in their attempts to prepare students for the skills-based final examination which, in turn was meant to develop new communication skills that would enable the students to cope better in real-life situations, such as beginning university abroad (Al-Baharna, 2005).

### **2.1.5.3. Science Curriculum**

Changes based on similar principles were also introduced in the science curriculum and it was generally recommended by the Ministry of Education that all science courses in Bahrain should be taught by means of the inquiry method, the project method and computer assisted learning (CAL). The ministry suggested that teachers of science should acquire different teaching techniques that coincide with the most recent trends in science education and which are consistent with the development philosophy of the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which aspires to aligning science teaching in Bahrain with other international programmes (Hameed et al, 2011). This resulted in the introduction of an American curriculum in science which was meant to encourage Bahraini learners to play an active role in obtaining scientific information and developing appropriate reasoning skills through discovery and self-directed learning. This also meant that teaching science should be based on practical experiments which should be demonstrated and supported by the latest technology (Hameed et al, 2011).

Similarly to the information presented in relation to the English language, the facts about teaching science presented here do not match the traditional view on education in Bahrain. This might have important implications for the outcomes of this research, specifically in terms of drawing conclusions regarding the role of school pedagogy and science education in students' transition. The way in which science is taught will be investigated in this study and, like in the case of the English language, the role of approaches to teaching science in students' transition will be interpreted from the perspective of the socio-cultural theory.

The final section on Bahrain draws on the facts presented so far and discusses the process of educational reform in Bahrain up to the most recent developments. The information presented in the categories under this section outlines important facts about the socio-cultural context of educational reform in the country, which will be useful for interpreting the findings presented in Chapter 5.

### **2.1.6. Educational Reform in Bahrain to Date**

The most significant reform in the secondary system of education in Bahrain is probably related to the introduction of the credit hours system in 1990/ 91. Initially, the project involved 16054 secondary school students in 21 secondary schools across the country. Later on, it was generalized gradually in all secondary schools by 1994/95. Following the branching of secondary education in 1980, the Secondary Education Development Committee made considerable efforts to develop the system of education that would resemble educational systems in other developed countries in terms of structuring and curricula. As a result, the old traditional system, known as the 'scholastic year system' was replaced with the Credit Hours System for Secondary Schools in order to 'upgrade the internal and external efficiency of education and make it more responsive to the society needs and development requirements' (Al Saleh, 1992, p.33).

The main objective of the project was to give students the choice of the most suitable career path by reducing the amount of study devoted to common courses and by increasing the possibility of studying specialised courses in depth. This was believed to ensure easy transition from secondary to third level education as the expected learning outcomes were to be closely aligned with university

requirements. This alignment was to be achieved by developing 'the students' technological efficiency by establishing technical and scientific attitude, scientific thinking methods and interaction with the requirements and change of this era' (*ibid.* p.34).

The system was meant to be very specific in that it focused on the disciplinary skills needed in a particular higher education environment. Therefore, four educational tracks were developed: literary, sciences, commercial and applied studies and the study plan in each was classified into four categories: common core courses, compulsory specialised courses, optional general courses and optional specialised courses (Al-Saleh, 1992).

However, the impact of the project on society was negative and students and parents expressed their fears about the change in the system of education and assessment scheme. Inevitably, the new Credit Hours System brought about changes in the evaluation of students by implementing new legislation that was supposed to aid the development of the new secondary education system. In contrast to the old system, which was 100% based on school evaluation, the new system was based on internal evaluation conducted by teachers (continuous assessment 30% of the total mark) and school based examination held in mid-semester (20% of the total mark), as well as external examination supervised by an expert panel set up by the Ministry of Education (50% of the total mark). Such changes were not well received by teachers and school administrators, and the lack of support from some schools and government officials slowed down the development of what seemed to have been a positive step in Bahrain's educational arena (*ibid.*).

Al Saleh (1992) states that the results of the evaluation of the two projects have shown some negative reactions. In addition, lack of personnel training, lack of good planning and inadequacies in educational guidance and application of the new students' evaluation system in some schools posed major obstacles in the successful implementation of the project. Moreover, some schools could not meet the conditions set by the rules and regulations of the new projects due to the lack of appropriate facilities and poor condition of some of the school buildings. However, this last point was responded to very quickly by the government officials who launched the project aiming at improving school scientific laboratories in 1990. The government's activities involved renewing and establishing laboratory buildings in ten schools every year and employing laboratory specialists, as well as providing training courses on protection against fire and providing first aid. The Ministry of Education sought to conduct necessary repairs and training in each school by the year 2000. Additionally, both the establishment of school libraries and introducing the computer systems into the learning centres also took place in 1990 -1991 (Al-Saleh, 1992).

A teacher training programme was also developed for secondary science teachers after identifying 'the urgent need for promoting the academic level of science teachers and correlating teaching with the society and scientific institutions in order to cope with the curriculum development and international trends in this matter' (Al-Saleh, 1992,p. 199). This project was initiated in 1991 and its main objectives were related to the promotion of high academic and educational level of secondary science teachers by introducing group supervision of science specialists that was believed to enrich the educational practices in scientific subjects and inform

teachers with the latest innovations in teaching methods. The project specifically addressed those teachers who 'insist[ed] on using their own traditional teaching methods and resist[ed] the efforts made to unify general teaching methods' (*ibid.* p. 199). It was also stated that the implementation of the credit hours system, mentioned earlier in this chapter, and the developments in the science curriculum necessitated new teacher training programmes which promoted linking science with society, which was believed to unify basic scientific concepts and working methods in science teaching and to develop teacher and student scientific abilities (Al-Saleh, 1992).

Despite many developments that took place to aid the success of the project, its impact on students' transition to university has not yet been explored and the lack of evaluation of the teacher training programme does not avail any information as to whether the new methods of teaching science were successfully implemented and whether they have had any impact on students' transition to university. This study will address this and will present findings that will demonstrate what impact the current Tracks and Credit Hours System and its associated developments have had on students' preparedness for university by focusing on the role of science education and the latest pedagogies in Bahraini schools on students' transition.

Early 90s witnessed some more efforts to introduce new teaching-learning methods in schools. Without official policies being put in place, each school was to take up appropriate strategies in order to enrich the teaching of curriculum subjects. This included 'enhancement of research and investigation processes, development of scientific thinking methods, search for knowledge from various resources and enhancement of self-learning principle by helping learners to

develop themselves to be able to continue their study outside the school by their self-efforts all around their life-cycles' (Al-Saleh, 1992, p.169).

As a result, the Ministry of Education sent for UNESCO experts to assist local officials in developing the educational system in Bahrain in 1990/91. According to UNESCO officials, the system of education, especially administration, was too centralized and unless changes took place in terms of giving individual schools more authority in decision making about their educational practices, successful education was not possible. The main decisions as to restricting the system of education in Bahrain were as follows:

- a) The school is the basic cell in the educational structure, making most of the educational decisions
- b) The school is developed by a small community, affects and affected by the society
- c) The main function of the school is to create cognitive and social learning for the students
- d) The school gives the teachers the opportunity to be creative
- e) The school is considered as a basic core of the planned directed social change
- f) The school develops its climate continuously to create a sense of participation and cooperation among students, teachers, principals and parents
- g) The school releases itself gradually from bureaucratic , hierarchical and competitive characteristics and tends towards interactive, unified living horizontally and democratically



h) Teachers interact with each other professionally and socially, utilize their experience and guide each other in the continuous professional development ,as well as utilize the learning resources centres and out-of-school experiences from time to time as much as needed.

(Al-Saleh, 1992, p. 51)

The proposed system for the prospective school stressed the concept of school autonomy in order to rebuild old practices that prevented acquiring desired abilities and behaviour. School was no longer seen as an institution that provided services but as an entity that was self-directed and autonomous. Schools were still expected to work within the general educational framework set by the Ministry of Education, however, centralization was to be reduced by democratic participation by the school staff.

Unfortunately, non-participation of school staff and rejection of the new idea by some teachers caused certain difficulties in implementing the programme. Incomprehension of the system principles and maintaining individual power in decision making, without referring to the Ministry's regulations, postponed practical applications of the project. In response to such reactions, the government held meetings, seminars and training workshops in order to educate pedagogic staff about the principles of the new system (Al-Saleh, 1992). An evaluation study was conducted in ten schools in Bahrain and reports from the educational personnel on the effectiveness of the implementation of the new system were requested, however no results have been published to date. Again, this new programme was very different from the traditional view and it will be interesting to see in this study whether the new learner-centred approaches have been successfully implemented

in Bahraini schools or whether the more traditional pedagogies still prevail and what meaning they have for students' transition. This will contribute to the socio-cultural theory in that it will highlight the place of broader sociological influences in students' transition.

Among the most recent developments in Bahrain's education are the policies related to the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education for the years 2009-2014. The most important initiatives include development and review of the current curricula in Arabic, English, Maths and Science. Specifically, the Ministry of Education are working on the implementation of Science and Maths curricula in the wider context of the whole GCC region. They are also planning to convert a substantial part of these curricula to electronic syllabuses that would enable conducting scientific experiments by means of the most up-to-date techniques and teaching aids. The whole strategic plan is hoped to lead to the introduction of teaching programmes that will lead to the development of life-long skills, such as social dialogue , scientific reasoning and critical thinking skills (Ministry of Education Strategic Plan for the Years 2009-2014, 2008).

On completion of the study that aimed at identifying the levels of Maths and Science performance of Bahraini students in comparison to their peers in other countries, the Ministry of Education received a report in which students from Bahrain were placed in the middle category of scientific performance. The results of the study were based on cross-references with the international criteria used for testing in science. As a result, the National Testing Unit was established in Bahrain which has been preparing independent national exams for subjects such as Arabic, English, Maths and Science. The work of the unit is believed to provide

more objective measurements of the achievements of students in Bahrain and align the country's testing techniques with international exams such as GCSE, A-Levels and IB (ibid). This has major implications for this study, considering its focus on transferring from culture to culture.

To conclude this section of the chapter, I would like to cite few lines from the Final Report of the International Meeting on Educational Reform and Educational Research held in Geneva in 1995. As we could see above, Bahrain has made continuous efforts to provide high standards of education in the country, however, according to the officials who participated in the meeting in Geneva (IBE and NIER, 1995), numerous problems were evident in the educational system in the Kingdom at that time. Firstly, opportunities for women have been restricted due to social values and most women who graduated found themselves unemployed. One of them, which is particularly pertinent to this study, was that the system in Bahrain does not provide graduates equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills, which results in the poor performance of Bahraini graduates and that the problem of change and successful reform was found to be located far below the decision-making stage.

With very little research that could inform educational practice in the country, the Ministry of Education established the Educational Research and Development Centre whose officials adopted a new research approach which put empirical findings at the fore of the policy making process. However, once a reform was developed and the decision was made, educational personnel tried hard to protect their own professional beliefs and practices by rejecting and neglecting any

innovations that could threaten their prerogatives or interests. This has been reflected in the following words in the Geneva meeting:

We can certainly observe the paradoxical behaviour of a great part of teachers who previously were described as supporters of using research findings in the Ministry's decisions. In fact, this group of teachers remain enthusiastic to support such findings as long as these findings are presented as a controversial matter, and therefore as long as their support could bring them in some intellectual distinction or some credit (...) In reality most of the field practitioners are not so enthusiastic to carry out any practice which implies mastering new or additional skills. Therefore, when reforms fail, the bureaucracy can claim that it was not from their lack of effort.'

(IBE and NIER, 1995,p.50)

This provides an important context for the socio-cultural theory adopted in this study for it is possible that local practices in the communities of schools are so strong and so ingrained in the members of school communities that aligning them with more international approaches might not be possible. From the socio-cultural perspective, this might have consequences for the transition of students who intend to study in a Western university.

Today, in 2012, little is known about the intended reform and its role in improving the system of education in Bahrain. Despite some government publications (see for example: The Development of Education. National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2008) that outline the intended outcomes of the system, many gaps lacking teacher and student voices exist. This research will fill these gaps, at least in terms of the system's aims and purposes for higher education, by exploring its role in the students' transition to the medical university. I present some background information about the concerned university in the next section.

## **2.2. RCSI Bahrain**

### **2.2.1. History**

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland was granted a Charter in 1784 and, influenced by the standard of French surgery at that time, adopted a motto 'Consilio Manuque' meaning 'Scholarship and Dexterity'. In 1844, an additional charter was obtained from Queen Victoria which became the charter by which the College works today. In 1866, the Medical Act stated that the graduates of the college had to be educated in surgery, medicine and obstetrics which resulted in the collaboration between the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of Physicians. In 1978 the College was given accreditation by the National University of Ireland and was entitled to grand degrees of MB, BCh, BAO and historical licentiates to its graduates (QAQI Submission Report, 2009). With its main campus in Dublin, the Royal College of Surgeons provides medical education, training and clinical practice to students from about 60 different countries in the world and runs two other campuses in Malaysia and Bahrain.

### **2.2.2. RCSI Medical University of Bahrain**

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain (RCSI Bahrain) was established in October 2003 when HE Sh. Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa (Ambassador of Bahrain to the United Kingdom) and the President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Mr. Michael Butler signed a memorandum of understanding. A year later, a licence from the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain was obtained and the RCSI Bahrain was officially opened by HH the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Sh. Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa and the

Prime Minister of Ireland, Mr. Bertie Ahern TD. The college is owned by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI-Dublin) which sets all its educational, administrative and clinical activities (QAAET Institutional Review Report, 2009).

First, a school of medicine was established at RCSI Bahrain in 2004 when students from Bahrain, India, Italy, Kuwait, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA and Yemen were admitted to the Foundation Year of Medicine. Then, a school of nursing was established in 2006 and to date the student body is represented by students of 30 different nationalities, with the majority of Bahraini students.

The role of RCSI Bahrain is to provide healthcare education and training to world standards in Bahrain through adopting the medical programme and educational activities offered by RCSI Dublin. Similarly to Dublin, the students in Bahrain are offered the licentiates of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland and the degrees of MB BCh BAO. The college in Bahrain also runs a postgraduate programme on completion of which the students are awarded a MSc. Degree in Healthcare Ethics & Law (QAQI Submission Report, 2009).

### **2.2.3. Curriculum**

The RCSI Bahrain curriculum has been acknowledged as one of the strengths of the institution. It is characterized by excellent programs of bedside clinical teaching, excellent teaching and clinical facilities and experienced and committed faculty dedicated to educational development (QAAET Institutional Review Report, 2009). The College in Bahrain delivers the same curricula as RCSI Dublin and

maintains the standards set by the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME).

An outcomes based curriculum has been adopted by RCSI Bahrain in which the realisation of educational outcomes is emphasized and the production of skilled medical professionals who present good ethical values is stressed. This form of curriculum has been developed in response to three major concerns regarding medical education over the years. Firstly, the traditional didactic teaching followed by a direct practice in hospitals is believed to not sufficiently prepare medical graduates for their professional practice. Secondly, even though the recently popular Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach to curriculum has been proved successful in student satisfaction and more productive approaches to study, the results concerning better acquisition of knowledge and practiced-based outcomes were not that sound (Newman, 2003, cited in Assessment Strategy, 2008). Finally, in response to a greater emphasis on the grasp of concepts and a greater focus on ambulatory and community medical teaching, rather than on memorising facts, an outcomes based approach to medical education has been developed (Harden, 2002). These factors have been considered in the development of the RCSI curriculum which eventually led to the adoption of the competency-based curricula in which assessment is based on the evaluation of the learning outcomes of particular modules (Assessment Strategy, 2008). This curriculum is also believed to be challenging for students in Bahrain for reasons I described in Chapter 1 in the context of the current research.

As a result, RCSI Bahrain medical graduates are expected to possess characteristics of social responsibility and community involvement, knowledge of

research and suitability for postgraduate studies. They should also be able to demonstrate professionalism in acting as a patient's advocate and by demonstrating compassion and sensitivity to cultural and personal beliefs. Such learning outcomes are achieved by the development of life-long learning skills in students through utilisation of such educational activities as lectures, practicals, project work, team based projects, simulation, clinical teaching, search and research skills and evidence-based inquiry. Didactic-lectures, small group tutorials, case-based teaching and clinical small tutorials are the core educational activities practised by the faculty members at RCSI (Medical Graduate Profile, 2008), which has specific implications for this study for several research findings cited in Chapter 3 suggest that when transitions are studied in terms of change of culture, lecture style and participatory nature of tutorials are frequently mentioned factors (for example: Bhattacharyya, 2010; Hirshy and Wilson, 2002).

The present curriculum followed by RCSI Bahrain was developed in October 2005 by RCSI Dublin. It divides the 5 year medical programme into three cycles: the Junior Cycle (JC), the Intermediate Cycle (IC) and the Senior Cycle (SC). Key medical themes are run across all years of the medical programme and they include Biomedical Sciences and Research, Clinical Medicine, Clinical Competence, Personal and Professional Development and Population & International Health (Assessment Strategy, 2008). Additionally, the Foundation Year programme that precedes the 5 year medical course is run in Dublin and Bahrain and about 40% and 20% of students respectively are enrolled in this pre-medical year. Since the main focus of this project is on the role of learning and



teaching in the Foundation Year in students' transition, a more detailed description of only this cycle is presented below.

## 2.2.4. Foundation Year Programme

The Foundation Year (FY) is divided into two semesters and is modularised into twelve units which include introductions to human biology, to medical physics and to general, medicinal and pharmaceutical chemistry, language and communications skills training, information and communication in healthcare, biomedical laboratory science and four modules on the biomedical basis of human systems. The structure of the Foundation Year programme is represented in the table below:

Table 2.1: Modules in the Foundation Year

<b>Semester 1</b>	
Module 1:	Introduction to Medical Physics
Module 2:	Introduction to Medicinal and Pharmaceutical Chemistry
Module 3:	Introduction to Human Biology
Module 4:	Human Systems 1
Module 5:	Information and Communications in Healthcare
Module 6.1	(½ Module) Biomedical Laboratory Sciences 1
Module 6.2	(½ Module) Language/Written and Communication Skills 1
<b>Total</b>	6 Modules in Semester 1
<b>Semester 2</b>	
Module 7:	Chemical Processes involved in Biological Systems/Physiotherapy Practice
Module 8:	Human Systems 2
Module 9:	Human Systems 3
Module 10:	Human Systems 4
Module 11.1	(½ Module) Biomedical Laboratory Sciences 2
Module 11.2	(½ Module) Language/Written and Communication Skills 2
Module 12.1	(½ Module) Medicine: From Concept to Patient
Module 12.2	(½ Module) Elective
<b>Total</b>	6 Modules in Semester 2

Each module in the Foundation Year is assessed at the end of the semester, using the combination of short answer and MCQ questions. The main modules are

assessed with high-stake summative examinations, except for the communications and the English language programme which utilize project work and continuous assessment. The work of the English and Culture Unit will be described more precisely in section 2.2.6. for the language factor is very important in this transition.

### **2.2.5. Assessment Strategy**

Assessment at RCSI Bahrain is set by the methods followed by RCSI Dublin who has defined a set of evaluation procedures appropriate for the educational objectives of the medical course. These have been benchmarked against WFME standards and include the development of an assessment strategy and curriculum blueprint, introduction of formal examination procedures and monitoring the significance of assessment across the curriculum. Consequently, the purpose of assessment at RCSI Bahrain considers judging the mastery of knowledge, skills and attributes, providing feedback, motivating students to learn and directing students in their learning. This is achieved by using authentic assessment methods that embed realistic tasks which require judgement and innovation, stress the performance of tasks rather than their memorisation and recitation, and offer opportunities to refine performance (Assessment Strategy, 2008).

The central feature of the assessment at RCSI is the practice of blueprinting. This means that the assessment methods used at RCSI are fit for purpose, valid, reliable, transparent and that they evaluate what is taught. This also means that when the curriculum changes, the assessment methods need to be accordingly adjusted and that both the assessment tools and the learning objectives in each module need to be clearly specified (Hamdy, 2006). Therefore, all faculty members

at RCSI are required to specify the nature and purpose of the assessment (e.g. formative/ summative), to review the module content and learning outcomes, to decide how specific content areas will be covered and to place their requirements in the relevant Marks and Standards (Assessment Strategy, 2008). Considering the impact of this specifically defined assessment strategy on students' transition will be one of the focuses of this study. It will be explored in the interviews with students and lecturers where conclusions in terms of change of pedagogical structures will be drawn.

The assessment strategy in the Foundation Year is based on multiple-choice and short answer questions. These types of questions are believed by the staff at the university to cause problems specifically for language students who not only have to utilise their subject-specific knowledge but also their foreign language skills in order to answer the questions in a very specific time frame. That is why the work of the Language and Culture Unit at RCSI Bahrain is so important for it provides language and study skills support in order to assist students in their exam performance.

#### **2.2.6. English Language and Culture Unit**

The English and Culture Unit was established in 2009 to provide for the students' English needs in order to improve their language proficiency and study skills so that they can face the challenges of learning in a second language environment. The unit is part of the Foundation Year and provides English sessions five times a week to those students whose English was determined as low on entry to the

university (between 5.5. and 6.5 IELTS). It is compulsory for those students to attend the programme as it is considered as half module in the Foundation Year.

In order to establish a suitable language programme, an initial process of analysis of the students and curricula needs was undertaken. These results were combined with elements drawn from personal relevance, performance, and discipline based approaches to curriculum design. Combining principles from the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) (Celce-Murcia et al, 1997; Bax, 2006) together with the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot and O'Malley, 1987; Snow et al. 1989), the current programme, which is a combination of academic and medical English correlated closely to labour needs and housed within the cultural framework of the Gulf region, was developed. The main objectives of the programme concern successful preparation of secondary students for third level learning and improving their language proficiency in disciplinary learning. The objectives of the course are divided into four main areas: academic reading and writing skills, advanced grammar and medical terminology.

Table 2.2: The English Language and Communications Course Content

<b>Area</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>Academic Reading</b>	Prediction; Skimming; Scanning; Intensive Reading; Extensive Reading; Annotating; Text Construction (features of a text, text coherence); Dealing with Unknown Words; Understanding Text Reference; Improving Reading Efficiency (selective reading & increasing reading speed); Critical Evaluation of a Text; Reading Authentic Medical Texts and Case Studies
<b>Academic Writing</b>	Understanding questions; Brainstorming & Planning; Coherence and Cohesion; Writing Introductions and Conclusions; Paragraph Structure; Developing Topic Sentences; Developing and Justifying Ideas; Expressing Advantages and Disadvantages; Expressing Result and Purpose; Compare and Contrast; Process Description; Summary Writing; Report Writing; Presenting and Supporting an Argument; Discursive Writing; Letter, CV and E-mail writing; Reflection Writing; Hypothesizing; Identifying Relevant and Irrelevant Information; Formality and Register; dealing with visual information (graphs and charts).

<b>Advanced Grammar</b>	Present vs. Past Tenses Review, Present Perfect Continuous, Modals, Relative Clauses, Advanced Passive Voice, 'If' Clauses, Sentence Construction, Phrasal Verbs and Idioms, Collocations
<b>Medical Terminology</b>	Skin, The Skeletal System, The Skeletal Muscle Contraction, The Muscular System, Neuromuscular Junction, Gastrointestinal Tract, Prefixes/ Suffixes/ Roots, The Nervous System; The Ear; The Eye; The Cardiovascular System; The Respiratory System; The Excretory System; The Immune System; The Reproductive System, The Endocrine System.

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All components of the course are taught in a communicative and purposeful way by which students are introduced to means of making their learning more organised and efficient. Students are taught techniques to read for specific purposes and to extract information. The writing course that is delivered looks at structure, topic, and expression. Students are taught presentation techniques and are required to make a presentation. Additionally, students are guided in lecture listening and note taking. All teaching materials have been developed in-house and are medically based. This type of programme is believed to enhance the students' transition to the medical university in terms of change of culture and language because it focuses on areas which have been identified as problematic when these types of transitions are concerned (for example: Serpell, 2007; Jin, 2011).

This chapter has presented some essential background information about the two settings in which this research is going to be placed. As demonstrated above, the programme at the medical university has been completely transplanted from the programme in Ireland and no local adaptations have been made to meet the educational needs of Bahraini students. We could also see in this chapter that Bahrain has been constantly developing its system of education to better align the teaching and learning in Bahraini schools with international pedagogies and to be able to adopt international standards of education in the country. The next chapter

presents some research findings where conflicts between two cultures of learning pose obstacles to student movement from one system of education to another, especially in terms of university transition. Chapter 3 also demonstrates how subject-specific and language education affect this transition, which issues have also been outlined above.

### ***Chapter 3 – Literature Review***

In the first chapter, I identified what transition to university involves and I also stated that in this study transition will be viewed in terms of changes in identity and agency required from students in order to move through the educational outcomes of the Foundation Year programme at the medical university. There, I additionally provided the personal context of this study and I outlined the theoretical framework of this study, indicating how the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice can be used to understand transition. I finished Chapter 1 with the rationale and the contribution to knowledge this research will make. The second chapter provided background information about the two culturally different systems of learning considered in this study.

I begin this chapter by exploring different perspectives on transition presented in literature and explain which of the perspectives has been adopted in this study. I follow this with a section containing research findings that increase our understanding of the factors related to the perspective on transition adopted here, specifically in the context of medical school. I then discuss research findings that demonstrate how transitioning from non-Western to Western contexts of learning may affect students' higher education and link this to the particular context of Bahrain and the focus of this study. I choose to discuss the role of schools environments in shaping students' preparedness for university, in terms of pedagogy, the role of background knowledge, which here is science, in disciplinary learning and its relation to foreign language because these were the three categories identified in the context of this research.

I specifically choose to concentrate on the above literature because, first of all, I would like to consider how findings from international studies compare with the specific context of Bahrain and the medical university. That is why, in Section 1, I explain how others have understood transition and why certain understandings may not be suitable for this study. In section 2, I critique a systematic literature review of factors related to success in medical education and I point out how this study will address the gaps in knowledge identified there. Section 2 also discusses several aspects of Western higher education that have been identified in literature as affecting the transition of students from non-Western cultures. This discussion, in addition to researches by Leese (2010), Tobbell et al (2010) and O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) presented under the theoretical framework, further contextualises this research in relation to the socio-cultural theory and points out how specific aspects of one community can affect membership in another. Subsequently, in section 3, I draw special attention to the findings on the role of school environments and pedagogies in preparing students for university, contextualising them from the perspective of Communities of Practice. Section 4 focuses on language considerations in disciplinary learning by highlighting the compensatory nature of subject-specific knowledge on weaker language abilities and by discussing specific language skills students should have developed in school in order to be able to study science. This section has specific meaning for the current research because the students participating in this study are foreign English speakers who experience transition in terms of change of language. The subject-specific knowledge here refers to science and it is also important because it is one of the categories that brought me to this study. Finally, section 5 refines the focus



and questions of the current research in light of the literature reviewed and explains how these had affected the choice of Communities of Practice as a theoretical framework and specific definitions of identity and agency.

### **3.1. Perspectives on Transition**

According to Kantanis (2000), transition to first year university study is disappointing rather than satisfying. Literature suggests that the majority of university freshmen worldwide find it difficult to make a transition to higher education for reasons such as lack of social interaction, intellectual difficulty and their associated factors (see for example Popovic, 2007; Lopez, 2005; Cano, 2010). Additionally, Popovic (2007) claims that these factors can be more difficult to overcome for medical students, for they engage in higher education associated with high levels of competitiveness and heavy material content. Below, I discuss some of the common perspectives on transition that have been identified in literature and I attempt to explain why some of them do not match the research setting of this study. I will do this by citing Tinto's (1993) popular framework regarding retention in higher education, but I will also provide examples of other authors that relate to specific perspectives on transition in Tinto's (1993) framework.

#### **3.1.1. Adjustment**

Tinto's (1993) work, despite being placed largely in the American context, has found wide applications worldwide in explaining students' transition to university (see for example Braxton, 2000; DeBerard et al, 2004). His theory proposes that

students' adaptation to higher education is determined by four factors and these include: adjustment, intellectual difficulty, incongruence and isolation.

When discussing transition to higher education in terms of adjustment, Tinto (1993) points out that students are unable to adapt to a new environment because the degree of separation from their past life and successful transition to a new life is too high. Cano (2010) supports this view on transition and presents findings from his study based in America which suggest that personal adjustment and integration into the new life play a role as important as academic factors. Cano (2010) studied Latina students studying at an American university and found strong relationships between acculturation, enculturation and successful integration into the university. The author concluded that separation from parents and fear of loss of cultural identity increased the levels of sociological distress of students.

However, the findings by Cano (2010) and the view on adjustment proposed by Tinto (1993), even though illuminating, cannot be fully transferred to the context of the present study. Firstly, due to the fact that RCSI Bahrain is located in Bahrain, Bahraini students are not forced to separate from their old lives and are not required to move away from home. Therefore, their cultural identity remains preserved and can be practised on daily basis. Moreover, they still mix within their culture, for the majority of students studying at RCSI Bahrain, despite it being a Western university, are Bahraini or from other GCC countries. The only issue of enculturation that could be considered here is the one connected with learning about the requirements of the culture – that is the university - but these will be considered in terms of pedagogical structures of the Western university later in the

literature review and will be linked to the deductive theme of school pedagogy in the findings and discussion chapters.

Additionally, acculturation, which was an important factor in the transition studied by Cano (2010) has also been rendered here as irrelevant because Lopez (2005) explains that when transition occurs in the context where the majority of students are former school peers or at least know that they come from the same educational background, students tend to adjust better because they feel they support one another. Being part of the Bahraini group of learners therefore does not seem to require the students to undergo any cultural changes and allows the students to build a social orientation that makes their Bahraini peers a source of support for better integration. This makes Tinto's (1993) perspective on transition grounded in cultural adjustment less applicable to this study and suggests that a different perspective should be sought here.

### **3.1.2. Incongruence and Isolation**

Considering the current context, Tinto's (1993) notions of incongruence and isolation in transition imply similar conclusions to those of adjustment, which is why I decided to discuss them briefly together in this section. Incongruence and isolation are similar to adjustment in that students need to separate from their past lives but incongruence refers to students who feel that their social and cultural context does not allow them to integrate socially with the institution. Isolation, on the other hand, occurs when students are unable to make friends and connections with others at university.

Chavous (2002) writes about incongruence and isolation when discussing the role of students' background and cultural fit of African American students studying at one university in the USA. The author concludes that those students who had not previously experienced Western cultures had greater difficulty in settling into the university environment than students whose pre-school experience involved mixing with Western people. The author additionally claims that being in a minority had a negative impact on the academic performance of African-American students who could not develop connections with other students.

Here, while Chavous's (2002) observations offer another interesting perspective on transition, they cannot be directly applied to the context of Bahrain. First of all, unlike Chavous's (2002) students, young people in Bahrain have experience with mixing with Western cultures due to the country's financial and economic ties with the West that were indicated in Chapter 2 and the large Western population living in Bahrain. Secondly, Bahraini students are the majority of students studying at RCSI, many of whom are school friends or family members, and therefore making connections and developing friendships should not be difficult. This makes Tinto's (1993) notions of incongruence and isolation unsuitable for trying to define transition in this study, which leaves us with the last notion of intellectual difficulty and this perspective has been identified as the most suitable for this study.

### **3.1.3. Intellectual Difficulty**

The perspective on transition connected with intellectual difficulty has been linked by Tinto (1993) to academic preparedness of students beginning university. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, perspectives on transition to university

usually define it in terms of social adjustment or academic readiness. The discussion above has suggested that for Bahraini students, making a transition to the Western university concerned in this study might be related more to difficulties in academic rather than social adjustment for the examples cited above suggested that the perspectives on transition related to adjustment, incongruence and isolation are connected with the transition of home students going to study abroad. Here the situation is reverse. It is a foreign university that has been implanted in the home culture of Bahraini students, with its pedagogical and academic structures which might or might not pose obstacles to learning for students from non-Western backgrounds. On the other hand, this is not to say that the cultural context of Bahraini students can be ignored but rather that it will be discussed in terms of its impact on teaching and learning in Bahraini schools, which has its significance for the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice.

In studies where transition to university is based on the notions of intellectual difficulty, the discussion is often directed towards the institutions from which the students have come (for example Torenbeek et al, 2011, Shankland et al, 2012; Bragt et al, 2010). In higher education, academics often complain about insufficiencies of students' previous education and about inequalities they may cause for students when passing the exams (Kantanis, 2000). In such situations, transition becomes defined in terms of academic progression and the impact of school structures on students' readiness for university. This matches the definition of transition presented in Chapter 1 which in this study has been understood as undergoing changes in identity and agency in order to move through the educational outcomes of the programme in the Foundation Year. This also

suggests that the theoretical framework guiding this study should focus on the practices in specific institutional contexts, which justifies the choice of Communities of Practice in this research. The literature review in the following sections explains how academic preparedness of students is influenced by school structures and pedagogies, students' preparedness in terms of subject-specific knowledge, as well as their link to 2<sup>nd</sup> language abilities. These have been the ideas that brought me to this study and they permeate the literature presented in this chapter. They also permeate the section on the theoretical framework towards the end of this literature review where I explain how these three themes and the research presented below informed the choice of Communities of Practice as a theoretical model. Before I engage in discussing these, however, I would like to present the findings from the systematic literature review which summarises the most commonly identified factors affecting transition like this one – that is, transition that is viewed from the perspective of intellectual difficulty and that is defined in terms of movement through the educational outcomes of the university programme. This literature review is also specifically focused on the context of medical schools.

### **3.2. Factors Affecting Transition to Medical School**

O'Neill et al. (2011) conducted a systematic literature review of international studies with the aim of examining which educational and sociological factors may be associated with students' transition to medical school. Out of 625 studies retrieved in a primary search, 13 were selected for the final review and results were discussed in terms of socio-demographic variables, psychological factors, entry qualifications and educational initiatives. In a summary of the main results, the authors suggested that socio-demographic variables were not an important

factor and even though they were included in 10 out of 13 studies, no patterns related to their impact on students' retention were found. On the other hand, when students' entry qualifications were examined, it was found that in 9 out of 13 cases lower entry qualifications correlated with a greater chance of dropping out from medical school. Similarly, despite being included only in 2 studies, a link between a type of curriculum and retention was also identified (O'Neill et al, 2011).

These findings are in keeping with what has been discussed in the introduction chapter to this study in that they are similar to the concerns of the senior faculty at the medical university studied in this research. There, it was explained that the senior staff were concerned about the lower entry criteria in terms of the English language, as compared to the main university campus in Dublin, as well as the lower level of the science curriculum in Bahrain, as opposed to students who graduate with, for example, A-levels.

On the other hand, despite the fact that O'Neill et al's (2011) review covered a relatively wide range of studies, which may present quite a comprehensive overview of what might affect students' transition to medical school, several limitations to the findings could be noted, especially when specific contexts like the one in this study are concerned in which transition is studied in terms of change in learning culture and language, which will be addressed in this research.

First of all, the majority of research used in the review was conducted in developed countries – the USA, the UK, the Netherlands and South Africa. Secondly, all students included in these studies were native language learners and no considerations were given to factors related to foreign language students. In

addition, the socio-demographic variables reviewed by O'Neill et al (2011) contained gender, age, ethnicity and social class but no room for cultural aspects was given in the selection process. Furthermore, entry qualifications that were found to be strongly correlated to students' performance were not specified and they ranged rather widely from the results of admission tests, pre-university qualifications and prior university experience. Finally, the type of curriculum that was used for comparison was defined as 'new' and 'old' to describe the dependent variable in relation to academic requirements as far as new and old assessment methods were concerned. However, no discussion of details of these assessment methods was provided and the demands they might pose on students were also omitted.

Drawing on the need for a research project that would encompass the various limitations of the review by O'Neill et al (2011), as well as considering the socio-cultural theory that encourages exploration of socio-cultural contexts, this study will attempt to explain how the students in this study are coping with the transition to the medical university. This will be achieved by exploring their experiences with this transition in relation to factors identified by O'Neill et al (2011). Additionally, the perspectives of relevant teaching staff in secondary schools and faculty at the medical university in relation to these factors will also be sought. Unlike in the studies reviewed by O'Neill et al. (2011), this research will give specific considerations to the nature of education in developing countries such as Bahrain and will focus on the role specific cultural influences play in shaping the learning strategies of students and their potential consequences for better university transition. Furthermore, this project will also involve foreign language students and



will attempt to explain the impact their language abilities might have on their university careers. Finally, this research will emphasise the effects of curriculum on students' higher education by exploring different views on the knowledge base, assessment schemes and task demands at the secondary level and their contribution to students' transition into the Foundation Year.

In the conclusion to their review, O'Neill et al. (2011) suggested that university success is 'multi-factorial in nature (...) and therefore it is probably wise to continue to use designs which allow for subsequent multivariate analyses' (p. 449). According to the authors, research designs that would examine educational, organisational and institutional influences on post-secondary transition are needed in order to fully understand what might affect the students' adjustment to university. Hence, the focus of this research will fall on specific structures, pedagogies and sociology of Bahraini classrooms and will attempt to explain what role these might play in the transition of students to a Western medical university. The following sections of this literature review present relevant research findings in this area.

### **3.3. Studying in Western Higher Education**

The socio-cultural framework underpinning this study proposes that educational institutions are not neutral establishments and that their practices are influenced by the broader societal views on education in specific cultural settings (Wenger, 1998). It can then be assumed that they might also be slow to change because of their collective nature and internalised mental structures through which the world of education is viewed (Sheridan, 2010). This might mean that engaging with a new third level institution can be difficult for students who arrive at university with their

own socio-cultural capital ingrained in them through schooling and previous educational experience. The discussion below presents some findings to support this.

### **3.3.1. The Role of Social and Cultural Context**

Teaching and learning in Western tertiary contexts is often described as a highly participative and interactive environment (Hirshy and Wilson, 2002; Olesova et al, 2011; Yang, 2011). Serpell (2007) sees this characteristic of Western universities as an obstacle to learning, for instance, for African students who are educated in didactic and teacher-centred environments and find it difficult to adapt to the new methods of teaching. Similarly, Jin (2011), who discusses the importance of culture in learning in his theoretical paper on the differences between Chinese and American students, reports on an experience of Asian students at one Western university who, when asked to play a more active role in tutorials, found it difficult to take a full advantage of university programmes which place greater emphasis on critical thinking and discussion. This, according to Jin (2011) is linked to Confucian culture and system of education where subordination and obedience are encouraged and where discussing things with lecturers is seen as inappropriate.

On the other hand, Western education systems are known to value a speculative and questioning approach to learning in which students are challenged to voice their opinions and debate with their lecturers (ibid). This often requires students to be independent in their quest for knowledge and learn how to look for information themselves. Druzhilov (2011) states that this characteristic of Western universities sets them apart from, for instance, Eastern models of education in that the Western

European framework attracts students who know how to learn intensively and independently.

Serpell (2007) supports this view by writing a paper on bridging the gap between Western higher educational context and an African context. The author argues that in order to adapt to Western institutions, African students (and any other non-Western learners) need to learn self-efficacy strategies for they can no longer depend on their lecturers to spoon-feed them and to provide them with correct answers. This is contradictory to what seemed to characterize the University of Bahrain, for example, where tertiary students 20 years ago were still known to rely on their lecturers for their lecture notes and study materials due to the lack of university library and self-study resources (Shirawi, 1989). More recently, verbal reports from the university's graduates suggest that this still might be the case today and that the development of ability to self-study may be under way.

Another difficulty connected with transferring from a 'home' to a Western culture of learning may be related to specific methods of assessment which might differ from assignments in students' home countries. Druzhilov (2011) implies that very often non-Western students are not familiar with the methods of assessment in the Western context and they are unsure how to respond to requirements that no longer ask for a mere reproduction of knowledge. For example, Yang (2011) who studied the transfer of Western higher education into the Chinese context concluded that one of the reasons for 'upsetting' Chinese students was related to requesting them to know how to analyse the knowledge they had required and apply it in different assessment situations. This had negative consequences for

students attempting to make a transition to Western practices because it violated the classical Chinese view of knowledge.

Alongside the general characteristics of Western higher education described above, additional student difficulties may also be caused by the specific nature and delivery of the programmes in many institutions. As indicated earlier, RCSI Bahrain implements an outcomes-based curriculum, which in practice means delivering lectures via power point presentations and following a tutorial system that engages students in active learning of the material taught in a series of lectures. This system of learning has been found to cause several problems to non-Western students, who educated in more controlled and authoritative settings, found it difficult to cope with the challenges of the new system (see for example, Bhattacharyya, 2010).

Bhattacharyya (2010) found that Chinese students studying in Australia face difficulties in adapting to outcomes-based approaches in higher education for two reasons. The author conducted a survey with a random sample of 20 students to determine their perspective on factors affecting their transition to a Western university. First of all, the Chinese students were found not to be able to express their opinions and discuss the topics in tutorials for fear of losing face and embarrassing themselves. This, according to Hirshy and Wilson (2002), is predominantly linked to the nature of Asian education where students are taught to respect the teacher and not to question his or her opinions. Secondly, didactic lectures delivered in big lecture theatres were also found by Bhattacharyya (2010) to be an additional problem for the large class sizes where there is very little interaction between the lecturer and the students were too overwhelming for the

students. The author claims that students who had previously been spoon-fed by their teachers and who relied on their help in providing teaching materials and study support find tertiary settings which are lecture-based, and which require students to study independently, difficult to cope with (ibid).

Finally, matters arising in relation to language and communication have also been found in literature to cause problems with university transition for students whose native language is different to the language of the lectures (Lucas and Katz, 1994; Schmid and Dusseldorp, 2010; Nasir and Saxe, 2003). Most of the international students enrolling in Western higher education study in English, which is not their first language. This, in turn, may pose a major stumbling block in achieving the desired outcomes, especially in traditional approaches where students are expected to acquire large amounts of knowledge delivered in jargon-ridden lectures and participate in discussions that require sophisticated expression in English (see for example, Bhattacharyya, 2010).

An example of this is reflected in the findings by Zhou (2008) who examined language students' perspectives on the role of English proficiency in their transition to university. The students who participated in Zhou's (2008) study were Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean and Farsi and they were all studying in a Canadian university. The findings from semi-structured interviews and stimulated recalls suggested that all students felt highly motivated to improve their English language proficiency as this was the factor that had a considerable impact on their acquisition of knowledge in content classes. Lack of linguistic resourcefulness was also seen by the students as preventing their ability to answer examination

questions which in turn prevented their transition for they were unable to attain the desired learning outcomes (ibid).

The findings by Zhou (2009) have their significance for this study as the students concerned here are also foreign language learners. Additionally, as indicated in Chapter 1 in the context of the current research, language difficulties have been thought of by the senior staff at RCSI Bahrain as the major factor in students' transition. This study, however, does not automatically assume this for the theoretical framework that underpins it suggests that other socio-cultural factors may also be important. That is why similar to Zhou's (2009) approach will be adopted in this study in order to find out what significance the language proficiency of students in Bahrain has for their transition. So, rather than following the assumptions by the senior staff that language has the major impact on this transition and testing whether this is true or not, this study will explore its role in the transition process. The general approach adopted by Zhou (2009) also sits with the paradigmatic assumptions of this research, where qualitative rather than quantitative measures are seen as more appropriate. On the other hand, while the findings by Bhattacharyya (2010) provide useful insights into other problems non-Western students face in outcomes-based programmes, his approach to research does not comply with the broader paradigmatic assumptions of this study. That is why, Bhattacharyya's (2010) survey questions will be turned here into qualitative questions which will allow for a more-in depth discussion regarding the conflict between the two cultures of learning, matching more closely the interpretive design of this study and the theoretical framework, both of which encourage explorations of practices that are part of individuals' subjective experiences within specific

communities (Wenger, 1998; Crotty, 1996). To better understand what these conflicts might be, a discussion of the social and cultural context of Bahrain is necessary. The next section outlines some major points.

### **3.3.2. The Context of Bahrain**

#### **3.3.2.1. Bahrainisation**

The literature on Bahrain criticises national schools for its traditional methods of teaching and learning which have been linked by some authors to stem from the Islamic view of school as an institution that teaches discipline and respect for authority but which do not comply with other international approaches to education (for example: Abdulmajeed, 1995; Al- Sulaiti, 2002). This view on education was found not to promote independent initiative or critical thinking but instead, to stress memorisation and rote learning (ibid). Shirawi (1989) states that these pedagogies were further fossilised in the Bahraini society by the general aim of education in 1980s which was to meet the needs of agriculture, business and industry that called for Bahrainisation of staff – that is, employing as many Bahraini workers as possible, through graduating students able to work in these sectors.

Consequently, secondary education intended to limit the number of students who would have access to academic higher education and to increase the number of students in the vocational and technical sections (Al-Hawatchi, 1990). Taking into account these facts, it can be assumed that problems with non-Western students in higher education described in the previous section are likely to be faced by Bahraini students, especially if their approaches to learning have been shaped by vocational rather than academic teaching philosophies. This view is supported by

Mawthoh and Kumar (2011) who state that the 'genesis of study habits may be found in learner's attitudes towards studies' (p. 56) and if these attitudes are shaped by the cultural influences of a specific nation and realised through the system of education of that nation, they will be deeply instilled in the characteristics of its graduates. This also matches the socio-cultural theory and suggests that practices based on memorisation and rote can play a role in the transition to Western, self-directed and participative higher education.

Today, the approach to education seems to have changed and more emphasis is put on graduating students suitable for university (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, verbal reports from the locals suggest that not much has changed since the inception of secondary education in Bahrain and that the traditional view on teaching and learning may still be held by the majority of teachers. Through its focus on pedagogical framework of Bahraini students, this study will therefore be able to explore if the traditional attitudes still prevail and what role they and other aspects of the cultural framework of students play in their transition to university, given the information presented in the sections below.

### **3.3.2.2. Family Influences, Arabic Language and Value for Work**

Closely related to the contexts presented in the section above are strong family influences that characterise Islamic societies across the GCC region. Grayson (1996, cited in Balduf, 2009) found that academic ability of students may also be linked to the amount of time these students spend outside the classroom in academically related activities. According to Grayson (1996, cited in Balduf, 2009) those who engage in non-required lectures and the like are more likely to present



an increase in their levels of adaptation to university. Unfortunately, the strong family influences of Bahraini society interfere with 'outside the class' interaction and place social responsibilities and family duty over academic development of the students (Shirawi, 1989).

Moreover, social interaction outside the class takes place in the Arabic language and, as one student once told me, communication in English and about science should be restricted to 'those guys up in the university'. Despite its importance for business and industry, learning English in Bahrain is seen as learning another subject in school that should be taught only to those who need it rather than to all members of the Bahraini society (Abdulmajeed, 1995). Some more traditional Bahraini people also tend to see the spread of the English language as an attack on the Islamic values and some simply do not need it to communicate within their work and private cycles (ibid).

Most importantly, however, the value of work in Bahraini society seems to be lost as 'we [Bahraini people] are living in the region which encourages giving everything (to some citizens) without asking them what they have to offer in return to their country such as knowledge, efforts or beneficial activities' (Shirawi, 1989, p. 65). This unfortunately might have been transplanted to school pedagogies which are believed not to exert much effort on the students (Al-Sabah, 2002).

### **3.3.2.3. School Pedagogy**

In light of the statements above and for the lack of more recent literature suggesting a change in these attitudes, it can be assumed that learner autonomy, self-discipline and constant efforts that characterise good university students (Bragt

et al, 2010) might be lost in the Bahraini society. Shirawi (1989) claims that even though the traditional methods of teaching and learning criticised for creating dependency on the teacher and focusing on rote learning may not lay good foundations for a good start at university, these seem to suit those Bahraini citizens that are still not ready to give anything in return (Shirawi, 1989).

Compounding the problem may be the fact that the general approach to teaching and learning in Bahrain has been described as highly centralised and prescriptive (Shirawi, 1989). This, according to Shirawi (1989) stems from the general position with respect to the mainstream education in the country which has been summarised by the author herself in the following way:

What has come to be termed as 'traditional' position with respect to the education of young children involves the view that children are inherently 'uncivilised' and that they must, through hard work, obedience to adults and strong discipline, learn good social and literacy skills through diligent practice. Knowledge is regarded as that defined by the academic disciplines which can be acquired through the teacher, texts, memorisation and drill.

(Shirawi, 1989, p. 70)

Additionally, criticism in literature in relation to teachers not being able to use effective methods of teaching (Al-Ahmed, 1988; Al-Ahmed, 1994; Shirawi, 1989) – that is, methods that stress humanistic rather than traditional paradigms, suggest that memory work is the most widely used pattern of learning in schools. This is additionally reinforced by a strong reliance of Bahraini students on teachers who are regarded as the only source of knowledge (Shirawi, 1989). Therefore, operating within a set of such inherited beliefs and traditions, Bahraini students expect that learning is confined to memorising sets of prescribed materials that prepare the students to pass the examinations. This cannot have positive effects

on developing independence and autonomy needed in university settings (Gunn, 2011), which also mirrors the findings presented earlier regarding problems associated with cross-cultural transition. This will be extensively explored in this study.

More recent literature suggests that despite continuous efforts to eradicate rote-based aspects of education in Islamic countries, including Bahrain, dissemination of knowledge in the GCC is still poor when compared to other countries (AHDR, 2003). In Bahrain in particular, the Ministry of Education have made inroads to improve this situation and introduced a number of reforms that aim at developing critical thinking, scientific reasoning, learner autonomy and self-study approaches to teaching and learning (Education Improvement: National Report for Bahrain, 2008). Some of these reforms have been discussed in the previous chapter, however what effects these reforms have had on preparing students for university has not yet been documented. It is therefore hoped that through the results of this study, which will be looking at their role in the transition of Bahraini students to a Western-type university, their impact will be established which, in turn, will contribute to knowledge in terms of transitions in the context of change of culture, but also particularly in the context of Bahrain.

Shirawi (1989) argues that despite many changes in the curriculum, the reforms have failed to influence what was happening in Bahraini classrooms. According to Shirawi (1989), these reforms did not change the fact that students' attainment in the final three grades of primary, intermediate and secondary is below the anticipated standard and it is still used to monitor government ratings rather than students' development (ibid). This means that issues connected with changing the

forms of assessment from 'home' to Western that were discussed in the previous section, might be applicable to students in Bahrain. This also means that studies like this one, which explore the extent to which current pedagogies, assessment techniques and professional conduct of teachers and learners comply with the pedagogical structures of the university, are needed.

This need, especially in relation to exploring the current pedagogies in Bahraini schools, is further supported by the study by Hayes et al. (2011) which showed major gaps in study skills Bahraini students have on leaving secondary schools and the skills they need to cope with the transition to the medical university concerned in this study. The findings from a quantitative questionnaire on how useful study skills techniques offered by the university course were implied that self-regulation strategies of students with regards to note-taking, revision techniques and time management were minimal and that Bahraini students might need instructional help in adapting to university learning. The same findings have also suggested a need for more qualitative approaches in order to build a better understanding of why this help might be needed; whether it is to remind the high-achievers of self-control techniques or whether to provide high-achieving Bahrainis with new skills that are not taught in Islamic contexts. This study will attempt to do this, contributing to the socio-cultural theory through showing whether self-regulation strategies built in school can also be used at university.

The discussion so far has suggested that transition to university can be affected by the cultural context of students' pre-university education and secondary learning environments. This is also the perspective and the theoretical framework adopted in this study. Furthermore, the information in relation to Bahrain presented here

has implied that, when interpreted in terms of the findings in section 3.2., the context of Bahrain can cause some problems for students wishing to study in Western higher education. The research findings in the next section elaborate in more detail on what has been presented so far and provide further insights into how school environments can shape students readiness for university. The concepts reviewed below have been chosen based on the theoretical framework presented towards the end of this chapter - specifically, in relation to the transfer of study strategies from school to university and the change in agency this transition may cause.

### **3.4. The Role of Prior School Experience in Transition**

Using the frameworks of 'resourcefulness' (Kennet and Reed, 2009) and 'regulation strategies' (Bragt et al, 2010), the discussion that follows will outline the most frequently mentioned self-efficacy strategies that should have been formed through students' formal education in order to make a successful transition to university. The subsequent sections will attempt to examine which academic skills are essential for successful university study and how school environments can contribute to ensuring good university start for their students. The concepts of learned resourcefulness and regulation strategies will also be presented and their contribution to this study design will finally be explained.

#### **3.4.1. Academic Skills and School Environment**

The lack of study and self-management skills has been described by some researchers as hindering the transition into the first year of university (Nordell, 2009; Schrader and Brown, 2008; Selçuk, 2010; Esia-Donkoh et al, 2011). For

instance, a meta-analysis of 109 studies in the USA focussing on students' transition to university conducted by Robbins et al. (2004) suggested that numbers of failures related to the lack of appropriate study strategies were much higher than attrition rates associated with socioeconomic status, achievement tests or secondary Grade Point Average (GPA). Similarly, Cukras (2006), who investigated the effects of study habits on the university transition of Canadian students, claims that students having brilliant secondary careers cannot perform well in college because of their low study habits that do not comply with ways of studying at university level. The author states that university students during their first year of study are unable to adapt to the new way of learning by not being capable of taking effective notes, utilising their library skills, and adopting new exam preparation strategies and effective revision techniques because these were not taught in school.

Many researchers refer to the fact that secondary schools do not teach appropriate academic skills to explain why so many first year undergraduates fail to fulfil the desired study outcomes at university. For instance, Nordell (2009), who wrote about the study skills of biology students at one American university, claims that new-coming students, especially the high performing ones, expect that skills which produced success in high school will transfer to tertiary settings. Unfortunately, the realities of universities seem to be more demanding than the students think and the quantity of knowledge to be learned, the pace of academic learning and the ways of utilizing academic content are usually at a much higher level than the students had previously expected. That is why deficiencies in such skills as preparation for class, note taking and note revising, as well as preparing for exams have been

constantly found to be linked to students' poorer transition into higher education ( see for example: Cortez, 2010; Haydon, 2011).

Compounding the problem is the general lack of time management skills which is also thought of as resulting from the undemanding nature of preparation techniques at school (Cemaloglu and Filiz, 2010; Swart et al, 2010). Previously cited Nordell (2009) states that in high school it was enough to study the night before the exam and still pass. At university, however, the quantity and depth of the material is much more challenging and studying only before the exams is insufficient. Tanrıöğen and Iscan (2009), who studied time management skills of students at one Turkish university, drew similar conclusions and stated that university life poses considerable demands in terms of time assessment techniques on the students and it is compulsory that they develop time management skills as soon as possible.

A number of studies worldwide have found positive relationships between time management skills and university transition. For instance, Swart et al (2010) used descriptive statistics to demonstrate that time management techniques of African engineering students have powerful effects on students learning and concluded that students' inability to manage their time may be detrimental to the process of transition. Similarly, Yunus et al (2007) listed time management techniques in top five factors predicting students' achievement based on the results of the nationwide study involving 3025 students in Malaysia. In addition, after having to introduce a study management workshop to support students learning in one Canadian university, Urbanic (2011) concluded that in order to succeed in university

programmes, students need to be prepared to make quick decisions and deal with time and resource pressures.

Carroll and Feltham (2007) hold that good study skills may facilitate students' learning at university and present the results from the analysis of study skills marks and mean core module marks from one UK university which suggested that these two sets of marks were positively correlated. This indicates that good study skills help students obtain higher grades in university subjects and that transferable core skills play an important role in students' transition to university. Their view has more recently been confirmed by other researchers who indicated that students who presented high levels of self-efficacy on entry to university or who learned better study habits in intervention courses offered by colleges achieved higher grades in academic tasks (for example: Lynch, 2010; Awang and Sinnadurai, 2011).

What the findings cited above mean for this study is that in order to build a better understanding of the transition of Bahraini students, their levels of academic preparedness should be explored. However, even though the findings by Swart et al (2010), Yunus et al (2007) and Carroll and Feltham (2007) offer valuable indications that students' transition might depend on their levels of self-efficacy and that previously highly achieving students tend to gain better results, they do not, due to their quantitative designs, offer insights into how these levels have been shaped by school environments or how these high achieving students gained their marks. The quantitative designs and statistical analyses employed in these studies seem to fail to provide a deeper examination of how these skills have been formed through interactions with school environments or even in early university



intervention courses, which is important for the theoretical framework in this research.

Balduf (2009), on the other hand, offers a different approach to studying the students' transition and their academic skills and proposes a qualitative design in which the differences between becoming a successful student in school and between becoming a successful student at university become uncovered. Balduf (2009) conducted interviews with a group of American students in order to gain insights into their problems in higher education, providing at the same time useful insights into how school contexts create opportunities for good university resourcefulness and development of self-efficacy. That is why Balduf's (2009) qualitative approach will be adopted in this study where students will be able to talk about what it meant to be successful in school and what it means to be successful now at the medical university. Some more concepts related to this issue are presented in the sections below.

### **3.4.2. Learned Resourcefulness and University Self-Efficacy**

Effective study habits, whether acquired earlier or learned in university courses, relate to so called 'university resourcefulness' (Kennet and Reed, 2009) or 'self-regulation' (Bragt et al, 2010). In more general terms, these describe a range of strategies a learner chooses to use when deciding on the most appropriate methods of study in order to respond to the challenges of the task assigned (Kennet and Reed, 2009; Bragt et al, 2010). Therefore, to become a successful learner, students must be able to select and apply appropriate methods that will enable them to master the material. This, however, might be obstructed by

students' inability to decide which processes are suitable or by the general lack of self-study strategies which might be related to school education (ibid). These, in turn, might be linked to the specific psycho-social variables that are present in school cultures where models of self-control are not sufficiently promoted (Roxa et al, 2010).

According to Kennett and Reed (2009), students characterised by high learned resourcefulness are able to overcome study challenges by applying self-instructions and problem solving methods to deal with problematic situations. Hence, students who lack this resourcefulness will be less adjusted to university in that they will not be able to cope with high levels of academic stress (ibid). Bragt et al (2010) refer to this phenomenon as 'regulation strategies' and distinguish three types of regulation processes involved in students' learning: (1) self-regulation: students direct themselves, (2) external regulation: students need somebody else to direct them and (3) lack of regulation: students do not know what to do, when and how to start studying (ibid). The authors claim that regardless of the type of regulation processes, whether they are internal or external, students who are able to regulate themselves perform better than learners with no regulation tendencies. However, whether the students are able to regulate themselves or not depends on the type of education they had received prior to beginning university.

This study will therefore attempt to determine which, if any, regulation strategies, type (1), (2) or (3) Bahraini students utilised in school and whether they can be transferred to the specific context of RCSI. One of the research questions posed in this study aims at exploring how the specific sociology of Bahraini classrooms fits with the pedagogical structures of the medical university. That is why previously

cited design by Balduf's (2009), rather than also previously mentioned correlational studies by, for example, Carroll and Feltham (2007), is more suitable for the aim of this study for these researchers did not reveal any information on which regulation strategies were used by the students involved in their studies but rather assumed that these strategies had simply not been used at all.

Balduf's (2009) design, however, might also have some drawbacks. Pajares (1996) states that adopting approaches that give way to students' self-assessments of their academic skills can be misleading and result in a distorted picture of how specific students cope with the transition to university. This might be so because many high-achieving students expect to do well in college because they are content about their study skills that allowed them to achieve success at secondary level. However, these students are often disappointed when they experience difficulties, or sometimes failure, in situations where they had previously been successful. That is why Pajares (1996) recommends that conducting assessments by staff might be necessary to build a true picture of students' academic skills, results of which could be used to explain how resourcefulness built in school can affect students' transition to higher education.

As a result, using a similar research design to Balduf's (2009), this study will use samples of Bahraini students to talk about the impact of their self-efficacy built in school on their transition. Unlike Balduf's (2009) study though, this research will also address Pajares's (1996) concerns by additionally interviewing relevant secondary teachers and university lecturers. This is hoped to provide a deeper understanding of which regulation strategies proposed by Bragt et al (2010) are practised in Bahraini schools and to further verify the truthfulness of the self-

assessments presented by the learners themselves. Greater validity of findings is also believed to be achieved by this approach.

To recap, the sections above have identified how specific self-regulatory skills can contribute to students' transition to university. They have also indicated that these can be influenced by the specific sociologies of secondary classrooms which not only contribute to the levels of these skills but also to the general readiness of students for university. On this basis, this study has adopted a specific socio-cultural framework which emphasises the role of interactions of individuals with the learning environment in transitions. However, as could also be seen in this theoretical framework, students' transition to university is not only dependent on their regulation strategies, but it can also be mediated by the levels of subject-related knowledge and the kind of education they received, which students also bring with them from school. The following sections will therefore present concepts related to the role of type of subject-specific education and background knowledge in disciplinary learning, as well as their relationships with foreign language abilities. Since the students concerned in this research are making a transition from studying science in Arabic to studying science in English, specific considerations of the role of language in these types of transitions are also presented below.

### **3.5. Background Knowledge in Disciplinary Learning**

#### **3.5.1. The Relationship between Background Knowledge and Language**

As early as in 1980s, Johns and Dudley-Evans (1980, cited in Usó-Juan, 2006) wrote about the relationship between background knowledge and students'

linguistic ability in a foreign language. The authors studied reading difficulties faced by overseas students in the UK and their findings highlighted the importance of background knowledge in disciplinary learning in that it allows the students to construct meaning of the material studied. The authors claimed that students learn the material by utilising their linguistic skills and background knowledge of the topic and when language skills are somewhat weaker, good background knowledge allows the same students to refer to the memory of what they had studied before to still make sense of what they are studying now.

This relationship is specifically emphasised in this study for, as it was indicated in Chapter 1, the specific research setting in which Bahraini students are placed has been believed by the senior management at the medical university to pose new foreign language demands on them which they might not have experienced before because they had studied their disciplinary subjects in Arabic. We have also learnt in Chapter 1 that the language abilities of students admitted to RCSI Bahrain are lower than the ones of students in Dublin which is believed to pose obstacles to mastering the material in the medical university. If, however, as stated by Johns and Dudley-Evans (1980, cited in Usó-Juan, 2006), good background knowledge is identified by students, chances are that they might succeed and that compensatory effects of good scientific background will occur and that successful transition to university will be reflected in their increased ability to study.

Usó-Juan (2006) support this view by reporting on the findings of her study which show that good subject-specific knowledge allowed the students to achieve higher scores on a university reading task. The participants in Usó-Juan's (2006) study were Spanish native speakers who were assigned readings in English of familiar

and unfamiliar passages in order to measure the effects of background knowledge on their test performance. The results from the study revealed that students who read familiar passages outperformed students who read unfamiliar texts.

Earlier research by Chen and Donin (1997) not only corroborates with the more recent findings by Usó-Juan (2006) but also implies that the higher the levels of background knowledge, the higher the possibility that the compensatory effect of subject-specific information on language skills will occur. And even though their findings are very important for building the theoretical framework for this study, several limitations can at the same time be noted which call for a different research design than the one adopted by the authors. In light of the socio-cultural theory underpinning the current study, Chen and Donin's (1997) limitations lie in that they fail to address the broader context of discipline-related or linguistic knowledge of students in their study. By conducting a regression analysis, the authors categorise these two variables into two categories, i.e. (1) high and low background knowledge vs. (2) high and low language proficiency which leads to a loss of information on a broader cultural context of students which, in turn, is believed to play a major role in the transition to university in this research. This study will address this by adopting a more interpretive stance.

Most recently, Wang et al (2010) investigated the effects of foreign language abilities on students' gains in science in three schools in Taiwan. The authors claim that prior knowledge and language proficiency are two very important traits that play a major role in acquiring the scientific material to be studied. According to the authors, learning science is a complex process in which 'experiences and information are processed through the lens of a learner's comprehension of

science language, epistemological beliefs, efficacy beliefs and metacognitive skills' (ibid. p. 803). This very closely matches the socio-cultural theory in this study which also proposes that learning is conditioned by the patterns of teaching a language and disciplinary knowledge adopted in specific communities, as well as the cognitive development these patterns promote (Eckert, 2006; Crafter and Maunder, 2012). And even though the conclusions by Wang et al (2010) have been drawn in relation to school children, they are very important for this study, considering that the focus of this study falls on the perceptions of learners and their beliefs about science education. That is why this research will take these conclusions on board and will use them to frame the discussions with students, who are expected to talk about their experiences of studying science and English in school and discuss their role in acquiring the scientific material at the medical university.

Wang et al (2010) imply that students who claim that they have better background knowledge and higher language proficiency will have less difficulty in responding to the demands of core subjects. At the same time, students whose linguistic proficiency and familiarity with the scientific content is seen as low might face greater difficulties in mastering science. Thus, in order to draw valuable conclusions in terms of the role of English and science knowledge in the transition of students considered here, this study will aim at establishing the perceptions of the levels of linguistic ability, topic knowledge and level of demand of tasks in science in schools of Bahraini students beginning higher education, and will present their comparisons with the demands at university in the final analysis of the findings.

### **3.5.2. Literacy and Skills in Science**

The concepts discussed above necessitate a discussion of the levels of literacy in science of students embarking on science-related university careers. These literacy skills have been the centre of research in science education (Murcia, 2009; Oluwatelure, 2010; Soobard and Rannikmäe, 2011) and in many ways, they refer to the abilities required to construct understanding of science in order to apply it to learning in content subjects (Nbina and Obomanu, 2010). They also refer to organising and analysing information in order to comprehensively present the acquired knowledge in scientific tasks (ibid).

### **3.4.3. Literacy in Science and Linguistic Skills**

Considering the research setting of the current study, it can be assumed that students' literacy in science will be strongly connected with their proficiency in English. This will be linked to whether appropriate reading and writing strategies were developed in school and whether they can be applied to university study. This will also be linked to the levels of thinking students are able to present in English (Ballard, 1996). This research will therefore attempt to explore the role of English abilities of Bahraini students in building the required levels of literacy in science, based on the considerations of the findings reviewed in the sections below.

To develop an understanding of the material to be studied, students need to use an array of linguistic strategies that will depend on their ability to determine the information they need, locate it, evaluate it and synthesise it (Scaramozzino, 2010). These claims have specific implications for this study as students at RCSI use power point lectures as their main study material, which contain scientific content



related to the main learning objectives of the Foundation Year curriculum. This mode of teaching requires the students to assimilate information independently, which means that in order to be successful in their study students should be able to select the content that relates to these learning objectives and synthesise the information that may be scattered across different slides in one power point lecture.

According to Northedge et al (1997), whose research interests lie in foreign language students wishing to study science in English, having to do this poses significant demands on foreign language learners studying science because scientific texts are characterised by high density of information and difficulty of technical vocabulary. Therefore, the key skills that are required for effective reading of such texts include explaining concepts in students' own words, summarising, predicting an outcome by finding relationships between the concepts and their applicability to a broader idea, as well as interpreting visual data, making diagnosis, analysing case studies and comparing and contrasting information (ibid).

Similarly, in order to respond to scientific tasks successfully, the students also need to learn how to write science. This in the context of the current research setting means that students should provide comprehensive answers to examination tasks which guarantee higher scores and ease their transition to tertiary education. Gunel et al. (2007) state that the act of writing in exam oriented settings entails a range of explicit writing strategies that enable the students to formulate and refine new knowledge and to clarify and connect ideas by means of the most appropriate words that make the meaning of what they are trying to say clear to others. Gunel et al. (2007) conducted a secondary analysis of six studies

focusing on using writing strategies in science classrooms. Their findings suggested that science requires students to re-represent their knowledge in their own words, rather than reproduce it, which in turn poses new demands in terms of written expression in a language.

Many researchers worldwide have attempted to measure if freshmen students possess appropriate language abilities in order to be able to predict their transition to higher education (see for example: Malcolm, 2009; Dreyer and Nel, 2003; Levine et al, 2000). Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) developed an inventory that lists the most frequently mentioned reading strategies which are needed in disciplinary learning and which could be used for measurements of students' literacy levels in terms of reading. These reading strategies include techniques oriented towards a global analysis of text, strategies used for solving problems and some supporting techniques which involve using reference materials for study, selecting and synthesising information.

Researchers have used this inventory to investigate language strategy use of their students. For instance, in relation to science in particular, Martinez (2008) investigated the reported strategy use of Spanish L2 chemistry students to assess the extent to which high strategy use impacts students' learning in their subject areas. Similarly, Dhieb-Hiena (2003) engaged in an investigation of the reading processes of L2 biology students in South Africa who were required to read research articles in their speciality area. Both authors concluded that specific strategy use is necessary for effective and rapid assimilation of the scientific material.

In terms of writing, similar inventories have also been developed in order to measure the mastery of the writing abilities that are thought of as essential for university success in disciplinary learning (Oxford, 1997; Woodward-Kron, 2002). For example, Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) undertook an investigation into writing skills of Jordanian students studying science who wrote in English at university but who had written science in Arabic prior to coming to college. And even though a writing inventory as such was not used in Khuwaileh and Shoumali's (2000) study, its bases were used as a framework for the analysis of strategy use in samples of students' writing. The authors found many weaknesses in students' writing abilities and many were expressed in the lack of cohesion and coherence, the lack of paragraph unity, inappropriate use of tenses and the subject-verb agreement. This, in light of what was presented by Gunel et al (2007) above, was thought of as having a detrimental effect on students' transition to university.

Baker and Boonkit (2004) developed their own inventory to identify the most frequently used reading and writing strategies by Thai university learners. The authors identified a number of literacy strategies in Thai students but they have also concluded that these strategies were culturally inappropriate in the Thai context. This conclusion has a significant bearing for this study for it indicates that in order to predict how successful certain students in certain university context are going to be, studies that demonstrate which linguistic strategies, rather than their overall use, are needed in order to determine their fit with specific cultural and educational contexts and to contribute to knowledge on transitions in terms of change of language.

Therefore, rather than measuring the general linguistic strategy use of Bahraini students, like it was done, for example by Martinez (2008) or Dhieb-Hiena (2003) cited earlier, this study will aim at developing an understanding of which of the general strategies described by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) or Gunel et al (2007) above are important in the context of the medical university and whether Bahraini students are adequately prepared to use them. This will be achieved in two steps. Firstly, the inventories by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) and Baker and Boonkit (2004) will be used for the development of a descriptive questionnaire, which will be distributed to secondary English teachers to determine which of these strategies are taught in Bahraini schools. Secondly, the results from the questionnaire will be triangulated in the discussions with students, English teachers and university lecturers to gain their perspectives on which literacies are needed at the medical university and whether or not they are taught in Bahraini schools. This new focus will also follow the socio-cultural theory in this study in that it will demonstrate what opportunities the cultural context of language education in Bahrain creates for learning the English literacies of science required at the medical university.

#### **3.5.4. Skills in Science and School Pedagogies**

According to Ates and Cataloglu (2007), another set of factors affecting literacy and skills in science might be related to the conceptual understanding of science topics taught in schools and research into strategies used by students to learn science may inform understanding university transition of some students.

Ates and Cataloglu's (2007) research aimed to determine if there were any relationships between university freshmen cognitive and problem solving skills in science and their university performance, using correlational means of data analysis. The authors concluded that students' learning strategies were related to their problem-solving skills, which, in turn, could have been related to many factors, including students understanding of learning physics and skills required to learn it which they brought with them before starting university. Ates and Cataloglu (2007) also concluded that researching skills in science of students in terms of their specific ways of selecting, perceiving and processing taught information may add to the body of knowledge on students' performance at university.

Such implications for research stem from the points of view of several authors who see skills as attained through formal school instruction that involves planned learning and directing the students through the process of acquiring knowledge (for example: Busjahn et al, 1999; Chemers et al, 2001; Shankland et al, 2010). This also complies with the socio-cultural theory adopted in this study which sees students learning strategies as shaped by school pedagogies. These school pedagogies are believed to provide scaffolding that gives conscious and metacognitive supervision to the students' use and acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, understanding students' experience and prior knowledge and skills, in this study in science, can serve as a foundation on which predicting students' university transition can be built (for example, Leese, 2010).

Some research in this area (see for example Mergendoller et al, 1988; Yip, 2009) suggests looking at the learning objectives of the school curricula and assessment tasks through the popular framework of the Bloom's taxonomy of learning

objectives (Bloom, 1956). When two different cultures of learning are concerned, which is also the case in this research, Bloom's taxonomy is often used in classifying the learning objectives in each institution and comparing the results in order to establish the fit between them in terms of specific skills and pedagogies involved in their development. For instance, Ubuz et al (2010) attempted to determine the 'fit' of the Turkish mathematics curriculum with other European and American programmes by classifying mathematical tasks accompanying every learning objective into lower- and higher-level demands. The limitations of this approach, however, were shown in that even though the learning objectives and their accompanying skills were taxonomised into less and more demanding, no comparisons were made with any of the European or American syllabuses to determine the 'fit' between them.

The research reported here, however, does not use quantitative comparisons of taxonomies due to its main paradigmatic assumptions. These assumptions are not based on objective measurements that produce sets of comparable data but rather seek to gather information about the social and cultural context in which these objectives are realised (Kathy, 2000). That is why this research focuses on means of collecting data that give way to information on how these learning objectives were implemented in school and what skills in science were emphasised, by talking to students and secondary teachers, as well as how these are currently realised at the medical university by inviting contributions from those who are directly involved in their implementation. Adopting taxonomising approaches and content analyses of learning objectives was therefore seen as not addressing the main aims of this study and not following the use of the socio-cultural theory in transitions which

encourages explorations of cultural contexts in order to understand their impact on students' university careers.

Thus, a more qualitative approach will be adopted here for, unlike in case of Ubuz et al (2010), it allows for a deeper understanding of how the knowledge base and cognitive skills realised through school pedagogies can help in explaining students' transition to university. This also corresponds with the point of view of Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) who believe that students' cultural frameworks cannot be revealed by content analyses of curricular objectives and assessment schemes, but rather through in depth investigations into how these are realised in specific teaching communities.

Torenbeek et al. (2011) propose research that is more suitable for the aims and objectives of this study. The authors believe that it is only through investigating the perceived fit by those who are directly involved in the transition from school to university that the researchers are able to determine a degree to which study approaches, skills and programme content are continued from school to university. Based on the results from their study conducted in the Netherlands, the authors concluded that when the students feel that there is much attention to more specialised skills in the first weeks of study at university, 'the undergraduate course starts off too academic, resulting in a gap between students' actual and expected skill mastery, the latter being related to a poor first-year experience' (ibid, p. 663).

That is why Torenbeek et al (2011) believe that comparing school and undergraduate programmes contained in the curricular documents might not provide useful insights into students' transition and shifting the focus of research

from studying documents to studying the feelings and experiences of students might be more useful. This is also the approach adopted in this study which, specifically speaking, seeks to understand whether the academic course in the Foundation Year starts off too academic for Bahraini students and whether this can be related to pedagogical supervision of science provided in Bahraini schools.

The final point in relation to students' skills and ability to study science at university will be made in the following section where I will present the BICS/CALP theory (Cummins, 1981) which is very important for this research, considering the fact that once the students enter the medical university, they need to learn how to study science in English. This additionally encompasses further discussion of the relationship between language proficiency and background knowledge presented earlier in this chapter.

### **3.5.5. BICS/CALP Distinction**

The distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) made by Cummins (1981) provides an important impetus for this study. The BICS/CALP distinction was initially made to argue Oller's (1979, in Street and Hornberger, 2008) claim that each individual's language proficiency depends on only one global factor which was described by Oller (1979) as 'global language proficiency' (Street and Hornberger, 2008, p. 73). Cummins (1981) contradicted this point by a series of research findings and disregarded the global view of language abilities by distinguishing CALP, that is language proficiency that develops through social interaction with the school environment and BICS which are acquired in natural



settings (Street and Hornberger, 2008). Therefore, to talk about the compensatory nature of background knowledge on L2 students' academic success, it is the CALP that needs to be considered as a focus of any foreign language – background knowledge research, including this one.

This distinction is very significant for this study for we know that students in mainstream schools in Bahrain study their sciences in Arabic. Rosenthal (1996), who writes about teaching science to language learners, argues that this might cause problems with making the transition because CALP is only applied in academic settings and is decontextualized by topics described to a listener in lectures. In practice, this means that during the lectures, L2 students may not even be interested in what is being said but rather they may be too busy trying to write down every word being said, without necessarily distinguishing what is important and what is not. Cummins (1981) argues that this might be the case because the content taught in the lectures might be unfamiliar to students, therefore, creating little or no opportunity for them to learn the material. For L2 students this means that they must utilise higher order language and cognitive skills taught to them in previous educational settings in order to create better understanding of the new material.

Consequently, when instructors are unaware of the differences between BICS and CALP, they may misjudge the level of preparation of L2 students to handle university coursework (Rosenthal, 1996). At RCSI Bahrain, it has already been noted that in some cases, native speakers of English or students of better language proficiency (i.e. above 6.5 IELTS) perform a lot poorer than students whose language abilities are more limited. Cummins (1981) provides an

explanation for this phenomenon by stating that development of CALP is not only conditioned by the context but also by the difficulty of tasks in this context. When these are put together, Cummins (1981) concludes that well developed CALP reflects a high level of education and literacy in the students' native language. This conclusion is very important for this study as investigating students' BICS and CALP and their relation to students' previous education may help to explain why some Bahraini students who can barely speak English excel in summative exams at RCSI, while others whose language proficiency is high perform rather poorly.

Rosenthal (1996) argues in favour of this view and states that achievement in the sciences very much depends on the development of CALP. In fact, BICS seem not to be important at all, since discussion and class participation in university lectures, especially in didactic programmes like the one run at RCSI, is almost non-existent. Therefore, the overall rationale for this study has been developed in relation to Cummins's (1981) statement about the transferability of CALP from one learning context to another. This means that a student who is well educated in sciences in his or her native language is able to acquire CALP more easily in the foreign language because of high level of literacy and skills in science discussed in the previous sections. So, is it possible that the students in this study had received excellent secondary education, as a result of which they will be able to transfer language and study skills, as well as scientific knowledge from L1 context to their new L2 environment?

This research will address this question and will attempt to develop an understanding of what role students' knowledge of science has played in their development of CALP. This study will also attempt to establish the extent to which

language skills taught in Bahraini schools match the requirements of the faculty members at RCSI Bahrain. Consequently, if discrepancies between the opinions of students, secondary teachers and faculty at the medical university are found, this study will assume that the CALP of Bahraini students is low. Additionally, if high and low English proficiency students who will be interviewed in this study report the same problems with learning, this might suggest that successful students transition from secondary to third level learning in Bahrain may not be related to general L2 proficiency of the students. Furthermore, if we consider the findings of Wang et al (2010) already discussed in the previous section, this research will also conclude that difficulties connected with a low level of CALP might be overcome if we find out through this inquiry that science-specific knowledge of Bahraini students is high.

A study by Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari (1999) conducted at the University of Bahrain supports this approach to research but, at the same time, rules out the suitability of the author's own design for its purposes. Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari (1999) conducted a correlational study whose purpose was to determine whether the students' total score on the language test was a better predictor of their success at university. Two language tests were correlated with the students' performance in this study (FCE and TOEFL) , and the TOEFL test, which is also the test required on admissions to RCSI Bahrain, was not found as a good predictor of students success in the regression analysis. This substantiates the claims by Cummins (1981) and Rosenthal (1996) discussed above and suggests that high overall language proficiency does not guarantee a successful transition to university. Additionally, the quantitative methods used in the study also fail to explain why this

might be the case and do not provide the readers with opportunities to learn about the context of discipline-related knowledge of the students involved in the study. This research, on the other hand, will address these limitations by using an interpretive design which is believed to be able to provide explanations as to why, if this is found to be the case, the overall language proficiency of Bahraini students might not play the biggest role in students' transition to RCSI, contributing to understanding of transitions in the context of language change.

Cummins (1981) suggests that the mastery of CALP is context-embedded and that learning of these skills can be facilitated by, among other things, a range of cognitive demands and contextual support contained in class activities. Consequently, if the same cognitive demands and contextual requirements are found for secondary schools and RCSI, it can be assumed that the school context of Bahraini students should facilitate the mastery of CALP and will, in turn, facilitate the students' transition. The difficulties connected with the mastery of CALP will also be assumed as easy to overcome if this research project shows, through talking to RCSI faculty and students, what has been assumed by the model of Yore and Treagust (2006) which I discuss next.

Similarly to Cummins (1981), Yore and Treagust (2006), who reviewed science and language research in their article on realities and possibilities of teaching science, noted that learning science is dependent on what they called the three language problem. This comprises crossing lines between students' everyday language (L1), language of instruction (L2) and science language (L3). It is therefore important for university lecturers to give considerations to the students' L1 where a different instructional (L2) and science (L3) languages are involved.

According to Yore and Treagust (2006), taking into account the three-language issue and understanding related beliefs and values of students might be helpful in bridging the gap between L1, L2 and L3.

This study will respond to Yore and Treagust's (2006) recommendations by collecting data in relation to what aspects of students' L1 (that is students' first language), L2 (the English language) and L3 (the language of science) are considered by the faculty at the medical university and how these considerations may impact students' transition. This will be revealed through discussing the specific language requirements in university content classes and the importance of language accuracy in completing the assignments. This will show how important language is in particular settings and will contribute to both, understanding of transitions in terms of language change and the use of Communities of Practice in researching transitions.

For instance, Zhu (2004) invited business and engineering faculty members at one university in the USA to participate in qualitative interviews in order to understand the target needs of L2 students and demands imposed on them in university classrooms. Zhu's (2004) results revealed that language considerations differed across disciplines and that the emphasis given to the correctness and style of language depended on individual lecturers. These findings are very important for this study for they set the main methods used with the staff members and suggest using individual interviews, rather than focus groups, which I will explain in detail in the next chapter. They are also important because they provide information on how different lecturers give various considerations to students L1, L2 and L3 discussed by Yore and Treagust (2006), which seems important in trying to understand the

transition to university investigated in this study. Hence, a qualitative approach will be adopted in this study and individual interviews will be conducted with each faculty at RCSI so that the transition of Bahraini students can be better explained through the lens of L1, L2 and L3, as well as BICS/CALP issues defined earlier.

To recap the main points discussed in this chapter so far, it has been suggested that no student arrives in class with a blank mind. University students will therefore possess sets of background knowledge which they will use for further learning by modifying what they already know. In addition, as we could also see, these sets will be defined by students' linguistic proficiency and subject-related background knowledge. The background knowledge assumed in the learning tasks and cognitive demands at school can therefore help in explaining how well fresh coming students are likely to master the material taught in university classes. This creates the need for investigating the perceptual fit of these tasks and programme content with the structures and pedagogies at the medical university to determine whether compensatory effects of subject-specific knowledge on weaker language abilities might occur in case of Bahraini students. It has also been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that how students use their background knowledge, to either overcome weaknesses in language abilities or to understand the meaning of the concepts taught, can often be mediated by the third factor connected with students' transition to university– and that is, students' academic resourcefulness formed throughout their secondary education.

The following section of this literature review offer insights into how the international findings presented so far have been interpreted in the context of Bahrain. Combined with the research findings on Bahrain, I explain how the

concepts presented above have led me to investigating language, science and self-efficacy in this research. By doing this, I also refine the focus of this research in light of the literature reviewed and identify the gaps in knowledge this research will address.

### **3.6. Focus of the Current Research**

#### **3.6.1. Towards Exploring Language Education and the English Language**

Some discussions on the general state of language education in Bahrain suggest that international studies by Martinez (2008), Dhieb-Hiena (2003) or Baker and Boonkit (2004) discussed in section 3.4.3 could be applicable to students in Bahrain who may have undergone a secondary school experience that left them unprepared for the literacy demands at university. Abdulmajeed (1995) describes the level of English of Bahraini school leavers as 'well below the level required for most of their post-school higher education opportunities' (ibid.p. 15). This, first of all, in Abdulmajeed's (1995) view, might be related to the low level of motivation to learn English, which stems from the questionable role of the English language in the Bahraini society, also discussed in section 3.2.2. The author relates the general lack of motivation to learn the language to anti-Islamic forces which try to influence strict and fundamentalist Muslim communities by Westernising the great Muslim nation. Secondly, Abdulmajeed (1995) states that teaching and learning English in Bahraini schools is regarded as teaching another subject rather than teaching a language. These two points suggest that language might be taught superficially

and that the linguistic development of students might not be sufficient to learn science in an English-medium university.

As early as in the 80s, Shirawi (1989) wrote about the educational development in Bahrain when she stated that despite the considerable curriculum movement to improve language education in the country at that time - a movement that meant to shift the focus of language teaching from skills-based to integrated communicative and genre-based approaches (please see section 2.1.5. in the background chapter) - nothing changed with regards to English education in the country's state schools. According to Shirawi (1989), methods of teaching English as a second language and the standard of teachers left a lot to be desired. In a more recent publication, Al – Ahmed (1994) seemed to support this claim by stating that low standards of English education in Bahrain can be attributed to under-preparation of the language teachers who had not been trained to use effective methods of teaching. Based on the results of her study on the effects of critical thinking training provided to some students, Al-Ahmed (1994) concluded that unless teachers in Bahrain developed and implemented an array of critical thinking skills into their teaching, successful L2 acquisition in secondary context was going to be hard to achieve. The main recommendations from Al-Ahmed's (1994) study included changing the aims and methods of teaching and providing good pedagogical training to teachers. The same author, in her earlier publication (Al-Ahmed, 1988), also commented on the standard of business and technical English secondary teachers by stating that the majority of teachers in Bahrain were expatriates who had little experience in teaching English for Specific Purposes in Bahrain. Al-Ahmed (1988) also related to poor communication between policy-makers and



educators and the negative effects of this relationship on the general state of education in the country.

Furthermore, Al-Hawatchi (1990), who engaged in the research project that aimed at improving English teaching pedagogy in Bahrain, implied that not many teachers saw teaching as the act of facilitating learning. Instead, they viewed educators as people who pass knowledge to others and ensure that the students master the topics (ibid). These findings seem to support the previously mentioned view by Abdulmajeed (1995) that language might be taught superficially and create a rationale for studies like this one which will explore if linguistic skills shaped in teacher-centred learning environments are suitable for achieving satisfactory levels of literacy in science required by the medical university. These findings will also be useful in researching transitions using the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice because they will help to explain whether and how broader characteristics and views on education in one context impact student learning in another.

Last but not least, the findings from the institutional study conducted prior to this research corroborate with the statements above and imply that flaws in English education in Bahrain may exist (Hayes et al, 2011). In the background chapter to this study, we read that RCSI Bahrain runs an academic skills course that aims at teaching new-coming students the language and study skills necessary to succeed in this particular medical school. In order to measure its effectiveness in bridging the gap between school and university, a questionnaire was developed based on the general language requirements for successful completion of core courses in the Foundation Year and specific language issues related to achieving literacy in science discussed in section 3.4.3. The discussion of the results obtained in this

study suggested that students in Bahrain come to university unprepared and that the language education students receive in Bahraini schools might be of a much lower standard than it is required to study science in an English-medium third level education. This formed an additional impetus for investigating the role of language education in Bahrain in this study in order to better understand transition in the context of language change.

Mavor (2001), who investigated the role of the English education in Portugal on the transition of Portuguese students, argues that in order to determine what role students' linguistic abilities play in their transition to university, three dimensions of influences on language proficiency need to be considered. These influences include: (1) the socio-cultural values embedded in the English language, (2) the realities of tertiary and secondary education in which language discourse occurs and (3) the cultures of learning in the university's and school's content classes. This three-dimensional approach will serve as a basis for investigating language education in this study for it corroborates with the theoretical framework guiding this research which stresses the role of students' cultural framework and school education in their transition to university.

A similar to Mavor's (2001) position on research has already been adopted by Al-Sabah (2002) who took the culture of Bahraini schools and its big influence on shaping teachers' beliefs and values about teaching English as a basis for her study. The author concluded that specific classroom and school environments set specific boundaries on teachers' pedagogical decisions, which in turn are translated into students' linguistic competencies. On a more international level, Jin (2011), for instance, concludes that the gap of cultural differences between two

learning environments holds up a successful transfer of what can be considered as good language skills in one environment to another. Based on his conclusions drawn in relation to students from the Confucian culture, Jin (2011) argues that in order to explain what type of proficiency in a language, or more specifically in relation to this study, how this proficiency may affect studying in other areas, raising awareness of cultural background of school pedagogies and methods of teaching is necessary.

Therefore, using Mavor's (2001) recommendations presented above, and taking into consideration the conclusions drawn by Al-Sabah (2002) and Jin (2011), this study will attempt to explain how social and cultural values embedded in English teaching pedagogies in Bahrain may contribute to students' language proficiency and what consequences this might have for their transition to higher education. This is hoped to fill the gap in knowledge in relation to the levels of preparation for university language education in Bahrain offers, which does not seem to have been investigated so far and contribute to knowledge on transitions in terms of change of language and culture.

### **3.6.2. Towards Exploring Science Education**

Due to the language barrier, I have been unable to find many examples of research in English that would outline the current state of science education in Bahrain. I have been able to identify only a small number of studies dealing with aspects of science education in Bahrain and they discussed the use of information and communications technology in science primary classrooms (Bucheeri, 2005), sources of stress of science teachers (Darwish, 2002) and the Pearl Oyster Course

as a new programme in the Bahraini curriculum (Sangoor, 1998). However, nothing that could outline the possible effects of science education on university transition seems to have been written so far, which, in its own right, points out to the significance of this study and its contribution to knowledge. Therefore, I will base the discussion below on selected references mentioned above, as well as the book written by Shirawi (1989) which presents a cross-section of education in Bahrain in 1980s and before, and indicates the direction of reform in order to improve the structures and pedagogies of the educational system in the country at that time. Some more information on these reforms can also be found in the background chapter to this study, however, here only selected aspects will be discussed – that is, aspects that may bear significance to students' transition to university. The National Curriculum for Science Courses in Bahrain was also translated to provide the most recent information on science teaching relevant for this study (Hameed et al, 2011).

In 1989, when Shirawi wrote about the possible problems with education in Bahrain, she described science teaching as an area that needed improvement. Her recommendations included teaching science from the first year of primary school till the end of secondary education and combining teaching technology with the science curriculum. This, however, was seen as quite challenging as lack of appropriate equipment and irrelevant teacher training of science teachers employed in schools at that time was believed to slow down the reform process (Shirawi, 1989). About ten years later, Sangoor (1998) noted that conventional methods of teaching and learning science in Bahrain still existed in the country's system of education and that these did not help learners develop higher thinking

skills needed to cope with the latest advances in science. Despite the government's efforts to develop the new curriculum, science programmes were still designed and written in line with the traditional approach that stressed teaching and learning the theoretical part and neglecting the practical component. Practical components were restricted to mere demonstrations by teachers and the curriculum was designed to achieve knowledge through memorisation (Sangoor, 1998). Today, the Ministry of Education in Bahrain describes teaching science in the country as a learner-centred and self-directed approach which promotes learning through inquiry and problem-solving (Hameed et al. 2011). This suggests the use of highly demanding methods of teaching and requires the students to present high levels of cognitive development. However, how these methods relate to students' preparedness for university is still unknown.

The concepts presented above point out to the significance of this research which aims to explore, in its broader context, whether approaches to studying science and knowledge base emphasised by structures and pedagogies in Bahraini schools can be transferred to university. According to Hameed et al (2011), the methods that are currently used in science teaching in schools are very advanced. On the other hand, the teaching of science in the Foundation Year at the medical university is largely lecture-based which suggests didactic methods of teaching which may require less demanding learning strategies. If this is the case, and this study will attempt to explore this, can it be assumed that learning science in schools was more demanding than it is now at the university and that the course in the Foundation Year is not academic enough for students to make a successful transition? Issues related to this important question regarding transition have

already been pointed out earlier in this literature review where Torenbeek et al (2011) stated that if learning conceptions, study approaches and programme content are continued from school, they can facilitate the process of transition. If, however, they appear to be not academic enough or too academic, the fit between the programmes will not be identified and students might experience many problems in their first year of study at university.

Another important question raised in this study is related to what has been outlined in Chapter 1 when I presented Henari's (2009) results which showed that students from national schools in the GCC region performed better than students from private schools in pass rates in two semesters out of the three semesters covered in the study. These students have also achieved a higher number of first honours in all three semesters when compared with students from private schools. So, is it also possible that Bahraini students present very high levels of familiarity with science-concepts and choose appropriate study approaches and that the compensatory effect of background knowledge discussed earlier in section 3.4 facilitates their transition to university? This study will attempt to answer this question by exploring the specific aspects of science education in the country in terms of what is proposed by previously cited Torenbeek et al (2011) who recommend exploring perceptual views of students in order to determine the fit between school and university programmes. This sits very comfortably with the socio-cultural framework of Communities of Practice for it places differences and similarities between two communities of practice in the centre of research. This research will additionally address the limitations of the study by Henari (2009) who did not differentiate between Bahraini and non-Bahraini students and who

correlated the results from all public and private schools in the GCC region, without discussing separate results for the national schools in Bahrain.

Nevertheless, to further draw on different aspects of the 'fit', this study will not only focus on the levels of linguistic and scientific development Bahraini students might need to achieve to study at RCSI, but it will also encompass those areas of the 'fit' that are often defined in terms of the learnt resourcefulness discussed earlier in this chapter (please see, for example, Kennet and Reed, 2009). The discussion which follows provides useful insights into how university self-efficacy of Bahraini government students might be influenced by the specific social and cultural aspects of Bahrain and how these aspects contributed to investigating the school pedagogy in this study.

### **3.6.3. Towards Exploring Pedagogy of Bahraini Schools**

Literature cited earlier in this chapter has outlined that specific learner attributes, such as note taking, examination preparation and time management skills can enhance self-efficacy and resourcefulness needed for success in higher education (Carroll and Feltham, 2007; Yunus et al, 2007). Unfortunately, it has also shown that students who lack these skills stand a risk of failing university courses and that is because transition to university involves activating self-regulatory processes that allow them to retrieve, organise and study the academic content in an effective way (Robins et al, 2004; Cortez, 2010; Haydon, 2011). This risk is believed to be even greater when students from traditional schools are concerned because mainstream education in different countries has been found to be falling behind alternative

schools that exceed in the development of student autonomy, creative thinking and problem solving skills (Shankland et al, 2010).

In Bahrain, a number of alternative schools has been created, which are commonly referred to as private schools, to provide students with learning opportunities that cannot be created in government schools (Abdulmajeed, 1995). These schools are believed to offer better educational programmes than state schools because they adopt Western syllabi and pedagogies. Some private schools in Bahrain are also thought to have advantages over national schools in that they provide bilingual programmes in which subjects are taught in English and Arabic. These aspects of private schools are believed by the locals to create greater opportunities for tertiary education where students are exposed to methods of teaching that promote autonomy, problem-solving, critical thinking and bilingual education.

Shankland et al (2010) provide justification for the approaches to improving education like the one adopted in Bahrain on a more international level by presenting results from a study conducted in France which measured student adjustment to higher education through comparing participants from alternative schools with students from traditional schools. The findings suggested that a cohort of students from alternative schools adapted better to higher education than the students from mainstream institutions as they showed greater academic results and higher levels of psychological comfort. The authors also highlighted that the greatest levels of academic self-efficacy found in students from alternative schools contributed to their successful transition to university, as opposed to traditional students who were identified as struggling with new situations and environments.



Shankland et al's (2010) results are in keeping with previous research on alternative schools which had revealed satisfactory development of students' self-efficacy skills. Through the findings of their longitudinal study of first year university students' adjustment, Chemers et al (2001) found a compelling support for the role of self-efficacy in first year college success. Strong relationships between self-efficacy, academic performance and personal adjustment were identified in alternative students, however, no such relationships were traced in relation to students from mainstream schools in Santa Cruz where the study took place.

On the other hand, previously cited data by Henari (2009) suggest that RCSI students from national schools in the GCC recorded better performance in pass rates than students from private schools. This is an interesting finding because it contradicts the pre-conceptions of senior management at the medical university who claim that Arab mainstream education may not necessarily match what is required from students at the medical university.

This also raises many questions which this study will attempt to answer by exploring if the structures and school pedagogies of Bahrain's mainstream education promote sufficient levels of students' resourcefulness and self-efficacy that is necessary to cope with the demands of study at the medical university. Unlike in the designs by Chemers et al (2001) and Shanklad (2010), however, this study will not compare students from alternative (private) and mainstream schools for it was felt that such sampling could invalidate the other sets of findings collected, for instance, in terms of the compensatory relationship between the English language and background knowledge, which could not be discussed in relation to private schools in the country where all subjects are taught in English. It

will, on the other hand focus on the pedagogies of national schools only which sits comfortably with the main methodology adopted in this study that stresses the importance of homogenous groups of participants (Cohen et al, 2000). Finally, this study will also address the limitations of the research by Henari (2009) discussed earlier by focusing only on the resourcefulness of Bahraini students and providing exploratory, rather than statistical data, which will help the reader to develop a better understanding of self-regulatory and study strategies of the mainstream students in Bahrain and the role they play in the transition process. This will contribute to the socio-cultural theory in terms of change of culture.

#### **3.6.4. Summary**

The above literature review demonstrates that transition to university is a complex phenomenon. It also indicates that this transition is often linked to the specific structures and pedagogies governing the teaching and learning at universities, which might not match the cultural and educational frameworks of students (Bhattacharyya, 2010; Sheridan, 2010; Torenbeek et al, 2011). And while a lot of studies cited in this chapter suggest this, they do not explore this. This study, on the other hand, addresses these limitations and elicits perspectives of FY students, secondary teachers and university lecturers as to how the cultural framework of Bahraini students and school pedagogies in Bahrain fit with the structures and pedagogies at the medical university. This focus allows to explore the socio-cultural factors related to the three categories of science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy which are inherent to this research and their role in their transition to university, addressing at the same time the gaps in knowledge in some of the studies cited above.

Additionally, this chapter has aimed at presenting some research findings and theoretical models that are related to students' transition to university. It has been shown in the discussion above that adaptation to higher education is a time of many life changes during which students face new environments, different frames of learning and an increase in institutional demands. Hence, the definition of transition proposed by Ecclestone (2009) which I explained in the first chapter was seen as the most suitable for this study. This definition proposes that when transitions take place in the context of cultural change, these life changes depict shifts in identity and agency that are required from people to progress through the educational outcomes of the system because they are socially regulated (ibid).

Ecclestone (2009) claims that learners who undergo transition experience uncertainty about who they are as learners and what they can do as learners with regards to different forms of learning in a new environment, which matches what has been presented in the literature review chapter. Additionally, the ideas that brought me to this study suggested that the problems with transition at this particular medical university are associated with achieving a passing score on final examinations rather than, for example, with acculturation or social adjustment. This might be linked to the fact that the medical university was transplanted into the culture of Bahrain, as opposed to students having to travel abroad and live away from their families and culture.

At the same time, despite its sharp focus on educational progress, it does not mean that the definition of transition adopted in this study does not give enough attention to cultural factors which are an important element of the context of this study. The meaning of transition proposed by Ecclestone (2009) depicts it as a

product of social institutions placed in specific cultural contexts and the outcomes these institutions expect students to achieve. This meaning liaises with the ideas that were described in the context of this research in Chapter 1 which indicated that transition of Bahraini students might be obstructed due to the specific cultural context of schools. Therefore, this definition does not neglect cultural influences on transition and additionally corroborates with the ideas highlighted in this literature review – that is, that changes in identity and agency might be required by cross-cultural transitions that are realised through differences in the language of instruction, modes of learning and students' ability to apply themselves to study in a way a new culture imposes it on them.

Finally, the definition of transition in this study depicts it as changes in identity and agency that individuals need to undergo to move through the educational outcomes to become members of the new setting. The literature reviewed in this chapter suggested that these changes may require adopting different frames of learning, developing different language patterns or acquiring new ways of participating in a university environment. Therefore, both the literature in this chapter and the definition of transition imply that a useful model of looking at the transition in this study is that of Communities of Practice which propose that transitions are related to mastering practices that ensure membership in a specific community (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). This is the theoretical framework that has been adopted in this research and I explain its use in this study in the next section. I follow the section on Communities of Practice with explaining the understanding of identity and agency shifts pertinent to the definition of transition in this research.

### **3.6.5. Theoretical Framework**

Considering that this research focuses on two culturally different educational settings and that it is concerned with contributing to theory regarding transitions between different cultures of learning, this study will adopt the socio-cultural perspective of Communities of Practice derived from the work of Wenger (1998).

Wenger's (1998) socio-cultural theory is based on the premise that educational development of individuals is determined by the practices and everyday activities of the communities they belong to. These activities are in turn influenced by the history and culture of communities who have undertaken these activities for many years and who have shaped the nature of personal and institutional settings (ibid.). Communities of Practice share these characteristics with other socio-cultural theories which position human thought and development in a cultural context of an individual (Vygotsky, 1978). All socio-cultural theories view development as embedded in socially organised activities which are part of people's everyday lives. This means that individuals learn about the world through participating in everyday lives of others, constructing meaning in a way it is taught to them by other members of a community (ibid).

What distinguishes Communities of Practice from other socio-cultural theories, however, is the focus on practice and identity that mediate the interactive relations of people and their environment. Wenger (1998) argues that while everyday activity and real-life settings are important for understanding learning, it is the shared resources and the mutual practice of a group by which these activities are

organised that have an impact on forming a person (identity) and are crucial to understanding educational development.

According to Wenger (1998), 'practice is the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise' (p.45). Hence, the term 'communities of practice' and the premise that this practice gives meaning to what we do. When we encounter various situations, this meaning is negotiated – that is, interpreted and acted upon in light of this practice (ibid). Wenger (1998) proposes that we engage in negotiation of meaning to become a member of a specific community but also because we belong to more than one community of practice, or we have to move from one community to another. To move between these communities, therefore, individuals need to cross boundaries – that is, discontinuities between communities characterised by markers that define membership and enter different practices (ibid). For this reason, according to Wenger (1998), crossing boundaries involves forming trajectories that are understood as negotiations of identity in a way that will provide access to a new community and its practice. Because identity in Wenger's (1998) theory is a characteristic of practice, it is the transferability of practice that is the focus of researchers who use this theory for understanding transitions (for example: O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Tobbell et al, 2010).

When transition to university is considered from the perspective of Communities of Practice, and when it is defined in terms of progressing through educational outcomes of an institution, like in this study, the emphasis needs to fall on the interaction between the individuals and the institutional setting in which they are currently studying. Crafter and Maunder (2012) state that when interpreted from

the socio-cultural perspective of Communities of Practice, transitions need to be seen as the individual's need to live and cope with the challenges of different contexts in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes and to retain membership in a new community. This means adapting to new social and cultural experiences and learning to overcome difficulties arising from the changes in cultures of learning. Investigating these changes, like it will be done in this study, can therefore lead to better understanding of transitions and contribute to theory on transitions in terms of cultural change.

The theory of Communities of Practice was also considered to be appropriate for this study because its use in transitions recognises the degree of transferability of language use, ways of acquiring knowledge, and other pedagogical structures from one community to another (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These aspects are related to the three categories of language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy that have been identified as inherent to this study and that have been explained in the section on the Context of the Current Research. Communities of Practice additionally place learners in the centre of social interaction, which in this study takes place in the Arabic language and within the cultural framework of Bahraini schools, and provide insights into how this interaction affects their ability to make a transition (*ibid*), which is essential for understanding transitions in terms of cultural change and language. Thus, in the sections under the theoretical framework, I consider relevant subtleties of Communities of Practice as a socio-cultural theory of learning, with specific references to the different educational settings as communities of practice because these settings are the communities considered in this research. I then present some research on transitions guided by

the notions of Communities of Practice and I finally finish with explanations of how this theory has shaped the current research.

### **3.6.5.1. Communities of Practice as a Socio-cultural Theory**

The notion of Communities of Practice was proposed by Wenger (1998) as a socio-cultural theory for exploring learning. A community of practice refers to a group of people who engage in common practices to achieve a specific goal. What is interesting about communities of practice though is that, rather than being classed together in terms of their shared abstract characteristics, like gender or area, the members in the communities of practice share the same social practices (*ibid*). This means that when having to deal with a particular situation, a community of practice develops ways of doing and viewing things that are adopted by every member (Eckert, 2006).

When interpreted in the contexts of educational institutions, which is also the context considered in this study, the theory of Communities of Practice assumes that there are common rituals, programmes and rules which all members of a community need to follow. These are, for example, the structure of a school day, subjects taught, assessment methods or the nature of the programmes (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). Following these rituals and programmes guarantees membership in the community, which in turn defines learning because new learners develop their identities through interacting with already existing members who engage them with knowledge and shared practices in their own community. This participation shapes the actions of the new members and their interpretation



of reality, creating at the same time a specific image of what learning involves (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of Practice, therefore, consider learning in people's own social contexts, for instance, in school, but they also propose that these contexts are influenced by the broader societal and cultural values of a society (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) support this notion, particularly in relation to schools, by stating that the shared practices of schools are influenced by the broader societal view on education and that these practices are adapted to people's particular context in order to meet the desired ends. This proposes a view that school pedagogies and structures are a social phenomenon derived from the experienced participation in the communities of practice, who have a particular view on education, because the process of gaining knowledge and mastering organizational characteristics is subsumed in shaping learning identities in an ongoing social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

When considered in transitions, Communities of Practice recognise that these identities and ways of mastery of knowledge that guaranteed success in one community may not be transferable to another. Communities of Practice see learning as embedded in wider social practices which are valued by all members of a particular community (Wenger, 1998). On entry to another community though, learners become legitimate peripheral participants who have some experience of educational practices but who, at this periphery stage, do not know if the practices that had previously guaranteed success and that had been valued by the members of the old community are also valuable in the new community. Therefore, depending on whether or not the participants are able to transfer the practices

between the communities, they might or might not become full participants (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007).

Consequently, when this model of learning is applied to educational transitions, the learning identity of students is in the foreground because the practices of the new community require the students on the periphery to reconsider their images of self as learners (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). Similarly, what actions students will take in order to reshape these identities to then fit into the community will be related to their agency (Ecclestone, 2009). Understanding these two concepts in reference to educational transitions suggests that research should focus on who the participants are as learners and what they can do to remain successful learners in the new community. This involves investigating where the students have come from and the current context (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). This reflects the aims of this study which will explore the past experience of the students – that is, the context of their secondary schools, and their current experience at the medical university.

Some research adopting a similar perspective and aims can be found in academic literature. For example, Leese (2010), who studied undergraduate students starting university, concluded that students' struggles with transition were related to not knowing the routines of the university – that is, not knowing the specific university language, not knowing how to study from lectures and feeling that students' study skills were poor. These struggles resulted from the fact that the ways of mastery of knowledge and delivery of the material promoted in school did not match the new university community, which resulted in difficulties with learning in the initial phases of third level study.

Tobbell et al (2010) provide similar findings from their ethnographic study but on the transition of students to postgraduate study in five UK universities. The significant findings in their research were that students' former learning identities played a role in their transition in that they suggested links between learning and self-efficacy strategies formed in previous communities of practice. Tobbell et al's (2010) students reported challenges in negotiating their academic identity in light of previous university practices, especially the need for independent study, which was the practice that necessitated identity change in order to become a member of the new postgraduate community of practice.

In addition, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) revealed that adult students beginning higher education in the UK, despite already being peripheral participants in the university community because they were enrolled in the university preparatory course, still had to negotiate their learning identities. Their challenges with transition were related to understanding university regulations and academic procedures, which became their new educational world, and to developing an understanding of these new practices in order to be able to undergo identity shifts. O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) concluded that when transitions are concerned, some practices in which students previously engaged in their communities of practice can be 'ontologically empowering or disempowering' (p.326).

Each of the examples above imply that when students' transition into higher education is perceived from the perspective of Communities of Practice, this transition becomes affected by not knowing the 'knowing how' of the university because the new university practices differ from the practices previously familiar to the students. Studying transition using the socio-cultural theory of Communities of

Practice, therefore, leads to an understanding of how changes related to the process of acquiring new skills, knowledge and meanings, as well as forming new learning identities in order to become legitimate members of the university community influence students' transition (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). By investigating the experiences of Bahraini students in relation to these changes, as well as the perspectives on these changes of relevant teaching staff in school and at university, this study is also hoped to contribute to this theory as a useful lens of looking at transitions.

Additionally, the socio-cultural perspective of Communities of Practice matches the definition of transition adopted in this study which is understood here as change in ways of acquiring knowledge, adopting new learning strategies and responding to university regulations in order to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university. This perspective also matches the research questions posed in this study which focus on different perceptions of the role of pedagogical and cultural frameworks of students that had been built throughout their secondary education in the transition to medical higher education. Below, I explain the use of Communities of Practice as a socio-cultural framework of this study in relation to these frameworks, based on the three categories inherent to this research – that is, the English language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy.

### **3.6.5.2. Communities of Practice in this Research**

The interpretive paradigm adopted in this study proposes that individuals have subjectively unique experiences that are negotiated through social interaction with

a particular environment (for example: Crotty, 1998). This suggests that in order to understand transitions in terms of change of language and pedagogical culture, these experiences should be explored which, in turn, is supported by the notion of the Communities of Practice that recognises the interdependency of agent and world, learning, gaining knowledge and their impact on transitions (Crafter and Maunder, 2012).

As far as language is concerned, Communities of Practice perceive its development from the perspective which suggests that there is a strong link between linguistic competency and local practice (Eckert, 2006). This means that explanations of learners' ability to use the language can be found in investigating broader patterns that were used in learning this language and that were set by the specific community (ibid). The same has been suggested by Mavor (2001) in the literature review who recommended seeking explanations of learners' ability to make a transition through investigating broader patterns of language education that took place prior to beginning university.

To support this conclusion, Eckert (2006) provides an example of a white working-class woman who did not develop her ways of language use directly from belonging to working class or being female but from her participation in the activities of her social community which was characterised by specific patterns of language use. Thus, considering that the social community in which language teaching takes place in this study is secondary schools, the theory of Communities of Practice suggests that investigating the patterns of language education in Bahraini schools, which will be achieved in this study through a descriptive questionnaire and interviews with English teachers and students, can be useful in

explaining the language proficiency of Bahraini learners and in drawing conclusions in relation to its role in their transition to the medical university, contributing in this way to understanding the transition in terms of change of language.

Moreover, the theory of Communities of Practice also proposes that ways of learning the language are related to ways of participating in the social world (Eckert, 2006). The importance of this notion for this study lies in discovering how linguistic development correlates with social structure of activity but also in understanding how social meaning becomes part of language (ibid). This is important for the research questions posed here because it suggests that language pedagogies are shaped through the local social practice and that they are standardised based on the shared experience and understanding of the participants regarding what language education should involve. And since exploring the role of pedagogical structures in students' transition is vital for the outcomes of this study, the notion of Communities of Practice that language is constructed in the course of local practices helps in contextualising this research in terms of its broader contribution to knowledge regarding the role of change in language and culture in the transition to university. This will be explored in the interviews with English teachers and students.

The notions presented in relation to language could in many ways also be applied to the second category inherent to this research – that is, the importance of subject-related background knowledge and its associated learning strategies. The literature review in Chapter 3 suggests that transition depends on the degree of transferability of knowledge base and ways of mastering knowledge from school to

university (for example: Bragt et al, 2010). The theory of Communities of Practice proposes a similar perspective, suggesting that when making a transition, individuals bring their own approaches to learning the subject matter and their own knowledge base that, like language education, have been influenced by educational patterns and resources offered to them through their previous social experiences (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). Communities of Practice therefore propose that one of the difficulties in making the transition might be related to acquiring the new knowledge, or to having to develop new ways of acquiring knowledge and to supporting the transfer between the old and new community with knowledge base and study strategies already acquired. The study by, for instance, previously cited Leese (2010) has shown this in that it emphasised the role of change in learning style between communities in students' difficulties at university. This study will also adopt this notion of Communities of Practice and will investigate, through student, science teachers and university faculty interviews, the approaches to learning science, the knowledge base and the cognitive demand of tasks in school and the university. This will help to establish the role the practices in schools and the pedagogical structures of the medical university may play in students' transition, which will contribute to theory in terms of change of culture of learning.

Finally, the third category of the transition considered here – that is, school pedagogy is, according to Communities of Practice, related to developing new learning identities through changes in agency in order to cope with the level of demand of university study (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). This involves reflections on, and if necessary, refinement of old practices in order to first become a member

of the new community and then retain this membership until graduation (ibid). Previously cited Tobbell et al (2010) highlighted this by demonstrating that negotiating a new identity in terms of becoming more independent and self-conscious learners guaranteed their students membership in a new postgraduate community. Thus, investigating negotiating these identities through the perspective of Communities of Practice led to a deeper understanding of transition in that it showed that differences between practices of different communities may play a powerful role in the transition process. A similar approach will be adopted in this study where the focus of student, teacher and lecturer interviews will fall on the role of previous pedagogical and cultural structures on students' ability to cope at the medical university.

The discussion so far has suggested that transitions entail some kind of change in an individual and that this change is usually influenced by various factors. Here, these factors will be limited to institutional settings of national schools in Bahrain and the medical university as these have been identified as communities of practice in this study. The three subtleties of transition that have been identified in the context of this research at the beginning of this chapter and that have been described here in relation to the socio-cultural framework of this study indicate that transitions are complex processes in which individuals are learning how to encounter new situations in terms of language use, acquiring knowledge and developing appropriate self-efficacy skills. The socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice also links these subtleties to the students' cultural and pedagogical background, suggesting that transitions occur when learners find ways of transferring knowledge, study strategies and learning identities from the old to



the new setting. These have been referred to in the definition of transition adopted in this study as changes in identity and agency. I explain the use of these concepts in more detail in the section below.

### **3.6.6. Identity and Agency in Transitions**

The definition of transition presented in section 1. 2 suggests that undergoing educational transitions is related to changes in identity and agency. Different perspectives on transitions, however, propose different views about the nature of identity and agency which means that, how these two concepts are understood is inextricably linked to how transition is understood by a particular researcher and to theoretical ideas underpinning the research process (Field et al, 2009). I have defined transition as it is viewed in this research in section 1.2. but I will return to some of the main concepts here in order to argue the particular understanding of agency and identity adopted in this study. I will mainly focus on theorisations of these two concepts proposed by Ecclestone (2009) but I will also cite relevant research findings that deal with identity and agency change in transitions. I will additionally make relevant references to Communities of Practice to illustrate the influence of the theoretical framework on the understanding of agency and identity adopted in this study.

The definition of transition adopted in this study depicts it as movement through the educational outcomes of the university which is expected to result in learners' shifts in identity and agency (Ecclestone, 2009). According to this definition, these shifts have to take place in order for students to progress through the educational system of the medical university, which makes transitions socially regulated and

dependent on the institutional setting (ibid). This means that when learners undergo this type of transition, they need to discover the best ways of responding to institutional pathways and normative expectations, utilising their attributes as learners.

Research that supports this perspective on transitions (e.g. Osborn et al, 2006) sees these attributes as outcomes of social systems and the structural forces that govern them. This links in well with the theoretical framework adopted in this study which also views successful transitions as dependent on learners' attributes as products of social settings (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Both, research by, for example, Osborn et al (2006) and the socio-cultural theory view learners' ability to make a transition as a product of communities of practice and expectations that were set for them in these communities. In practical terms, this means that changes in identity and agency required by the new expectations of the university will have to be understood by exploring how much cognitive, emotional and social progress novices that enter the new community will have to make due to the differences between the old and the new setting (Ecclestone, 2009). Changes in identity, therefore, will have to be viewed as finding out the extent to which being a learner in school transfers to being a learner at university, and changes in agency will be related to looking at whether coping strategies in school and past actions can also assist students in their learning at third level. This is how they are going to be considered in this study.

### **3.6.6.1. Understanding of Identity in This Study**

The definition of identity that best suits the context of this study is one that defines it as distinctive characteristics of individuals which are shared by all members of a particular social group (Côté and Levine, 2002). Because culture and specific school communities lie at the core of this research, identity is viewed here as a set of attributes constructed through cultural capital of schools and pedagogical interactions with the community of national schools in Bahrain. And while there might be multiple other identities that constitute a person's characteristics (ibid) and while some social theorists might recommend studying identities at many different levels, for example, the Personality and Social Structure Perspective (PSSP) (House, 1997, cited in Côté and Levine, 2002), this study, due to its theoretical framework, will consider only this identity that is born out of interactions of learners with their school environments.

When this type of identity is considered in transitions, change in identity refers to finding out whether learners have sufficient structure and resources to 'achieve a viable way of being in a particular context' (Ecclestone, 2009, p.15). If this is not found:

Transitions become problematic because a viable identity in one context does not transfer to another (...) disrupting a viable way of being in a [new] context, making transitions demotivating and stressful and learning ineffective.

(Ecclestone, 2009, p.15)

For example, Colley et al (2003) who viewed transitions as movement through the educational outcomes of three vocational courses in the UK, concluded that transitions of students were affected by the differences in viable identities

established in learners' previous social and cultural context and identities required by the colleges of further education. The author argued that the learners' past dispositions were challenged by the expected norms of action in the new environment, diminishing the participants' attributes as learners.

This matches what O'Shea (2013) argues about identity work in transitions into higher education. O'Shea (2013) states that identities available in school environments may sometimes exist in contradiction to the 'ideal' identities established by universities, pointing out in this way to the mismatch between social contexts that constructed learners' previous identities and the new social context they have just entered. According to O'Shea (2013), learners who enter higher education represent traits – that is learning identities, that were powerful in their previous educational settings but they may also either empower or exclude these learners from the university context. O'Shea (2013) claims that new university practices may either confirm or disrupt former learning identities which is why transition to university involves negotiation between existing and expected learner attributes, leading to identity change.

And while O'Shea's (2013) work was also based on exploring other types of identity, such as women's attributes as studying mothers or being the first one to enter higher education, her focus on learning identities was very powerful in influencing the understanding of identity and identity change adopted in this study. The discussion in the previous paragraph indicated that learners' dispositions gained through formal education predispose learners for successful transition on entry to higher education. This matches the model of Communities of Practice adopted here as a theoretical framework which also argues that learners on the

periphery of higher education are ontologically empowered or disempowered by the practices of a community in their opportunity to become legitimate participants in higher education (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). Therefore, the position on identity change that stems from these theorisations, as well as the definition of transition in this study, required me to view identity change as degree of negotiation of learners' attributes in order to move through the educational outcomes of the Foundation Year (FY) programme at the medical university. This is reflected in the research questions posed in this research that will explore identity change through the perspectives of teachers, students and university lecturers.

#### **3.6.6.2. Understanding of Agency in This Study**

Ecclestone (2009, p.15) defines agency as 'people's capacity to interact with others and with material conditions in order to shape their own destinies'. This definition presents agency as the ways in which people make choices to respond to situations based on the opportunities given to them by their social capita (ibid). When applied to educational transitions, this definition also suggests that even though agency and identity are separate concepts, they are inextricably interconnected because actions taken to respond to a particular context are informed by the attributes that were discussed in the section on identity and the constraints based on these attributes (Ecclestone, 2009).

Ecclestone (2009) suggests that agency is linked to identity but rather than being an attribute, it refers to strategic actions that could be taken because of certain attributes. Ecclestone's (2009) definition of agency has also been adopted in this

study because of the specific definition of transition in this research that encourages investigating actions that need to be taken by students in order to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university. This definition of agency also links very closely with the theoretical framework which proposes that learners on the periphery not only have to act in a way a new community imposes it on them but also that their ability to act will be determined by their identity – that is, attributes as learners formed in previous communities.

Côté and Levine (2002) additionally strengthen the suitability of this definition of agency for this study by arguing that what would be seen in this study as learners' ability to make a transition would depend on '(a) available resources derived from the community, (b) how an individual packages these resources into a configuration that has meaning in that community and (c) how that person then strategically invests these resources in the lives of people in that community' (p.123). By adopting a stance that focuses on these three points, this study aims to seek if resources available to students in Bahraini schools are viewed by the participants to have given them opportunities to take strategic actions in order to ensure their participation in the community of the medical university. This stance also seeks to explore how and if strategic actions taken by students at secondary level can in the participants' view be transferred to the context of the university, which in this study is understood as agency change.

A case study of two primary students making a transition to secondary school by Osborn et al (2006) demonstrated how change in strategic action connected with the transfer from one educational setting to another impacted their transition. Osborn et al (2006) concluded that a major departure of these two students from

the established patterns of strategic action resulted in the loss of coherence across established practices related to the curriculum and teaching methods, which had negative consequences for the learning process in the new community.

The majority of literature reviewed in Chapter 3 also suggests that loss of coherence, or lack of transferability of strategic actions that guaranteed success in school to the university context is one of the major factors affecting transitions (for example: Balduf, 2009; Nordell et al, 2009; Bhattacharya, 2010). Be it related to the language, subject-specific education or pedagogical structures, the literature in Chapter 3 has shown that students who are unable to apply themselves to university study because they lack specific attributes (identity) and therefore are unable to take specific actions to cope with the demands of university study (agency), are unlikely to make a transition. Therefore, the theorisations of agency and identity presented in this section were seen as suitable for this study. Additionally, analysing changes in identity and agency as defined here that are required by the transfer to a new community was also seen as necessary for the outcomes of this research because both, the definition of transition and the theoretical framework propose that if the demand of these changes is high, transitions are affected negatively. Relevant analysis of these issues will be presented in the discussion chapter.

### **3.6.7. Conclusions**

Using the example of Bahrain and the medical university, this literature review aimed at establishing grounds for a study design that would help to explain what role specific aspects of Islamic education might play in students' transition to a

Western-type university. The table below presents the summary of the research questions and aims of this research, as well as the main theoretical concepts and research findings that were used to identify the gaps in knowledge this study will address.

Table 3.1: Summary of Research Questions, Literature Review and Research Plan

<b>Research Questions and Aims</b>			
<b>To explore different understandings of Bahraini students' transition into the FY at a Western medical university</b>			
<b>1. What are the perspectives of:</b>			
<b>a) secondary teachers?</b>			
<b>b) students?</b>			
<b>c) university lecturers?</b>			
<b>2. How do the participants perceive the role of school practices, English education and science background knowledge in students' identity and agency change to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university?</b>			
<b>What is known from international literature?</b>			
At university, language is utilised for learning in subject areas; levels of metacognition; CALP and language strategies required to study science. They are influenced by previous school experience	Good study and time management skills essential for success at university; university resourcefulness and self-efficacy can be/ should be taught at school	Good background knowledge can facilitate compensatory effects and assist students in their university learning; when requirements of programmes and assessment tasks are similar, transition may be eased	Students approaches to learning and study strategies shaped by school contexts; strong social and cultural influences on school pedagogies exist
<b>What is known about this case study from literature on Bahrain?</b>			
Bahraini students linguistically unprepared for demands of university; poor language education in the country	Bahraini students educated in highly prescriptive and controlled environment	Science taught and assessed through very advanced methods; on the other hand, conventional pedagogies might still exist	Bahrain's education characterised by teacher-centred approaches; teacher the only source of knowledge
<b>What remains to be explored in terms of the broader aim of the study?</b>			
What role do social and cultural values and teaching pedagogies in Bahrain play in developing students'	What is the actual students' experience of Bahraini schools/ medical university? How important is university self-efficacy	Can we talk about the compensatory effects of background knowledge in case of Bahraini students?	How do schools in Bahrain, through pedagogies and structures prepare students for



language proficiency and which study Can scientific skills university? How do  
and what strategies are valued at from school be they facilitate/  
consequences this the medical university? transferred to hinder the  
might have for their How do schools prepare university? transition?  
success in higher Bahraini students for  
education university?

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In the next chapter, I draw on the information presented here and I use it to explain the paradigmatic assumptions underlying this study. I also discuss the main methodology and specific research tools adopted in this research.

## ***Chapter 4 – Methodology and Methods***

### **4.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter I reviewed literature pertinent to university freshmen transition and identified ways in which this literature informed the design of the current study. This chapter discusses how this study will be conducted and outlines ways in which particular issues will be studied in order to address the research questions and the main assumptions of the socio-cultural theory.

I begin this chapter with outlining the paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research and demonstrate how they can be used in exploring the post-secondary transition. I then move on to discussing the case study approach to research, which is the main methodology adopted in this thesis. Next, I outline the research design, sampling, methods and procedures involved in data collection. I also discuss the specific use of triangulation which was an important strategy used in this study. Data analysis is subsequently described and means of preparation of data for interpretation are provided. I follow this with issues pertinent to validity and reliability in interpretive research. I finish this chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations.

### **4.2. Research Paradigm**

The paradigmatic position that guides the process of this research is largely associated with the social sciences and finds its explanations in the interpretive stance towards educational research. Developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, interpretivism became a leading philosophy in educational research which is nowadays used to explain reality as a social construction by human actors

(Walsham, 1995). Below I consider the main assumptions of the interpretive paradigm that fit with the aims and the theoretical framework of this study.

#### **4.2.1. Interpretive Paradigm**

According to Leininger (1985) the main principles of interpretivism can be described in the following way:

Interpretive research focuses on identifying, documenting and knowing – through interpretation – the views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts and general characteristics of life events, situations, ceremonies and specific phenomena under investigation with the goal being to document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in particular contexts from the people’s viewpoint or frame of reference.

(Leininger, 1985, p.5)

Consequently, this study will adopt the interpretive stance which explores different contexts, as well as their different interpretations in order to achieve the totality of events that are involved in the transition process considered here. And while it needs to be acknowledged here that the ‘totality’ here does not mean ‘the truth’ or ‘reality’ because interpretive research recognises that there is no one version of reality and that access to the totality of participants’ experience cannot be gained, this ‘totality’ is understood here as an in-depth interpretation of participant views on transition. This will involve investigating the context of schools and the medical university and inviting students, staff at RCSI and secondary teachers to explore different perceptions of how well Bahraini students are seen to cope with the transition to university and what demands different contexts of their previous and current education place on them in relation to this transition. Unlike positivistic approaches which take one neutral view of the phenomenon by decontextualising it from the real world (Kathy, 2000), this study places an emphasis on students and

staff unique experiences in specific educational contexts by trying to understand the lived experiences of the transition of these students to a Western medical university.

The approach adopted in this study, therefore, supports the interpretive stance which suggests that we cannot understand how people cope with certain situations unless we understand how they make sense of the world – that is, what their beliefs and attitudes towards the situation under investigation are (Howe, 1998). Trying to understand how people make sense of the world also matches the socio-cultural theory in this study which states that research should be focused on meaning-making in society, as well as how it is conditioned in social interaction and motivated by common goals of a community. This theory, in turn, matches the interpretive paradigm in that it studies the outcomes of persons acting under a common motivation and common practice with regards to transitions (Crotty, 1998).

The work by Balduf (2009) that I described in literature review represents one of many examples of interpretivist research in the field of transition to university. Balduf (2009) recognises that the focus of transitional research should fall on young people's first-hand accounts and the ways in which they can contribute to understanding the transition process. Therefore, Balduf (2009) uses interviews that capture the lived details of students' beliefs about their transition by focusing on the particular context of their schools and the current university.

The approach adopted by Balduf (2009), which is also the approach in this study, supports interpretive researchers in that it argues that breaking social situations

down into countable instances – as it is proposed by positivists (Mathews, 2004) – is unacceptable in social research. Interpretivists are of the opinion that the research process involves much more and, instead of concentrating on frequencies of certain occurrences in social situations, researchers need to investigate multiple truths that derive from individuals and that have individual meanings to the members of a particular community (Lemke, 1998). This is so because knowledge and theories about certain educational behaviours are socially constructed within a particular educational context, at a specific time, with certain people and driven by certain educational practices (Ericson, 1986, cited in Vrasidas, 2001).

The purpose of this study fits with this worldview in that it emphasises the role of two educational contexts in students' transition – that is, the specific pedagogical systems and structures that operate in (1) the specific medical university and (2) mainstream secondary schools in Bahrain. It also stresses the importance of multiple interpretations of how these systems and structures influence one's transition to university by exploring their fit with the views of the university lecturers, students and their secondary teachers.

### **4.3. Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology can be broadly defined as assumptions about the nature of the social phenomena being studied which inform a research design in that it tells the researcher what social research should study (Cohen et al, 2000). Epistemology sits alongside this and focuses on the nature of knowledge produced in the research process, its forms and ways of acquiring this knowledge. In other words, considerations of ontology and epistemology provide a theoretical basis for

deciding what kind of research findings can be obtained in a particular study and discuss their relevance to the main objectives of individual research. Below I provide explanations of basic ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying this study.

The interpretive paradigm discussed above suggests that the main objective of this study involves exploring the unique experiences of first year Bahraini students with their transition to a Western university, as well as the perspectives on this transition of staff and secondary teachers. This also implies that the ontologies and epistemologies within the positivist paradigm, which assume testing hypotheses about the world (Kathy, 2000), cannot be adopted here because they are driven by a purely scientific paradigm. On the other hand, the main position adopted in the current research suggests the use of constructionist ontological and epistemological principles which reject the view that social reality is governed by universal laws and general underlying regularities which can be tested for its truthfulness (see for example: Pring, 2000).

Instead, the constructionist ontology proposes approaches to research that emphasise the viewpoint of individuals who are part of the investigation at hand and that focus on how people understand and interpret what they experience (Cohen et al, 2000). The constructionist ontology, therefore, assumes that meaning is embedded in participants' experience and that it is grounded in social interaction. This is closely related to the interpretive paradigm adopted in this study which sees the world as constructed by human actors in a social environment (Leininger, 1985). This also has additional implications for the socio-cultural theory adopted here (please see Chapter 3) which proposes that the behaviour of these actors can

only be understood through exploring their engagement in social interaction with the environment (Wenger, 1998).

Therefore, researchers adopting the constructionist ontology immerse themselves in a social environment of their participants in order to gain an insider's view on the issue under study because only then they can understand the impact of the social environment on participants' meaning-making (Tuli, 2010). Some methodologies described in the literature review have shown us that when transition is decontextualised from the social context of the researched, its understanding may not be fully achieved (see for example: Huerta and McMillan, 2005). Pring (2000) argues that this type of work holds limitations in terms of lack of meaning and that it tells us little about the complex environment in which the transition takes place. Reducing transition to a fixed number of factors as it has been attempted by some positivist researchers (e.g. O'Neill et al, 2011 or previously mentioned Huerta and McMillan, 2005) fails to recognise the complex interplay of structure and agency and does not interpret transition in the context in which it is understood (Pring, 2000). Therefore, considering the paradigmatic and socio-cultural assumptions of this study, the constructionist ontology was adopted here.

In terms of epistemological assumptions:

[Constructionism] holds the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent on human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

(Crotty, 1998, p.42)

In this study, constructionism is applied in the research methodology that reveals different perspectives on Bahraini students' transition to university as defined by

three different groups of people who 'live' this transition from three different standpoints – the students themselves, their secondary teachers and the university lecturers at the university where this transition is taking place.

The constructionist epistemology relates broadly to the interpretivist approach in that they emphasise the subjective nature of data that can be gained through investigating the experience of human actors (Burton et al, 2008). More specifically, however, constructionism focuses on how different cultures formulate the world in their diverse ways and what type of data this might produce (Cohen et al, 2000).

The above definitions are very important for the current study because the research context in which this project takes place does not only encompass the transition from school to university but also the transition from Arab to a Western culture of learning. This latter form of transition is believed to produce data derived from the subjective construction of meaning caused by the specific cultural framework of Bahraini students. However, the data the participants report is not necessarily subjective per se, as the critics of constructionism tend to say (e.g. Leininger, 1985) but rather relational to the context in which the research takes place (Pring, 2000). This type of data increases our understanding of phenomena viewed through the cultural lens, which is also the contribution this study is trying to make by adopting this lens through the constructionist epistemology to the context of transitions.

As stated in the main research questions in Chapter 1, this study aims to explore the pedagogical systems and structures of Bahraini schools and the medical



university and ways of their compliance with the students' cultural framework and understanding of learning. This fits with the main assumptions of the constructionist epistemology which tends to produce data that emphasise the multiple competing interpretations of the same phenomenon that can circulate in any cultural context (Cohen et al, 2000). This also fits with the researcher's beliefs that transition should not only be explained from the point of view of the Arab-Western transition but also from the transition between the three cultures of learning formed in this particular research setting – and that is: the community of students, secondary teachers and the community of lecturers.

The work cited in the literature review chapter raises the need for constructionist epistemologies in transitional research. A study by Hayes et al (2011) raised particular limitations of scientific approaches in trying to explain transition in that it produced a list of variables affecting the transition of Bahraini students but it did not reveal how these variables were constructed in the culture of Bahraini schools. As a result, this research offers a different perspective on students' transition to university by adopting epistemological positions that address the need for acknowledgement of students', teachers' and lecturers' voices and their cultural frameworks. This is hoped to be achieved through adopting an interpretive methodology, which I will present in the following section.

#### **4.4. Research Methodology**

In this section, I present the case study methodology that has been identified as the most suitable for this research and I explain the reasons for its selection. I begin by defining a case study as it is used in this context and then I move on to

explaining the main aim of this methodology. I also refer to case studies cited in the literature review and discuss how this study will address the methodological limitations noted there.

#### **4.4.1. Case Study**

A case study is referred to as 'the study of an instance in action' (Adelman et al. 1980, cited in Cohen et al. 2000). This means that real people in real situations are investigated and the reality of a specific issue, rather than its theoretical representation, is presented in the research outcomes. This also means that ideas are presented in depth and go beyond numerical representation (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2007).

Using Adelman et al's (1980, cited in Cohen et al, 2000) definition above, the instances in action considered here translate to Bahraini students (instances) undergoing transition to the Irish medical university (action). Additionally, the description of a case study above does not only fit with the general paradigmatic, ontological and epistemological assumptions of this study but it also matches the research setting that has been selected here. Case studies are concerned with the depictions of events that already exist, regardless of the research, and their relevance to the study in a way that indicates all the factors that can impact a social situation in a particular direction (Bryman, 2008). The case of Bahraini students at the Irish medical university, which is the case investigated in this study, is 'real' and exists regardless of this research. This will not change due to the research process and its relevance to the broader aims of this study is demonstrated in that these students are an example of a culturally different setting

as compared with the medical university. In case study research, cases are usually selected to represent a wider population so that conclusions from the research can be used for contributions to wider theory and other similar contexts (Denscombe, 1998). This premise was used for the selection of the case in this study which will generate findings that will contribute to broader understanding of transition in the context of language and culture change.

Moreover, the most common use of case studies associates it with a location, be it an organisation or a community of people (Bryman, 2008). Similarly, this study focuses on an intensive examination of a community of Bahraini students who enrol to study in one medical organisation. An important feature of this community is that they share unique characteristics and that they can be easily distinguished from other members of the same community. Drawing clear boundaries in terms of who can or cannot belong to the case under study is an important methodological move in case study designs (Cohen et al, 2000). (A detailed description of the case will be provided in the research design section).

The general aim of case study approaches is to create a story of 'a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance' (Denscombe, 1998, p.52). Similarly, the aim of this study is to provide a story of an experience with a transition in the context of cultural change, using the example of Bahrain and the specific medical college in order to present to the reader a broader picture of what socio-cultural factors are involved in this transition and what relationships exist between them. Once this story is created, the outcome of this research is achieved and no attempts at, say, confirming or rejecting hypotheses about this transition

are made, which might be the case with researches using, for example, experimental designs (ibid). The aim of this study is to provide modification and illumination to the already existing ideas about the transition of Bahraini students which were presented in the research context in Chapter 1, rather than to test whether lecturers' assumptions about, for instance, students' scientific knowledge were right or wrong.

Thus, case study researchers concentrate on the elements that form this picture rather than on the type of theories that could be drawn from the research process (Denscombe, 1998). This means recognising the naturally existing context as a determinant of certain behaviours in a specific community from the perception of human beings as complex entities that cause and respond to the social constraints of this context (Cohen et al. 2000). This matches the socio-cultural theory adopted here and the general aim of this study that seeks to explore different perspectives on students' transition and how teachers, students and lecturers view the role of the broader societal context of Bahraini schools in this transition.

Case studies are commonly used in researching transition to university because this area of research allows for investigating typical 'instances in action' – that is, specific groups of students in reference to specific organisations (for some examples, please see Torenbeek et al, 2011, Shankland et al, 2010 or Yip, 2009 cited also in the literature review). This study follows these researches in that it focuses on a particular group of students in a particular context but it also draws on their methodological limitations in order to present the totality of events, which has been identified as missing from some of these studies during the literature review process.

For instance, Baker and Boonkit (2004), cited earlier in the literature review, attempt to explore the transition of Thai students into one university. The authors aim to discuss how the educational system in Thailand affects educational attainment of students by presenting survey results regarding students' reading and writing abilities. Similarly, Malcolm (2009), also cited earlier, adopts a case study approach to discussing the performance of students in one medical university in Bahrain and bases her discussion on the effects of educational context in the Middle East on the questionnaire results regarding students reading abilities in English.

However, while these case studies give considerations to social constraints as important elements of the picture, they do not give any considerations to the importance of students' voices. This, in turn, does not present a holistic view of students' transition and does not meet the main condition of case studies (Denscombe, 1998). This research, on the other hand, responds to these limitations and allows the concerned students to speak, rather than letting the researcher speak for them.

Bragt et al (2010), also cited in the literature review, used a case study approach to measure the impact of previous education on university performance of Dutch students at one university of applied science in the Netherlands. The authors failed to meet the basic conditions of case studies because they neglected to apply specific criteria to the selection of students which resulted in too many differences in educational background and flawed results in terms of the impact of context on students' university study. This according to Bryman (2008) does not meet the basic criteria of case studies that emphasises the selection of homogenous groups.

As a result, Bragt et al (2010) ruled out the context of previous education as a factor for predicting study outcomes at university because they could not build a complete picture of the transition of their students. On the contrary, this study places special importance on the environment in which cases interact and, as mentioned earlier, selects participants that share common characteristics (Bryman, 2008).

The holistic view that is aimed to be achieved by case studies also suggests the use of specific methods. I give considerations to this issue in the subsequent sections where I first discuss the overall design of this research and then move on to presenting each method in detail.

#### **4.5. Research Design**

Bryman (2008) argues that the central issue of concern in research designs of case studies like this one is the quality of theoretical reasoning – i.e. whether sufficient connections between different conceptual ideas have been made and whether these ideas have been explored with a sufficient number of participants. This suggests gathering data from all the groups within – that is, in this case, not only the students themselves but also their teachers at secondary level and their tutors at university. Collecting data from these groups of participants will enable gathering information on how well schools prepare students for the transition (teachers), how students experience this transition (students) and how university lecturers understand this transition (lecturers in the Foundation Year) - hence, enhancing the quality of theoretical reasoning.

Data collection took place in two periods during the research. One period of data collection comprised 10 months – from September 2010 till June 2011. In that period of time, I interviewed university lecturers, conducted focus group sessions with the students and went to secondary schools where I distributed questionnaires and conducted focus group interviews with English language teachers. After the initial analysis of data collected between September 2010 and June 2011, it was felt that some of the main aims of this research were not yet fully explored, at which point I decided to conduct a second round of interviews with the students. The students were interviewed again at the beginning of the academic year when I organised a focus group meeting in September 2012. The interviews with science teachers also took place in September 2012. The table below provides the timeline of data collection.

Table 4.1. Timeline of Data Collection

<b>Period of Data Collection</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Data Collection – Period 1	Sep 2010 - June 2011	Secondary English Language Teachers FY Students at the Medical University Foundation Year Lecturers
Data Collection – Period 2	Sep 2012	2 <sup>nd</sup> Round of Interviews with Students at the Medical University Secondary Science Teachers

All participants were selected based on the three deductive themes and the theoretical framework and I selected participants who had the knowledge and experience required by the research and who could provide appropriate comparable data (Andrade, 2009). Hence, science and English language teachers

were selected at secondary level because of the deductive themes of the science background knowledge and the English language, groups of students were interviewed at university (after the completion of the first year), because their transition is studied here, and science lecturers who teach the material in the Foundation Year were also chosen because the movement through the educational outcomes of their programmes is the basis of transition in this research. I provide details on participants and their selection below.

#### **4.6. Sampling for the Study**

Due to the highly contextualised nature of case studies, the participants to be studied must be set in geographical, institutional, communal or other contexts, where clear boundaries must be drawn between them in order to select samples that will share the same characteristics and that will generate useful research outcomes (Robson, 2002). I present the common characteristics of each sample in the sections below, as well as explain the procedures involved in the selection of participants. I start with the description of the questionnaire sample because the schools that were selected for the questionnaire were also used for the selection of teachers who took part in the focus group interviews.

##### **4.6.1. Questionnaire Sample**

10 government schools were selected for the purposes of this project. The number of schools to be visited had to be agreed on prior to the research process, which was required by the Ministry of Education in Bahrain to whom I had to apply for a research permission that would allow me to visit the schools. All English teachers in the selected schools were invited to complete the questionnaire.



The selection of schools was determined by the purposive sampling method. Bahrain has 34 national secondary schools (16 for boys and 18 for girls) which are distributed across 5 governorates. In order to collect data from a school in every area in the country, I decided to visit at least one girls and one boys school in each governorate because, even though the number of schools in each governorate may vary, each governorate has at least one school for boys and one school for girls. So, on my visit to each governorate, I randomly approached one girls and one boys school. In this way, I visited one third of schools in Bahrain, where I conducted my quantitative research with all English teachers who were employed full time. I delivered my invitation to take part in my research through the senior teacher of English in each school (see Appendix 8 – the invitation was attached to the questionnaire questions and to the information sheet which can be viewed in Appendix 7). The total number of English teachers employed in these 10 schools was 85. All of these teachers responded to the questionnaire, returning a 100% response rate. The table below presents some information regarding the teachers' qualifications, nationality, age, gender and experience:

Table 4.2: Information about English Teachers Participants - percentages

Qualifications	Experience (years)		Teaching Load (hours per week)		Qualified in		Nationality		Age		Gender		
<b>TOEFL/ DELTA</b>	4%	1 to 4	15%	20	40%	UK	0%	Bahraini	40%	below 20	0	Female	36%
<b>B.A</b>	91%	5 to 8	11%	15	39%	USA	0%	Non-Bahraini	55%	21 to 30	21%	Male	61%
<b>M.A</b>	1%	9 to 12	19%	10	11%	Bahrain	36%			31 to 40	36%		
<b>PhD</b>		more than 12	51%	5	4%	Other	59%			41 to 50	21%		
<b>Other</b>										51 to 60	13%		
										above 60	2%		

\* percentages may not equal 100 because some teachers did not respond to selected items

## **4.6.2. Focus Groups Samples**

The teachers that took part in the focus groups interviews were sampled from the same schools which I visited to distribute the questionnaires.

### **4.6.2.1. English Teachers**

After completing the questionnaire, the English teachers in schools that were selected for the questionnaire were asked to participate in the follow up focus group sessions. My aim was to recruit between 6-12 interviewees for each session as this is the number of focus group participants that is generally recommended in literature (Stewart et al, 2007; Morgan, 1998a, cited in Bryman, 2008; Massey, 2011). The majority of teachers in each school responded positively to my invitation which was delivered to them through the senior teachers of English in Each schools (please see Appendix 9 – this invitation was attached to the interview questions and the information sheet – please see Appendix 7) and I managed to conduct a focus group interview in each school. It was decided here that interviewing teachers in all schools was necessary due to the fact that these teachers had previously completed the questionnaire and that some interview questions were related to selected questionnaire items.

The number of members in each group ranged between 3-8 and the total number of teachers interviewed in all focus group sessions was 60. A smaller number of participants in this study occurred in two cases. In one case, I managed to interview only 3 participants, and in the other only 4. In the second case, interviewing a bigger number of teachers was impossible because 4 was the maximum number of teachers employed in that school. In the first case, the

teachers did not respond to my invitation. The table below presents the numbers of teachers interviewed in each school and the number of teachers employed in respective schools (teachers who completed the questionnaire).

Table 4.3: Number of English Teachers Interviewed in Focus Groups out of the Total Number of Teachers Employed

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G	School H	School I	School J
<b>Participants Interviewed</b>	4	6	8	7	5	8	7	7	3	5
<b>Participants Employed (questionnaire)</b>	4	9	15	7	5	8	7	7	15	8

#### 4.6.2.2. Science Teachers

The science teachers were sampled from 4 of the group of 10 schools where English teachers completed the questionnaire and where the focus groups with English teachers were conducted. This was determined by the fact that the number of schools to be visited had to be specified in the application for the Ministry of Education. I visited four schools (2 boys and 2 girls) where I asked to interview 6-12 randomly selected science teachers. I asked the principle in each school to arrange a meeting with science teachers in which I explained the purpose of the research and I invited them to participate in focus group interviews. The invitation to participate in this research was attached to the interview questions and the information sheet which can be found in Appendix 7. Table 4.4 presents the number of teachers that were interviewed in each school and the number of teachers employed in respective schools. Table 4.5 presents some background information about the teacher interviewees.

Table 4.4: Number of Science Teachers Interviewed in Focus Group Sessions out of the Total Number of Teachers Employed

	School A	School B	School C	School H
<b>Participants Interviewed</b>	2	6	6	8
<b>Participants Employed</b>	3	10	14	16

\* the codes used here are the same codes that were used in coding the schools for focus groups with English teachers

Table 4.5: Background Information about the Science Teachers Interviewed in Focus Group Interviews

	Nationality	Qualifications	Teaching Load (hours per week)	Subject	Teaching Experience (in years)		
<b>Bahraini</b>	50%	<b>Higher Diploma</b>	18%	<b>5-10 hours</b>	9%	<b>Chemistry</b> 32%	<b>0-5 years</b> 23%
<b>Egyptian</b>	36%	<b>BSc</b>	59%	<b>11-15 hours</b>	9%	<b>Biology</b> 27%	<b>6-10 years</b> 27%
		<b>MSc</b>	4%	<b>16-20 hours</b>	63%	<b>Physics</b> 18%	<b>11-15 years</b> 14%
		<b>PhD</b>	4%				<b>16-20 years</b> 14%
							<b>more than 20 years</b> 9%

\* percentages may not equal 100% because not all teachers provided answers to these items

### 4.6.2.3. Students

This group of students was selected by means of purposive sampling strategies that were applied to all Bahraini students in the first year of the medical university. The specific selection criteria applied here included the following common characteristics: (1) all students were FY university students and they all made the transition because they moved through the educational outcomes of the FY, (2) all students were Bahraini, (3) all students graduated from the Bahraini mainstream state education system (4) all studied sciences in Arabic<sup>5</sup> and (5) all students were

<sup>5</sup> Some Bahraini students graduate from private schools where they study sciences in English. These students were exempted from the group of students concerned in this study.

native speakers of Arabic. I invited all students personally during my classes, explaining the purpose of research and providing them with the information sheet (see Appendix 7).

This last characteristic played an important role in allocating students in groups for the focus groups interviews. All non-native English speakers at the university are divided into two groups in the FY and these are: (1) below IELTS 6.5 – a group that has to attend English classes (ELC) and (2) equal or above IELTS 6.5 – a group that is exempted from the language programme (Non-ELC).

At the time of recruiting students for the focus groups interviews, the number of Bahraini students in the Foundation Year was 60, 30 of them were enrolled in the ELC group, the other 30 were in the Non-ELC group. After applying the purposive sampling criteria, only students from government schools were selected, which reduced the number of ELC students to 27 and the number of Non-ELC students to 14. Out of 27 ELC students, 22 responded to an email of invitation to participate in the study and out of 14 Non-ELC students, 13 returned their invitation. Taking into consideration the typical group sizes described in literature which range between 6-12 participants (Stewart et al. 2007; Morgan, 1998a, cited in Bryman, 2008; Massey, 2011), it was decided that this response was sufficient not to invalidate the data. Therefore, the ELC and Non-ELC groups were divided into two groups, which resulted in four groups of students that were interviewed for the purposes of this study: 2 groups consisted of ELC students (n=10 and n=12) and two groups consisted of Non-ELC students (n=7 and n=6). Despite the large group sizes of the two groups, it was decided that management of the focus group sessions was not going to be a problem because I personally knew and taught the students,

which enabled me easy identification of participants in situations when, for example, some students were speaking simultaneously.

For the second round of student focus group interviews, I managed to recruit only 9 students from the groups that were originally interviewed. Two emails of invitation (please see Appendix 14) were sent to each student asking them to return for additional sessions, however, only 9 of them responded positively. As a result, all students were interviewed in one session. Out of these 9 students, 4 were ELC and 5 were Non-ELC.

All subjects in all groups should have learned English for at least 9 years as the compulsory English language education in Bahrain started in grade 4 and continued to grade 12 at the time when participants were enrolled in secondary education. In government schools all core subjects are taught in Arabic and students attend one English as a Foreign Language session five times a week for 50 minutes for the first two years and 3 times a week in the third year. All participants were fresh secondary graduates and were 18 years old.

Interviewing students separately as low language (ELC) and high language (Non-ELC) groups had an additional significance for this study. In Chapter 1, it was stated that the role of the English language in students' transition is one of the major categories inherent to this research. Therefore, it was believed that comparing the results from the ELC and Non-ELC groups was going to generate useful outcomes in terms of this role and its wider implications for exploring transitions in terms of language change.

### 4.6.3. Semi-structured Interviews – the whole population

All university lecturers that teach the students whose transition is concerned in this study were interviewed here (n=6). Five of the lecturers were interviewed on the RCSI campus in Bahrain but one of the staff members was sent the interview questions via email for this particular faculty delivers the course to students from the campus in Dublin. All participants were provided with the information sheet in Appendix 7. Additional information about the participant background is contained in the table below:

Table 4.6: Participant Information - Faculty at the Medical University

Faculty	Nationality	Degree	Teaching Experience (in years)	Gender	1 <sup>st</sup> Language
Faculty 1	Irish	PhD	28	Male	English
Faculty 2	Irish	MSc	10	Male	English
Faculty 3	Irish	PhD	50	Male	English
Faculty 4	Irish	PhD	8	Male	English
Faculty 5	Irish	PhD	11	Male	English
Faculty 6	Irish	PhD	30	Male	English

### 4.7. Research Methods

Because of its interpretive character, most case studies employ qualitative methods of data collection (Cohen et al, 2000). The data in this study was also mainly collected through qualitative methods, however, an additional quantitative questionnaire was used to collect data in relation to the English language. The additional questionnaire was used because early in the study I thought that English was going to be a much more important factor than the data from this research indicated. The use of the questionnaire was additionally reinforced by the recommendations from Mavor (2001) who, as explained in the literature review,

had a significant influence on the focus of this study. Mavor (2001) recommended that in order to explore the role of the English language in transition, investigations into patterns of English education prior to entering university are advisable. This could have been easily achieved in this study by the use of a descriptive questionnaire, which is why I included it as an additional tool for data collection regarding the English language.

And even though this research has suggested that English was not the most important factor, I still decided to keep the data in the study because they gave important background information about the patterns of teaching the English language in Bahrain, which links in well with the theoretical framework, and because they helped orient the focus group questioning. Shankland et al (2010), who are also cited in the literature review, suggest that when data from one instrument are used in another, mixing methods is desirable for questionnaires enable to elicit facts about a situation, which can later be explored in the interviews. Shankland et al (2010) used quantitative questionnaires to elicit information about the quality of adjustment to higher education of their participants, which was later used in the interviews about the satisfaction with student life at university. Here also, the questionnaire was used to elicit information about the quality of language education for higher education and subsequent interviews with English teachers allowed for elaboration on this quality and opened a discussion about its relationship with school pedagogies. So, for example, when the questionnaire results revealed that refining ideas was not emphasised in teaching writing, this was brought up again in the focus group interviews and questions were asked why this was the case. Since some of the interview design is based on the



questionnaire, I will present it first in the section below. I will then discuss focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and I will finish with the description of means of recording qualitative data.

#### **4.7.1. Questionnaire**

It has already been stated in the introduction chapter that the English ability of students considered in this case study is one of the categories inherent to this research for the lower entry criteria in terms of the English language as compared to the parent campus in Dublin were seen by the senior management as the major factor affecting the transition. It has subsequently been presented in the literature review that research conducted previously in relation to teaching and learning English in Bahrain suggests that the language education in government schools may not be suitable for students who wish to study at university (for example, Abdulmajeed, 1995) and the international literature suggests that if foreign language education in schools is not adequate for higher education, transition of students is negatively affected (for example: Nel et al, 2004). Therefore, I decided to give a considerable amount of attention to the language issues in this study to explore its importance for the transition in this study and to contribute to a wider knowledge on transitions in the context of language change.

Considering that the findings presented in the literature review (Shirawi, 1989; Al-Ahmed, 1988; Al-Ahmed, 1994 and Abdulmajeed, 1995) are over 20 years old and that I have been unable to find any more recent findings regarding the current state of language education in Bahrain, I decided to develop a descriptive questionnaire which enabled me to collect data on the latest patterns in teaching and assessing

English in Bahrain. This was very important for this study as the second research question posed here and the theoretical framework focus on the role of pedagogical structures in students' transition.

The use of the questionnaire gave me the opportunity to collect data from a large number of schools across the country and to collect standardised answers which could be generalised to a wider population (Denscombe, 1998). This generalizable data was later compared with what has been presented in the literature review regarding language skills and literacy in science in order to determine the suitability of language pedagogies in Bahrain for university learning. In other words, what the literature suggests should be taught was compared with what is taught in Bahrain and conclusions were drawn in the discussion section as to whether skills and cognitive levels that are currently emphasised in Bahraini schools help or prevent the students' transition to university.

Additionally, the information from the questionnaire was also used in the conversations with teachers who were asked to elaborate on the relationship between the questionnaire findings and school pedagogies. Finally, the findings were also compared with the requirements of the university lecturers and conclusions were drawn in the discussion section as to how appropriate secondary language programmes in Bahrain are for higher Western education. Such use of the questionnaire provided additional evidence for the second research question which focuses on the role of pedagogical structures in school and university in students' transition.

Hence, the questionnaire consisted of 2 main sections regarding writing and reading (see Appendix 8). Additionally, a section regarding the teachers' professional and demographic background was also added to the questionnaire. All the items included in the instrument were grounded in the literature review regarding academic language skills required to achieve the desired levels of literacy in science, as well as my own observations of the type of errors students in the Foundation Year make (please see sections on Reliability and Validity regarding the development and validity of the questionnaire). All items were translated into Arabic and statements in both languages were included in the questionnaire.

Section A focused on the information regarding the teachers' qualifications, teaching experience and load, nationality and other demographic factors such as age and gender (7 items). Sections B (15 items) and C (15 items) focused on assessing and teaching the writing skills respectively, with questions concerning following specific marking techniques and ways of giving feedback, as well as emphasizing the mechanics, cohesive devices and organizational elements when teaching the language. Similarly, sections D (14 items) and E (8 items) were linked to teaching and assessing reading in terms of different strategies, purposes and difficulty of reading tasks. The questionnaire was piloted, which is discussed in detail in the section on Validity and Reliability.

Before the distribution of the questionnaires, I held a meeting with a senior teacher in each school during which the purposes of the research and ethical issues were explained. My role as a researcher here was focused on explaining the purpose

and tools of this research to each senior teacher who were asked to assist me with the distribution of the questionnaires.

All questionnaires were given to the senior teacher of English in each school who was then responsible for distributing the questionnaires among his/her staff. The teachers were requested to return the questionnaires at least two days before the focus groups meeting with teachers in each school was to be arranged so that I could study the responses that were later used in the interviews. The senior teacher in each school was asked to arrange a focus group meeting with his/her members of staff within maximum 2 weeks from the date of the questionnaire distribution. The short period of time between the distribution of the questionnaires and the focus group meetings held in each school was also believed to ensure better focus groups outcomes because it was assumed that the participants would remember their responses better if the focus groups were held shortly after the distribution of questionnaires (Walliman and Buckler, 2008). The questionnaires were distributed in 10 schools (please see sampling in section 4.7.1) between April and May 2011. One school did not respond within two weeks and the focus group interview was held 4 weeks after the completion of the questionnaire.

#### **4.7.2. Interview Focus Groups**

A focus group method of collecting research data originated in the idea of interviewing people who were known to have shared a certain experience to explore their thoughts about that experience (Anderson, 1998). Consequently, the focus group has become a popular method for researchers examining the ways in which a certain combination of people interprets the general topics related to the

research by exchanging views and feelings about that topic. This has specific implications for the participants in this study because they belong to specific social groups and their shared views will be used for the interpretation of the students' transition to university. This also links in well with the notions of Communities of Practice which focus on shared values regarding certain practices (Wenger, 1998). Using focus groups interviews finally sits with the general methodology adopted in this research which stresses studying the points of view of all groups and as *groups* belonging to the research setting, rather than individual people (Denscombe, 1998). It finally enables explorations of experiences of people in specific communities, which is in line with the socio-cultural theory.

Subsequently, focus groups are invariably concerned with ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals (Creswell, 2007). The researchers engaging in focus groups are interested in how people respond to each other's views and shape their general understanding of different phenomena out of interaction that takes place within the group (Stewart et al, 2007). Following the socio-cultural theory, this is also the intention of this study which focuses on the group understanding of the students' transition, specifically in terms of students' and secondary teachers' views, and the impact of their communities on this transition. It is worth noting here that lecturers at RCSI will be interviewed separately because of the individual requirements in their content classes which set them apart from other groups, i.e. students and teachers whose learning or teaching requirements have been defined by the Ministry of Education in Bahrain through the centralised system of education.

Additionally, the use of focus groups in social research has been identified particularly suitable for the researchers who engage in exploring Arab cultures. Hofstede (1997) identified one social aspect of the Arab world pertinent to the use of focus groups in this study – that is, high collectivity which relates to the extent to which ‘people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (ibid, p. 51).

This view has a major significance for this study because it allows us to assume that group points of view gained through interviewing teachers and students are likely to be true representations of their understanding of transition. According to Thomas (2008), such assumptions in conducting focus group sessions can be made because trust between in-group members in Arab cultures is seen as central to conducting group investigations, which, in turn, allows for cultural values and beliefs of the researched to have some ‘breathing space’. This can also have its dangers for the group members can protect themselves and by not revealing details that could be harmful, say, for their employment (Stewart et al, 2007). This, however, will be addressed in this study by triangulating the results from all focus groups and other methods. Anonymity of responses is also believed to contribute to overcoming these dangers (Stewart et al, 2007), which will also be ensured here.

Taking into consideration Mavor’s (2001) influences on this research discussed earlier, two groups of secondary teachers were chosen to be invited for focus group sessions – that is, the science teachers and the English teachers. These teachers were invited to discuss the social and cultural influences embedded in

school pedagogies and to present their perspectives on how these influences might impact transition. Similarly, focus groups interviews were also used with Bahraini students who were asked to relate to the specific cultures of the schools and the medical university in order to explain their transition, linking in this way to the three influences emphasised by Mavor (2001). Below, I present the details of the focus group interviews with each group.

#### **4.7.2.1. Focus Groups with English Teachers**

A list of 21 questions (see Appendix 9) has been prepared in advance of the interviews. The initial set of questions referred to the teachers' responses regarding the items contained in the questionnaire they had previously filled in. These initial questions aimed at exploring things that determine the ways in which English is taught and assessed in Bahraini secondary schools, as indicated by the results of the questionnaire, and what role this may play in students' adjustment to higher education where English is the language of instruction.

However, the focus groups interviews did not focus exclusively on the questionnaire, allowing the teachers to talk freely about the context of schools in which teaching English takes place and to discuss whether being a member of a teaching community in Bahrain imposes specific pedagogies and structures on teachers. The choice of these interview items was based on the discussion in the literature review and was informed by the work of previously mentioned Mavor (2001) and Torenbeek et al (2011) who argue that studying previous school experience and the wider social and cultural context of pre-university education is essential for a better understanding of students' transition to university.

A range of questions that were asked during each interview included: (a) descriptive questions – for example: ‘Can you tell me about some of the most difficult problems when teaching English?’, (b) clarifying questions – for example: ‘How do you implement the curricular requirements and the new methods of teaching?’, (c) convergent questions – for example: ‘What do you know about the English language requirements at university level?’ and (d) opinion questions – for example: ‘What do you think should be done to respond to these requirements?’

This range of questions allowed for a broader and more detailed coverage of topics related to the research outcomes but, at the same time, it gave a certain amount of direction and structure to the discussion and kept it focused on the role of social and cultural influences on English language education in students’ transition. Morgan (1997) states that group members in natural settings know each other which might lead to an increased dynamicity of the discussion and yield results not related to the research outcomes. Therefore, I adopted a moderator’s role during these interviews to keep the discussions focused on specific issues but I was also trying to be reflexive and, being aware of my own views brought to this study, I was trying not to finish the discussions of specific issues too soon unless I identified all the codes and I was not finding any new information. Data saturation was achieved after the third interview, however, I decided to continue with the interviews because it was important to come back to all participants who completed the questionnaire to make sure that I did not decide too soon that no new data could be generated. Additionally, because some questions in the interview schedule were related to the questionnaire results, it was felt that not returning to all participants could create threats to validity and reliability (Creswell, 2003). Overall, only when no new



information could be generated, I interrupted the group members and asked them to move to the next issue. I was also being reflexive about the research process and was thinking about the possible influence of me as a lecturer at the medical university on participant responses. That is why I ensured all participants that my intention was to become involved with the participants and their context and that all knowledge in this research will be derived from the perspectives of the participants, rather than, for example, my own judgment of teachers' professionalism (Bryman, 2008).

I conducted all interviews in English and made sure that questions were written in simple language. Additionally, due to the fact that all English teachers were Arabic native speakers, I had the interviews protocol and question (please see Appendix 9) translated by two Bahraini English teachers, using the back translation method. Each interviewee was given a copy of the interview protocol with questions written in both languages. I arranged 60 min for the pilot interview. This time was found to be sufficient to discuss all 21 items in the interview schedule.

All focus group sessions were conducted between April and May 2011. On average, the sessions lasted between 40 - 60 minutes. I visited ten government schools in Bahrain and conducted one focus group session in each school. On my first visit to each school, I asked the senior teacher participating in the study to arrange a meeting for a focus group session in which up to 10 teachers in each school were invited to participate. Morgan (1998a, cited in Bryman, 2008) recommends that a typical group size should be between six to ten members. However, the same author also states that as long as the smaller or bigger size group is justifiable, for instance, because of some external circumstances, the

number of participants should not become a methodological issue. It needs to be noted here that the time of data collection was the time of political unrest in the country which affected the availability of some teachers for the interviews. The figure below presents the timeline of all interviews with English teachers.

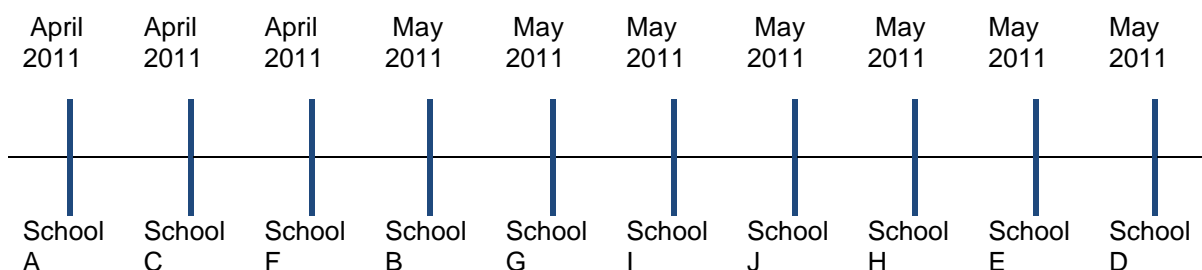


Figure 4.2: Focus Groups Interviews - Timeline

\* Schools were coded randomly – not in the order of visits to preserve anonymity

#### 4.7.2.2. Focus Groups with Science Teachers

The focus group questions used with the science teachers in secondary schools focused on preparing students for university in terms of scientific knowledge and skills, discussing benefits/ drawbacks of science education in Bahrain, explaining the latest approach to teaching science and assessing the quality of science education in Bahrain as compared to other countries in the Gulf and outside. The teachers were also requested to talk about their specific efforts in addressing students' university needs and how the social and cultural influences of Bahraini classrooms affect their work. This focus was adopted following Mavor's (2001) recommendations discussed earlier in relation to building a better understanding of transitions by exploring the cultures of learning and their influences embedded in pedagogies of specific communities.

The interview protocol (please see Appendix 10) contained 6 main questions, which were supported by several sub-questions in order to focus the conversations on the themes of the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3. The types of questions asked in each focus group session included: (1) descriptive questions – for example, ‘Can you talk about science programmes in Bahraini schools?’, (2) clarifying questions – for example, ‘What influences the way you teach science?’ and (3) convergent questions – for instance, ‘What do you know about students’ third level needs?’.

Similarly to the focus group sessions with the English teachers, asking questions related to the theoretical framework allowed to frame the discussion and to avoid responses not related to the social and cultural framework of Bahraini schools. As explained earlier, ‘side tracking’ is a common issue in focus groups which tends to occur in groups where participants know each other (Morgan, 1997). Therefore, I adopted a moderator’s role in which I ensured that the discussion remained focused and that the dynamicity of the discussion was controlled in a way that prevented several interviewees talking at the same time. By doing this, I was able to identify individual teachers when they were speaking and assign specific codes that helped in identifying the speakers during the transcription process. Like with the English teachers, I became reflexive about the research process and while acknowledging the impact of my own views regarding this research, I was trying not to let them influence the data collection process and again, not to finish the discussion unless all codes have been identified. To facilitate this, I designed questions that offered prospects of seeing the world from the interviewees’ point of

view, rather than my own perspectives. I also ensured the participants that the answers to these questions were not going to be used to judge their practice.

My other role was related to facilitating the outcomes by allowing the teachers to speak either in English or in Arabic. This was an important strategy because the English proficiency of some science teachers was very low and allowing them to speak in Arabic was believed to generate better results. In this way obstacles connected with expressing thought in English were overcome and better expression of ideas was encouraged (Bryman, 2008). Additionally, a teacher of English whose first language was Arabic was asked to participate in each focus group interviews who simultaneously translated anything that was said in Arabic. However, to avoid the criticism connected with the loss of information that sometimes occurs in simultaneous translation (ibid), the original interviews were transcribed in Arabic by a specially trained research assistant.

The interview focus groups with science teachers were conducted in September 2012. I visited 4 schools (for sampling procedures, please see section 4.7.2.2.) where I conducted interviews that on average lasted between 40-60 min. Unlike the focus group sessions with the English teachers, these interviews were not related to the questionnaire, therefore data collection was stopped as soon as saturation was achieved. Data were saturated after the third interview, however, I conducted the fourth session in order to increase the level of saturation.

#### **4.7.2.3. Focus Groups with Students**

To elicit exploratory data that represents the world view of the participants whose transition is being investigated in this study, all FY Bahraini students at the medical

university who graduated from mainstream secondary schools in the country were invited to take part in focus group sessions and all these students successfully passed their first year. These sessions aimed at engaging the learners in a discussion about their experience with learning at university, as well as how this experience compared to learning in school. A sense of students understanding and interpretation of two learning environments was hoped to be elicited by a set of discussion questions (see Appendix 11) that have been designed based on the theoretical framework in this study, as well as the concepts presented in the literature review. As mentioned earlier, this focus was adopted following Mavor (2011) who encourages comparisons between cultures of learning in order to understand transitions. This focus also matches the socio-cultural framework in that, by comparing the two cultures of learning, it aimed at eliciting which practices in the community of schools were transferable to university. Therefore, the understanding of students' transition was sought through discussions of three major areas inherent to this research – the English language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy, as well as their relation to students' cultural framework because their impact on shifts in students' identity and agency was the focus of the second research question.

When explaining the sampling of the students in this study, it was already mentioned that two rounds of focus group interviews were conducted with the students. The initial focus group items in the first round of interviews regarded the students' general feelings in terms of things they found easy and difficult when at university. The students were also asked to elaborate on how they felt about lower language abilities and their relation to the transition. They were asked to discuss

learning English in school and what significance this might have had for their university careers. The students were additionally asked to discuss the specific requirements in the university's content classes and how they compared to the requirements at secondary level. Finally, views on the use of specific learning strategies were exchanged in order to establish their importance for success in the medical school (see Appendix 11).

The second round of interviews concentrated more on the personal change in identity and agency that took place after the first year of university (please see Appendix 12). The questions that were asked here were related to personal changes at the cultural level that the students had to undergo in order to make a transition to a Western university. They were also focused on the role of the Bahraini culture in preparing students for university and in shaping students' view on education and things in general.

Both rounds of interviews focused on a wide range of questions. These were (a) descriptive questions – for example: 'How do you feel about studying at the university now? How is it different from school? What's hard? What's easy?', (b) clarifying questions – for example: 'What was learning English like in school? Can you compare it to what is needed now at university?' and (c) opinion questions – for example: 'When you think about the academic skills you need now to be a successful student, what are the most important?'

I conducted the first round of focus groups in June 2011 when students completed their first year of university. The interview items were discussed in four separate meetings. The second round of focus groups was conducted in September 2012,

after the initial period of data analysis when it was decided that more data had to be collected in relation to change in identity connected with a transfer to the Western mode of learning. These concerned collecting more information about the role of students' cultural framework on their transition, which was not explicitly discussed in the first round of the focus groups. Due to a small number of respondents that took part in the second round, only one focus group meeting was held in September 2012. The sessions in both rounds of interviews lasted on average between 40 - 60 minutes. Due to language considerations, all questions were back-translated into Arabic and the students were given the choice to speak in English or Arabic. I also adopted a facilitator's role and offered assistance to those students who faced difficulties in understanding or answering questions in English. For example, whenever students' responses were unclear, I rephrased what they said in my own words and then asked them to confirm by saying, for example, 'Is this what you meant?'

#### **4.7.3. Semi-Structured Interviews**

The most important feature of semi-structured interviews that has a major significance for this study is the fact that the open-ended nature of questions offers a researcher the opportunity to investigate the depth of specific experiences (Burton et al, 2008). Unlike structured interviewing, which forces the respondents to fit their responses into pre-specified categories, semi-structured interviews assume that only when the setting of the interview is less controlled and the interviewees feel relaxed and secure, they are able to reveal their genuine perspectives on what the interviewer is trying to investigate (Wengraf, 2001).

A similar point of view has been presented by Balduf (2009) in this literature review who justified her use of semi-structured interviews to explore the transition of her own students by stating that more structured methods of data collection do not allow for explorations of true motifs and feelings which are important in studies on students' transition. This point of view also informs the choice of semi-structured interviews for this study as true representations of contexts 'as they stand' are important conditions matching the methodological approach of case studies and the interpretive paradigm. Exploring contexts 'as they stand' was also important considering Mavor's (2001) influences on this study in relation to gaining insights into realities of university environments that could be true representations of their pedagogical structures.

In semi-structured interviews, the interviewers begin by identifying a number of key questions focusing on the theme of their study that act as prompts (Butterfield et al, 2009). Dependent upon the response that they receive, they will then either ask further questions to pursuit fruitful lines of enquiry in detail on move on to the next key question (Burton et al. 2008, Robson, 2002, Creswell, 2007). This allows for unexpected discoveries to take place that might raise some important themes which could play a key role in shaping further enquiry.

Following a similar approach, the interviews used in this study were informed by the issues presented in the literature review and the theoretical framework. These regarded the three main themes of language, background knowledge and academic skills, as well as the lecturers' understanding of the students' cultural framework. I wished to focus on these aspects of students transition, that is why these themes were used as hints for eliciting participant responses in terms of their



importance for students' adaptation to a Western university. If the participant responses were felt to be going in a desired direction, additional questions were asked to gain more details about any of the themes, if , however, it was felt that the conversation was deviating from these themes, subsequent questions were asked to put the conversation back on track. This feature of semi-structured interviews determined their choice for this study and proved its superiority over unstructured interviews where less control over the direction of conversation is maintained (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, my role during these interviews was to keep the conversations focused.

Finally, providing a focus to the interview is considered to be a big advantage of semi-structure interviews as it helps to eliminate bias (Walliman and Buckler, 2008). By selecting specific questions, researchers prevent generating useless data which might be considered as one of the limitations of the unstructured approaches to interviewing (Rugg and Petre, 2007). This involves preparing an interview schedule in advance of the research that can capture all the information that is relevant for the research outcomes. The details of the interview schedule used in this study (Appendix 13), as well as the procedures carried out during the interviews are presented next.

The interviews in this study were conducted with the faculty members at RCSI Bahrain and were intended to gather information on their perspectives on students' transition to the Western medical university and to gain their views on their understanding of this transition for Bahraini students. It was felt that individual interviews were more suitable than group meetings for, unlike the English teachers in secondary schools, each faculty at RCSI sets their own standards and marking

criteria. For the same reason, it was also felt that structured interviewing would not yield desirable results for the number of categories for each question could be indefinite.

Hence, questions raised in the interviews aimed at exploring the perspectives of science lecturers at the medical university on the transition of Bahraini students. The faculty were asked to discuss their expectations and importance of good English language skills for the core subjects delivered in the foundation year, the specific demands of the tasks in those subjects and how they are reflected in the assessment methods and task types. The final questions also asked about the faculty's responsibilities in guiding students in their studies and how those responsibilities should be split between themselves and the language lecturers at RCSI Bahrain.

Different types of questions that were asked in the interview included: (a) opinion questions – for example, 'What in your view are the biggest problems with learning FY students face?', (b) questions about expectations – for example, 'In terms of reading and writing, what type of tasks are required in your content classes?', and (c) clarifying questions – for example, 'Are those skills verified in formal assessment?' These were complemented by a series of follow up questions, for instance, about how faculty at RCSI understand the culture of learning of Bahraini students and what consequences learners' cultural framework might have for their learning at university. Using the range of broad questions and follow-up questions allowed for relevant contextual factors to be revealed, showing the significance of specific pedagogical structures at RCSI and Bahraini schools for students' transition.

I conducted six interviews (one with each faculty) in the first period of data collection which was between September 2010 and June 2011. All were conducted in English for this is the mother tongue of all lecturers interviewed here.

#### **4.7.4. Data Recording and Field Notes**

All focus group interviews as well as the semi-structured interviews with the faculty at university were recorded using the iKey-Audio HDR7 portable field recorder. Audio recordings, as opposed to video recordings, were used during each meeting in consideration of cultural sensitivity to video recordings, specifically in relation to female teachers and student participants. All recordings were transcribed in full and samples of transcripts from each of the three groups of participants with indications of relevant codes can be viewed in Appendices 1,2,3 and 4.

Field notes were also taken as the participants were speaking to be cross-checked with the recording during the transcription process and to note any non-verbal behaviour that would normally be revealed in video recordings (Burton et al, 2008). Sample field notes can be found in Appendix 5.

During all focus group interviews, the participant teachers and students were seated around the table to give more reserved members of the group a sense of security and equality, as well as provide maximum opportunities for eye contact (Stewart et al, 2007). The interviews took place in specifically arranged rooms, either in schools or at the medical university. These arrangements allowed for easy moderation and control of the whole interview process where contextual factors of the interview venue were considered unimportant (Cohen et al, 2000).

#### **4.7.5. Triangulation**

Interpretive case studies, like the one adopted in this research, require the researcher to be directly involved in the process of data collection and analysis (Cresswell, 2007). Consequently, the researcher also becomes a participant in the research process who becomes informed about the phenomenon from the subjective point of view of other participants (ibid). I am aware that this subjectivity raises a lot of criticism because researchers need to convince others of the legitimacy of their findings and conceptual implications that arise from them (Andrade, 2009), however, measures of addressing this exist and they have also been taken in this study.

Andrade (2009) who also used an interpretive case study design in his own research on the use of information and communication systems in rural areas in Peru gives an example of a scenario which illustrates how problems with legitimacy of the findings can be overcome in interpretive case studies. Andrade (2009) recalls a situation in which a huge wave is approaching a shore and how different people on that shore interpret this phenomenon. For example, there is a surfer on top of the wave who is excited about its height but there are also two little children in a boat right below the wave who are very scared. There is also a relaxed monk mediating on the beach. Andrade (2009) points out that in order to fully understand what this wave means for beach goers, interviewing only the surfer would be misleading because his personal interpretations of the wave may not match the interpretations of the children or the monk. Therefore, if the interpretive researcher wants to overcome problems with legitimacy and develop greater confidence in the

findings, he or she should include the perspectives of all people who were at the beach at that time.

What Andrade (2009) proposes is linked to the process of triangulation which, when interpreted from the positivist stance, usually means finding the truth (Denscombe, 1998). In interpretive research, however, triangulation is used 'to create an integral and persuasive piece of research around [the] phenomenon' (*ibid*,p.45) to develop greater confidence in the findings through using multiple sources of evidence. This ensures corroboration of multiple interpretations which, in turn, strengthens the interpretive researcher's argument with additional evidence (*ibid*). Andrade (2009) recommends the use of this type of triangulation in interpretive case studies 'for maintaining the chain of evidence which is essential in achieving a persuasive account of theory building studies' (p.48), including this one.

The design and the multiplicity of participants described above suggest the use of multiple sources of data in this study. This allows for viewing things from more than one perspective, gaining a better understanding of an issue at hand but also for building greater confidence in the findings and achieving 'theoretical sufficiency' (Day, 1999, p. 117, cited in Andrade, 2009). This principle was used in the study by previously mentioned Andrade (2009) who used perspectives of and interviewed many different groups of participants in order to see if alternative reasons for the occurrence of a phenomenon could be found, adding rigour to the research process.

Similarly to Andrade (2009), the data gained from different groups of participants and from different methods in this study will be compared and contrasted in order to

see if alternative perspectives on students' transition exist between teachers, students themselves and the lecturers at the university and if new data can be obtained from each of the participant groups. This will ensure theoretical sufficiency and will capture the views of all those who are involved, leading in this way to the greater validity and reliability of the findings. Hence, the research design that has been discussed in this section and whose summary is presented in Figure 4.1. on the following page.

## **4.8. Data Analysis**

This section of the methodology chapter presents the ways of data analysis applied in this study and explains how these informed the interpretation of data in the discussion chapter. I first outline the qualitative analysis and then move on to discussing the analysis of quantitative findings.

### **4.8.1. Qualitative Data Analysis**

The interpretive stance adopted in this study assumes that all human actors have perspectives on and interpretations of their own actions and behaviour (Lemke, 1998). This position, therefore, requires the researchers to learn about these perspectives and interpretations in order to form knowledge in the research process (ibid). That is why the 'Definition of Situation' (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003) approach to data analysis was adopted here with the qualitative data because this approach directs the researchers' attention to concepts that reflect actors' own concerns, beliefs and interpretations of various phenomena and requires them to incorporate those interpretations and perspectives into their own. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define it in the following way:

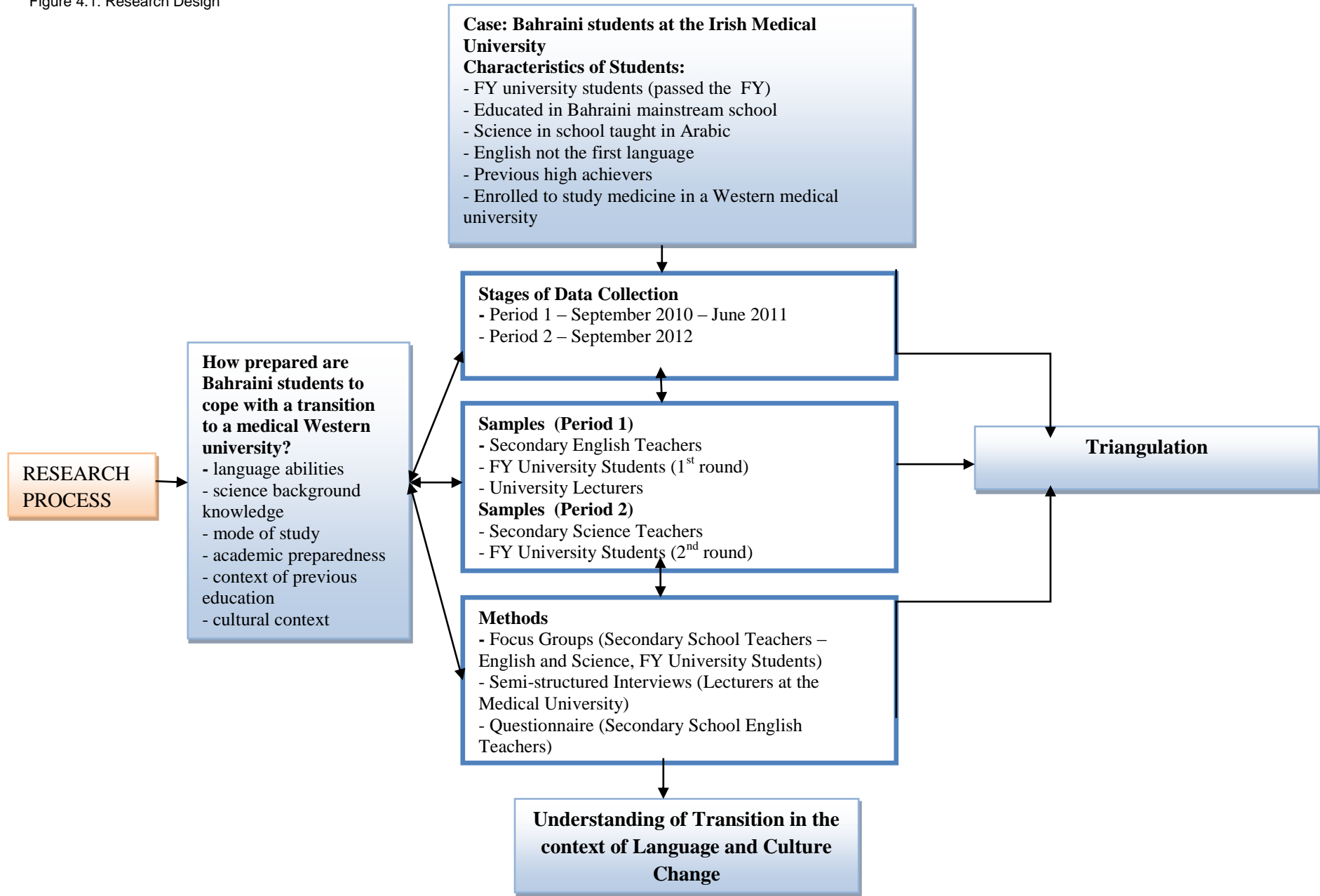
Under this type of code your aim is to place units of data that tell you how the subjects define the setting or particular topics. You are interested in their world view and how they see themselves in relation to the setting or your topic. What do they hope to accomplish? How do they define what they do? What is important to them? Do they have a particular orientation that affects how they define participation (religious, political, social class, feminist, right-to-live)? You may be looking at various participants: students, pupils and administrators, as well as parents. You might have a coding category for each type of participant.

(Bogdan and Biklen, 2003,p.162)

#### **4.8.1.1. Coding Scheme**

Apart from highlighting that it is important for researchers to uncover how different social and cultural factors affect what people do, which is very important for this study due to the socio-cultural framework of Communities of Practice, Bogdan and Biklen's (2003) emphasis on having clearly defined coding categories for each type of participants was crucial for the approach to data analysis in this research. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) argue that these categories should be based on the essential issues investigated in the study and they should be related to specific questions posed during the interviews (ibid).

Figure 4.1: Research Design





Additionally, the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice was also taken into consideration while developing the codes (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991) and these were mainly related to the third theme of school pedagogy and included codes related to practices of communities of schools and universities and the social and cultural influences on them.

Therefore, using these codes, the transcribed data was analysed deductively, summary of which with specific examples can be found in the table below.

Table 4.7: Coding Frames and Examples for the Themes of Science Background Knowledge, the English Language and School Pedagogy

Theme/Code	Explanation/ Example
<p><b>Theme:</b>  <b>1. Background Knowledge</b>      <b>Science</b></p> <p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard of science education (01B)</li> <li>• Practices and approaches to teaching science (02B)</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. The codes under the theme of science background knowledge refer to the role of science base , approaches to study science and skills in science in transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples: good for university, high level of science in school, old science curriculum very detailed , high level of science helped overcome language difficulties</li> <li>• Examples: focus on theory, learning science based on memorisation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme:</b>  <b>2. The Language</b>      <b>English</b></p> <p><b>Codes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language skills (01E)</li> <li>• Practices and approaches to teaching English (02E)</li> <li>• Professional Language (03E)</li> <li>• General proficiency in English (04E)</li> <li>• Broader context of schools (05E)</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. This deductive theme refers to statements which concern the role of the English language in students' transition.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples: focus on specific skills, importance of writing, importance of grammar</li> <li>• Examples: communicative approach, memorisation of model answers, system of awarding marks</li> <li>• Examples: importance of medical terminology, impact of medical terminology on understanding of science</li> <li>• Examples: Importance of language proficiency, good language users do not perform better</li> <li>• Examples: focus on the final exam, object of teaching, emphasis on theory</li> </ul>
<b>Theme:</b>	

### 3. School Pedagogy

3. Under this deductive theme, statements that referred to the role of broader school practices, focus of teaching and culture of schools in students' transition were grouped.

Codes:

- General school pedagogy/ practices (01S)
  - Goal of education (02S)
  - Examples: teaching not based on critical thinking, teaching based on memorisation, spoon-feeding
  - Focus on the final exam, achieving high marks, prepare for final exam
- 

It can be noticed in the table that the codes in the left hand column have acronyms such as 01B or 03E. These have been developed to code the transcripts more conveniently, instead of repeating the description of codes each time they occur in the text. So, for example, 01B stands for *standard of science education* and *B* indicates that this code belongs to the theme of background knowledge. Similarly, 03 stands for *professional language* and *E* stands for English.

After applying the deductive coding to all participant groups, further analysis of data involved inductively coding any new material under each deductive theme which was not included in the original deductive theme. For example, while analysing the transcripts a crucial issue of translating the lecture content from English into Arabic arose but which was not discussed in any of the literature I reviewed. Finally, all deductive and inductive codes were grouped together to develop conceptual categories that were used to help organise the findings in Chapter 5 and data interpretation in Chapter 6.

Balduf (2009) who is cited in the literature review used a similar approach to data analysis in a study on the transition of students at one American university. Balduf (2009) used three deductive themes of previous achievement, cause of underachievement and interventions to code all transcripts from her interviews.

Balduf (2009) also identified specifics under each of her themes by applying inductive coding to any segments of new data that could be grouped under each of the three themes. For example, new statements related to the theme of previous achievement that were identified inductively included 'previous levels of challenge experienced' and 'prior motivational factors' (p.283).

#### **4.8.1.2. Comparing Data from All Participant Groups**

Bryman (2008) recommends transcribing interviews in full for this allows the researcher to devise a framework or a matrix for analysis through direct interaction with textual data. This also enables finding links between categories derived from all participant groups, which also enables a more holistic analysis of the case. To analyse the data holistically across all three deductive themes and across all participant groups was an important aspect of this study, taking into consideration its case study design (Denscombe, 1998).

Finally, using verbatim data was seen as essential here for in case study approaches the emphasis falls on presenting the case as it stands naturally in its social setting (Denscombe, 1998). It was also felt that this approach would provide good foundations and evidence for deriving claims about the students' transition process (Bryman, 2008). That is why verbatim comments of many participants will be presented in the findings chapter.

To develop a matrix for the holistic analysis of data in this study, Ritchie et al's (2003, cited in Bryman, 2008) framework approach was used for ordering and synthesising data. This framework is a tool that allows researchers to construct an index of raw data consisting of codes, categories and main themes which are then

represented in a matrix which is later used for holistic analysis. These codes, categories and themes are the product of constant rereading of the transcripts and constitute recurring motifs in the text. Using this tool, the researcher creates a table which displays the core categories under which each column of the table represents a code where relevant verbatim comments are pasted into each cell. I have placed an example of a matrix created during my own data analysis in Appendix 6.

After coding and comparing data within each interview group, I then compared the categories across all participant groups in relation to the deductive themes that built the map for analysis presented in the discussion chapter. This entailed integrating categories under the deductive themes that reflected the voices of all participant groups. And while the voices of individual participant groups were presented in the findings chapter to answer the research questions, they were drawn together in the discussion chapter to demonstrate how the findings from this research compare to the literature on transitions and whether they offer a new understanding of transitions in the context of language and cultural change. Most importantly, all participant perspectives were also drawn together in the discussion chapter to argue if the model of Communities of Practice is a useful framework for understanding transitions.

#### **4.8.2. Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data analysis was based on the results from a descriptive questionnaire that used ordinal data to describe the current trends in teaching and assessing of the English language in Bahrain. These data were used for

interpretation of how these trends can assist or prevent the students' transition to a Western university.

Quantitative measures of central tendency were used in this data analysis by calculating the mean responses to each category for all schools included in the sample. The mean analysis enabled comparing data from all schools and looking for common directions in patterns, which in turn allowed for conclusions related to general pedagogies of language teaching in Bahrain, which were later interpreted in light of the requirements stated by the faculty at the medical university. Univariate analyses were conducted for each item in the questionnaire and tables with mean responses to each item in a specific category were produced. Responses were converted into percentages and four separate tables were created presenting average responses related to (1) teaching writing, (2) assessing writing, (3) teaching reading, (4) assessing reading.

Data analysed in this way offered examples of what language skills are taught in Bahraini schools as well as what level of language use is required from students at secondary level. These findings were used for the interpretation of language pedagogies in Bahrain in terms of their suitability for university, based on the comparisons made with the requirements of language use voiced by the university staff and the requirements described in literature regarding achieving literacy in science in a foreign language (please see section 3.4.3 in the literature review). Relevant conclusions will be presented in the discussion section in the next chapter.

#### **4.9. Validity and Reliability**

As mentioned earlier in the section on triangulation (section 4.6.5), the constructs of validity and external reliability that define positivistic studies are often inappropriate in interpretive research for the critics of the interpretive stance argue that the theoretical generalisations this approach to research makes lack precision, rigour and objectivity (for example: Yin, 2003). On the other hand, proponents of interpretive research argue that the validity and reliability are inappropriate because interpretive researchers do not aim at producing generalizable data but rather focus on in-depth exploration of one instance (Creswell, 2007).

Given their uniqueness, clear cut boundaries and the small size of participant groups, case studies have also been criticised for the lack of external validity and reliability of the findings because critics of this approach do not believe that findings from such research can be generalised to wider populations (for example: Bryman, 2008, Creswell, 2007). Interpretive researchers, on the other hand, argue that any criticism regarding the lack of representativeness and bias in interpretive case studies should be rejected because the concepts of validity and reliability are not abandoned either by the boundaries of the case or the stance itself (Andrade, 2009).

Construct validity, for instance, which in positivist view refers to making legitimate inferences from the empirical data, is addressed in interpretive research by using multiple sources of data that can triangulate the results and strengthen the argument (Andrade, 2009). This, as explained in the section on triangulation, provides a chain of evidence which can be translated to operationalised sets of

measures in positivist research (ibid). Triangulation in interpretive research also helps to achieve internal validity because building explanations of the phenomenon, through looking for similarities and differences in responses, corresponds with pattern matching and theory testing in positivist research (ibid).

Additionally, external validity, which refers to the extent that the findings from a particular case can be generalised, is also addressed in interpretive case studies by carefully identifying those features of samples that can be extended to any member of the population to which that sample belongs (Hammersley, 2007). Case study researchers often say that they do not expect others to replicate the results but rather use their specific segments for further research that may in turn replicate the results from that one aspect of the study (Hammersley, 2007). This last point links in to reliability of research, which in positivist research means ensuring repeatability and consistency of measures so that the second researcher can arrive at the same conclusions as the previous one, but which in interpretive case studies is achieved by using chunks of the same data and the same sample for further research (ibid). By doing this, the researcher can develop new research using the chain of evidence from the previous study, producing in this way meaningful results that can be trusted (Hammersley, 2007).

An important aspect of interpretive research is that of reflexivity. Researchers need to be aware of their own relationships with participants or involvement in the context being studied and how this might affect the 'truthfulness' of responses, perceptions and knowledge presented in the study (Bryman, 2008). I am aware that it is possible that in this research some of the responses might have been influenced by my position as a lecturer at the medical university, for example, when

I interviewed the students who might have thought that I was looking for specific answers in relation to science or the English language. At the same time, it also needs to be noted that interpretive researchers argue that there is no one version of reality and therefore the impact of such relationships on reliability is not relevant (Bryman, 2008). Reliable results can, however, be achieved when a researcher has developed a firm coding frame that could be used by another researcher to compare if he/she will generate similar patterns of codes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Such coding frame was developed in this research and was discussed in the previous section (Table 4.7).

The characteristics of all samples selected in this research are typical or representative of a specific community, which in turn, allows us to conclude that whatever will be discovered through the process of this research can be used to discuss the transition of any other group of mainstream Bahraini students to a Western-style university. However, to build the chain of evidence so important for the quality of interpretive research, certain procedures should be put in place. These and their applications in this thesis are discussed below.

#### **4.9.1. Credibility, Dependability and Transferability**

Respondent validation strategies were used in this research for they contribute to a greater credibility of the results (Creswell, 2007). These strategies involve returning the findings to the participants for review in order to determine the level of agreement between the researcher's interpretation and the interpretation of the researched (Lewis, 2009). In case of disagreements, the researcher is obliged to publish the respondent's comments alongside the researcher's report (ibid).



In this research, students, lecturers at the university and teachers in secondary schools received draft reports and were asked to judge the accuracy of my accounts. Both, the university staff and the students confirmed the data, therefore no changes were made to the original drafts. The English and science teachers did not return their comments.

The respondent validation strategy was particularly important in case of science teachers where returning the interview transcripts in Arabic and English was believed to confirm the credibility of the translation. These transcripts also contained follow up questions asking for the confirmation of the reports and for clarifications, which additionally increased the validity and credibility of the findings. In this way, the difficulties connected with the loss of information when translating between the two languages were overcome for the teachers were given opportunities to comment on any verbatim data. However, no comments have been returned.

The second strategy contributing to a better quality of this research involved 'recruiting' an external auditor who was asked to assess the external dependability and transferability of the results. By engaging in an external and objective review, the auditor inquires about the research questions, methods, ways of data analysis and interpretations of the findings in order to ensure that the research is honest and not biased (Creswell, 2007). One auditor was chosen by myself who was my work colleague with experience in research and working in government schools in Bahrain. The other set of auditors was delegated by the Ministry of Education where I had to undergo the same process in order to obtain an ethical permission to conduct my research in schools.

Additionally, as a parallel activity to undergoing external audits, complete records such as audio recordings, interview transcripts and the actual questionnaires returned by the participants were kept for verification. Denscombe (1998) points out that keeping such records contributes to the credibility of research as ‘they are grounded in fieldwork and empirical data’ (p.299). Furthermore, thick descriptions (Brekhus et al, 2005) – that is rich accounts of all details concerning this research have been prepared and have been presented in this chapter. These can also be used by the reviewers to judge the quality of this research.

#### **4.9.2. Validity and Reliability of Questionnaire**

Due to the quantitative character of the questionnaire, separate validation procedures were employed here. Some of them were used in the development of the questionnaire, the others were employed when the questionnaire was being piloted.

The development of the questionnaire was guided by several efforts. These included (a) a review of recent literature on the language skills needed for the university (see for example Malcolm, 2009; Gunel et al, 2007), (b) insights gained from similar existing surveys (see for example Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002; Baker and Boonkit, 2004) and (c) the use of expert judgement with respect to categorisation and rephrasing of items in the questionnaire.

Increasing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire can be achieved through the process of operationalising a questionnaire – that is, making sure that it measures what it is supposed to measure (Cohen et al, 2000). Operationalisation is often linked to reviewing the existing work because it can assist the researcher in

choosing the relevant concepts and in itemising them into subsidiary topics that relate to the central purpose of the questionnaire. Looking at similar surveys also gives the researcher an idea of the kinds of data required to give relevant answers (ibid).

After reviewing the literature, I developed a pool of 82 closed items and 10 open ended questions. These items were reviewed by a group of two expert judges (professional research colleagues) who were knowledgeable about questionnaire design and experienced in teaching at RCSI. They were instructed to review the initial pool of items for ambiguity and redundancy. Several items were considered ambiguous, several were repeated and finally, the open ended items were seen as unnecessary because they could be asked in the follow-up interviews. As a result, a questionnaire of 62 closed items was developed, which was later subjected to pilot testing.

The pilot test was conducted in the school I visited first and involved collecting responses from 15 teachers who were employed in that school. Apart from completing the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to mark any items or instructions that were unclear. No such indications were made by the teachers and the results were subsequently included in the final analysis. Additionally, all the items, instructions and ethical statement included in the questionnaire had been translated into Arabic using a back-translation method to avoid misinterpretations of questions connected with working between L1 and L2. My role as a researcher was fulfilled in making sure that instructions and questionnaire items were clear and that the participants understood the purpose of marking any unclear items.

Finally, the results from the pilot study were subjected to statistical testing to examine the internal reliability of the questionnaire items. The half-split test (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) was used in the reliability testing and the results suggested high inter-item consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). Standard deviation was also calculated for each category in the questionnaire to assess the impact of the 'outliers' on the research outcomes. The results suggested no such impact because the standard deviation ranged between 0.62 – 1.27, which could be related to a relatively big size of the questionnaire sample ( $n=85$ ) (Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.10. Ethical Considerations**

This study received ethical approval from the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education (Appendix 15). Additionally, an approval from the Research Centre in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain had to be obtained to access schools and teachers in secondary schools (Appendix 16).

Due to the personal contact with participants, apart from the situations in which questionnaires were distributed, which was required by the use of the interviews and focus group sessions, informed consent (Appendix 17) and participant information sheets were issued to all participants involved in the study. Considering that all participants were of a legal age, no written consent was obtained from the parents of the students.

The participants were not forced to take part in the research process and it was made clear to all respondents that their participation in the interviews and the questionnaire was voluntary. Equally, all participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the research process at any time of the research and that

this decision would have no negative consequences for them. No participant exercised this right.

Confidentiality of data was an important aspect of the ethical procedures involved in this study for the nature of the interview questions might have required the participants to reveal some sensitive data about their institutions. The participants were however informed that they had the right not to answer questions that they felt could shed a negative light on their institutions or that could make them feel uncomfortable. One female participant did not want to speak during the focus group sessions in schools and when asked about the reasons, she responded she just wanted to listen to what others were saying.

I ensured the participants that their responses would be treated in strictest confidence and that no traceable data regarding the participants would be published in the final report. I had to inform the participants that I was required to submit the final report to the Ministry of Education, however, I ensured them that data would be published in an anonymised form and that their characteristics could not be traced. Even the background data that was collected in the first section of the questionnaire or the description of participants provided earlier in this chapter was presented in a way that was untraceable to the third party.

Despite the fact that I had to state the number of schools visited during the process of research when applying for the permission from the Ministry of Education, their locations and names were not revealed. I made it clear to the participants that I had to report the general findings to the institutions that were involved, provided that the anonymity of participants was preserved and that no feedback on

individual participants was given. I was clear with the participants about the purpose of this research and stated it from the outset that its aim was to find out about the school and university pedagogies and their relation to students' transition and not about improving school practices in Bahraini schools or the medical university. These statements of confidentiality were inserted on the first pages of the questionnaires, interview schedules and consent forms. They were also translated into Arabic.

It was also made clear to the participants that I intended to record their responses in order to prepare transcripts of the conversations that would later be used for data analysis. Prior to each meeting, I asked the participants for their permission to record their responses and all participants agreed. I also explained that I would be taking field notes in relation to their general behaviour during the interview and that these would also be used in the final report. I ensured that no third party, apart from me would have access to the recordings and would listen to them and that I would personally transcribe all interview data (apart from the interviews conducted in Arabic). All participants agreed. All recordings will be destroyed on completion of this research and all transcripts were anonymised using specific coding schemes explained in the next chapter.

Finally, specific ethical considerations were made when interviewing student participants. The concern was about labelling students who might have been seen as struggling with the transition to university. While this label might have been seen as discriminating, I decided not to tell the participants that they have been identified as having more difficulty in adapting to university study but rather that I was interested in exploring the experiences of all Bahraini students in their first year of

university study. I explained to the participants that it was important to interview all students, and where necessary, make comparisons between weaker and stronger language students but without labelling these in the language group as less likely to succeed. Codes for students and staff at the medical university were developed in this research and no data that would reveal any information that could threaten the anonymity of staff or students was made available to any third party.

#### **4.11. Conclusions**

Broader paradigmatic assumptions of interpretivism have been used in guiding the research process in this study. Additionally, a case study approach has been identified as the most suitable methodology that allowed me to explore the experiences of students, teachers and university lecturers with the first year university transition of Bahraini students. This specific case of Bahraini students at the Irish medical university allowed me to explore issues of transition in the context of language and culture change and their example can be used to increase our understanding of transition in such contexts.

The specific design of the study and the triangulation strategies applied here were the strength of the research design which contributed to achieving a better understanding of how Bahraini students are coping with their transition to the medical university. The case study approach also allowed me to conduct a very focused study of a small group of people and to provide thick descriptions of people's perspectives on this transition. Due to the fact that four distinct but related groups of people were involved in this study, this research resulted in the generation of data that contextualises the transition of Bahraini students in a

broader context of every secondary to third level research setting where similar groups of participants are usually involved. Finally, by conducting research in real secondary settings in schools, I was able to present important insights into the realities of classrooms in specific cultural contexts and how this, or any other classroom settings, might be used in trying to explain the transition process where two learning cultures meet. All this has been achieved by the use of interviews, focus group sessions and one questionnaire which had a specific purpose of igniting the discussion about the language education in Bahrain. The general aim of the use of these methods was in keeping with the main paradigmatic assumptions of interpretive research which, in turn, allowed me to address the research questions successfully. The next sections present specific findings of this research project.



## **Chapter 5 – Findings**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The definition of transition adopted in this study describes it as change in identity and agency in order to move through the desired learning outcomes of the medical university to meet the normative expectations embedded in them and to become a member of a new community (Ecclestone, 2009). The socio-cultural theory that is central to this research further indicates that this change arises from the interaction within the context (Vygotsky, 1987) and Crafter and Maunder (2012) interpret it as born out of uncertainty in the new social and cultural worlds of an individual because students beginning higher education do not understand the ‘knowing how’ of the university. And not understanding the ‘knowing how’ is related to not knowing that practices that guaranteed success in old communities, which in this study is the school, may not guarantee success in a new community – that is, the medical university (*ibid*).

These two definitions underpinning this research suggest that the transition in this study depends on the specific structures and pedagogies governing the teaching and learning at the medical university which might not match the cultural and educational framework of students in Bahrain. And while a lot of studies cited in Chapter 3 imply this, they do not explore this (for example: Bhattahatyya, 2010; Sheridan, 2010, Olesova et al, 2011). This study, on the other hand, by collecting qualitative data elicits perspectives of FY university students, secondary teachers and university lecturers as to how the cultural framework of Bahraini students and school pedagogies in Bahrain fit with the structures and pedagogies at the medical

university. This focus allows exploration of which factors related to students' cultural framework of schools may play a role in their transition, pointing out to the possible changes in identity the students in this study have had to make to find themselves where they are now – that is, at the end of their FY at university and to move through the educational outcomes of the FY.

I explained in Chapter 1 that the relationship between three areas of academic preparedness – that is, the science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy are critical to exploring transition in this research. That is why I have invited science and English teachers to talk about how schools prepare students for university in terms of their subject areas and broader academic resourcefulness. I placed these teachers in the first position in my story line because the type of education they deliver and how they do it impacts the students' agency and identity on entering university. I also invited students themselves and placed them in the second position in the storyline to explore if their perspectives on their experiences with transition are similar to what their teachers predicted them to be and whether the pedagogical and cultural structures of the university, as well as issues related to background knowledge and language proficiency were viewed by the students as requiring many changes in identity. Finally, I located university lecturers at the end of my storyline for they were able to contribute to the understanding of the transition studied here from the perspective of the medical university. By doing so, I was also able to compare if what they said of this transition was similar or different to the issues raised by the teachers and the students.

The findings presented in this chapter are therefore organised according to data obtained from these three groups; starting from science and English teachers, through to the students, and finally reaching the lecturers because the research questions focus on the perspectives on transition of each of these groups. The chapter is divided into two parts – the first one presents data obtained in the school context, the second focuses on the university setting. The first section under Part 1 contains findings from the focus group interviews with the science teachers, then I move on to presenting findings from the English teachers, which include questionnaire results in section 2 and focus group interviews in section 3. Under Part 2 of the findings chapter, I first present data from the focus group interviews with Bahraini students in the FY and then from the semi-structured individual interviews with FY lecturers.

At the end of each section with qualitative data, in the summary sections, I will point out how each set of data answers the research questions. This will not be done at the end of the questionnaire section for the questionnaire did not aim at eliciting perspectives, however, the patterns of language teaching generated by the questionnaire will be referred to in the discussion chapter to argue the usefulness of Communities of Practice in understanding transitions. There, the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data will also be brought together to show how the data in relation to the three deductive themes of science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy compare to other relevant observations made in research on transitions.

These deductive themes were used in every set of qualitative data to organise the findings thematically and to enable easy reference. Shorter participant quotes (less

than 40 words) have been incorporated in the main text and have been marked by single inverted commas and italics to distinguish them from my text. Quotes of around 40 or more words have been presented separately, using indented margins. The perspectives of each participant group in relation to these themes will be compared and contrasted in the discussion section to demonstrate if the findings from this study contribute a new understanding of transition in the context of language and culture change. Most importantly, the conceptual categories that emerged under each of the deductive themes will be subject to the second level of analysis where I will demonstrate how the findings from the current study expand or challenge the ideas of the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice with regards to understanding transitions.

## ***Part 1 – Findings Obtained from the Participants in Schools***

### **5.2. Science Teachers**

This section of the findings chapter presents my findings and analysis from the focus groups interviews (n=4) with science teachers conducted in September 2012. As indicated in Chapter 4, a total of 22 science teachers in 4 secondary schools in Bahrain participated in the study whose findings are reported here.

The transcripts from the focus group interviews were examined across participants within each group using the coding scheme explained in Table 4.7 but also across all four focus groups to establish possible similarities and differences in science teachers' perspectives regarding the students' transition in terms of the three themes identified in this study – that is, background knowledge, the English language and pedagogy. These were discussed in light of the socio-cultural model of Communities of Practice underpinning this research which indicates that ways of acquiring subject specific knowledge and building skills for university in one community may not be transferable to another, which might affect transition in a negative way (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). That is also why some of the codes that were identified in the data analysis, for example, in relation to the poor equipment in school laboratories or the poor translation of the science books from English to Arabic were omitted here because they did not add to understanding of transition from the perspective of the theoretical framework or even the culture change, but rather focused on evaluation of the science education in Bahraini national schools.

Therefore, each transcript was coded to identify sections in which the interviewees spoke of the role of science and language teaching in Bahrain in the transition to the medical university, as well as other social and cultural aspects of pedagogy in Bahraini schools that they considered to be important in building students' university skills. These sections (usually a paragraph) were then analysed to identify specifics based on the coding scheme in Table 4.7 to identify issues related to transition. This process led to the formation of 4 conceptual categories under the theme of *Background Knowledge: Teachers' Views of the Type and Level of Science Content in Relation to the Medical University (Table 5.1)*, one category under the theme of *The English Language: The Value of Medical Terminology (Table 5.2)* and 4 categories that were grouped under the theme of *School Pedagogy: The Role of the General View on Education and Its Influence on School Practices in Transition (Table 5.3)*.

To preserve the anonymity of participants, schools were randomly given letters from A-D and teachers were given numbers from 1-8. So, for example, a teacher who spoke first in school A was coded as Teacher 1A, and a teacher who spoke second, for instance, in school D was coded as Teacher 2D.

Some quotes were used verbatim from the original English but some have been translated. To indicate this, I will use [original quote] and [translated quote] next to each response. In original quotes, I will use ... .. for a pause, square brackets for omitted words and (sic) for grammatical errors. In translated quotes, the English of the reported speech has been corrected to improve coherence.

## 5.2.1. Theme1 – Background Knowledge: The Level of Science Content in Relation to the Medical University

Four categories have been identified under the theme of the *Background Knowledge: Teachers' Views of the Type and Level of Science Content in Relation to the Medical University* and the statements that were grouped under this theme included comments regarding teachers' confidence in the level of knowledge base in relation to university, as well as their views on inadequacy of the policy regarding science programmes in terms of weaker curriculum, adaptation from Western models and the assessment scheme. These more conceptual categories of confidence and inadequacy will also occur in the data from other participant groups and their significance for the contribution to knowledge this study will make will be jointly presented after the second level of analysis in the discussion chapter. Table 5.1 below summarises the categories within the theme of the perceptions of science teachers regarding the type and level of science content and its relevance for third level education.

Table 5.1: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of Background Knowledge: Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of Science Education in Transition

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Confidence in Science Base</b>	comparison to other GCC countries; high level of science in Bahrain; good for university
<b>Inadequacy of Change in Science Programmes for University Transition</b>	old curriculum better than the new one; new curriculum superficial; old programmes more in-depth; old materials more suitable; important areas no longer in the curriculum; no organic chemistry; basics for university provided; should teach derivation of rules; focus on application; lower order skills
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Western Models</b>	traditional methods used in Bahrain; teaching theory; based on the book; superficial teaching; lower order skills; adapted from the USA impossible
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment</b>	continuous assessment; revision system at university; students awarded marks for little effort; marks given for participation in class

### **5.2.1.1. Confidence in Science Base**

The teachers in all schools agreed that the level of science education in Bahrain is sufficiently high for university and that in comparison with other GCC countries, *'the science material in Bahrain is much stronger than the material which [is] applied in other Gulf States' (Teacher 1B)* [original quote]. All teachers also felt that the science curriculum in Bahraini schools provides a good foundation for science students beginning higher education because as teacher 3D indicated *'their level is similar to university level' (Teacher3D)* [original quote] and the programme covers the basic topics that are studied at university. For example, one physics teacher talked about the science base of the curriculum in the following way:

*Teacher 2B:* Yes, I think for medical students our physics curriculum ... .. it is ... .. covers some. They solve many problems and [the] main things that the medical students needs (sic) from physics which is topics related to works and forces and this is [what] we cover in it. [original quote]

These perspectives indicate that Bahraini students should enter higher education with an increased sense of agency which, in light of what was presented in Chapter 3 with regards to the theoretical framework, should not deter the students from moving towards the centre of the new community. The perspectives under the category below, however, that the sense of agency of some students might be decreased due to inadequacy of the recent change in the science curriculum.

### **5.2.1.2. Inadequacy of Change in Science Programmes for University Transition**

Despite the fact that all teachers felt that Bahraini students will have a good knowledge base on entering university, they also stated that it might still be difficult for students to make a transition because the movement through the learning



outcomes of the medical university might be obstructed by the fact that the new curriculum is written '*in brief summary and the human systems are in brief summary*' (Teacher 3D) [translated quote]. The teachers felt that before the adaptation of the American curriculum in 2012 (please see Chapter 2 for more details), the locally written curriculum which was taught before, and which was also taught to the students in this study, provided the students with more detailed information that, in teachers' view, enabled the students a better start at the university because of the greater depth in which the concepts were taught. In contrast, now, one teacher stated that '*there is one paragraph in the book replacing a whole module we taught before*' (Teacher 3A)[translated quote]. Teacher 2A agreed with this by saying:

*Teacher2A:* Now, we have only the general and the main idea not coming into the deep ... .. [In the past] it takes everything, when we were talking about the skin, it's go deep. In the past we have everything in this, but now no ... .. Before, we take the books, every book is for something, for specific course, material, organic, (sic) unorganic also, now the name of the book is general physics one , physics two, there is no optic physics.[original quote]

Similarly to Teacher 2A who pointed out to the lack of optics in the physics programme, other teachers also remarked that some essential areas of science are not taught in the current curriculum, which might affect students' learning at the university because, as suggested by Teacher 2D, '*before it was a course for organic chemistry, but now not there*' (Teacher2D) [translated quote]. Teacher 4B explained that in biology, for example, '*there is some weakness in molecular biology, hydrogenic and modern sciences related to genes and studying the cells. There is a gap*' (Teacher 4B) [translated quote]. So, the teachers were concerned that with the removal of courses, for example, in organic chemistry or some aspects of biology, the power of background knowledge might be reduced and the

transition of Bahraini students might be hindered because '*when they go to the university, they are shocked (sic) of the level there, it's too hard for them*' (Teacher 2D) [original quote]. This seems to indicate that in terms of learner identity, Bahraini students will not be able to present attributes that are expected from them on entering university, resulting in many negotiations that might affect their sense of agency.

### **5.2.1.3. Inadequacy of Policy: Western Models**

It also seems that one of the biggest changes in agency for Bahraini students was, in every teacher's opinion, related to the fact that in spite of adopting Western syllabi, which could enable the transition to a Western university, the methods of teaching in Bahraini schools have not changed and the teaching is still based on memorizing theory from course books. Teacher 1B acknowledged that:

*Teacher 1B:* The curriculum is the same as in the (sic) American state but the difference is in the method of learning. Yes, (sic) that the only difference, yes ... .. (sic) Same same but the difference is in the teaching, (sic) the teaching depend on the data in the book only, not the lab and (sic) the students doing experiments in the lab, no. [original quote]

This, according to the teachers, makes it impossible to fully implement American curricula and results in superficial teaching that concentrates only on theoretical concepts: Teacher 2B explained that, for example, in chemistry:

*Teacher2B:* They only concentrate on the nomenclature of compounds rather than the reactions and equations and how we (sic) make translate this compounds to other. (sic) This is problem with this curriculum that we have now. [original quote]

It appears that all teachers agreed that due to so much focus on theory, Bahraini students will have to undergo a major change in their identity as learners in order to make a transition because they will have to understand that learning is not only

based on memorising theoretical information. The teachers stated that building a new understanding of what learning involves might be hard for Bahraini students because in school, according to teacher 3A, *'it is not hard, not higher thinking, there are some questions that are higher thinking (sic) and we don't practise that with them (Teacher 3A)'*[original quote] because Teacher 6B explained that *'we don't concentrate on how to extract and how to figure out the concept from the phenomena'* (Teacher 6B). [original quote]. It looks therefore, as if Bahraini students will have to cross many boundaries to form trajectories that will result in the desired change.

One chemistry teacher illustrated this change by referring to learning chemical analysis:

*Teacher3C:* Analysis in chemistry is missing , they will find it hard at the university because here it is only simple ... .. There is no graphic analysis ... .. There was some, in the old books but they deleted it ... .. but here the part of alkenes and alkalines is simple, just their symbols, it is not in details. [translated quote]

Another teacher described this change by listing the skills that the students need to develop in order to make a transition to university and highlighted that these skills cannot be based on memorisation.

*Teacher 2C:* The first thing student must be skilled in mathematics. That is the first thing that prepares him for the university. The second thing is (sic) the proficient of physics rules and their deriving. The relations between the basic rules and the graphs. (sic) Student must understand how change from this law of another law and understand how he can use of results ... .. Also, there is sometimes, (sic) the student have the strategy of how to apply the rules in answering the problems in physics ... .. (sic) You need not to memorise, you need to understand. [original quote]

Whether or not these skills are required at the medical university will be explored with students and university lecturers. The joint findings will then be presented in

the discussion section to develop a better understanding of how the cultural framework of schools may impact the transition process, indicating at the same time whether or not using Communities of Practice might be appropriate for understanding transitions.

#### **5.2.1.4. Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment**

Finally, the teachers interviewed in this study seem to believe that another important change in agency will be related to change in assessment schemes between school and university. Science in secondary schools in Bahrain is assessed based on 50% continuous assessment and 50% final exam. The continuous assessment comprises short tests, attendance and participation in class, whereas the final exam is a written examination. This system, according to the interviewees, does not reflect students' real ability in science because as Teacher 1C explained '*in the school here there are some other things you can get marks for (sic) other things, daily activities and things (sic) like this and this makes the 90% of the mark*' (Teacher1C)[original quote]. This, according to science teachers, may cause difficulties in moving through the educational outcomes of the university where, in the teachers' opinion, a lot of high stake final examinations take place which focus solely on the science content. The teachers generally agreed that this change from continuous assessment, which comprises many small tasks not related to the mastery of scientific knowledge, to summative examinations based *only* on the mastery of knowledge may cause some difficulties with transition. These perspectives imply that the previously negotiated meaning of what learning involves might be challenged when at university, limiting in this way

students' strategic actions to achieve the desired goals, which in this study is understood as agency, As teacher 6B suggested:

*Teacher 6B:* The system of assessment must be chosen [changed] too. I mean, to evaluate the level of the student, we just need one exam I think, that is at the end. ... .. [Otherwise] they will not understand the way of revision or the system there [at university]. It is new environment for them. [original quote]

More about exams and assessment will be presented under the last theme with science teachers because this theme, through its deductive focus on pedagogy, will be related to the broader societal view on education in Bahrain. But first, the findings presented under the next theme will indicate that the high value students in Bahrain assign to the final exam prevents the teachers from preparing Bahraini learners for university in that it does not encourage them to teach medical terminology in English. Relating to the exams and assessment in the last theme, however, will also help to explain why so much emphasis on theory is given in Bahraini schools, which has been identified by the science teachers so far as also causing some difficulties with transition because it prevents them from adopting more Western approaches to teaching.

### **5.2.2. Theme 2: The English Language: Value of Medical Terminology**

Only one category was identified within the deductive theme of the English language. This category was related to the focus of science education in Bahrain which falls on preparing students for the final exam and was labelled here as *Broader View on Education: The final Exam*. The final exam will be mentioned again under the third theme in relation to the conceptual category of the broader

view on education, however, it also had to be mentioned here because it relates to the deductive category of the English language. The conceptual category of the broader view on education is very important for this study, taking into consideration its theoretical framework, and it will reoccur under the third theme with the science teachers but also with other participant groups. This category is a useful lens through which the contribution of this study to knowledge will be argued in the discussion chapter, which is hoped to help to explore how helpful the model of Communities of Practice is for understanding transition. Table 5.2 below presents the codes that were used within the theme of the English language.

Table 5.2: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of the English Language: Value of Medical Terminology

Category	Codes
<b>Broader View on Education: The Power of the Final Exam</b>	English terminology determined by exam; terminology in English not taught because not tested in the exam, students not interested in terminology in English

### 5.2.2.1. Broader View on Education: The Power of the Final Exam

The statements under this theme indicated that many teachers think that '*studying in Arabic and then in English is a factor in transition*' (Teacher 4C). The teachers reported that even though science course books in Bahraini schools feature sections on medical terminology in Arabic and English, students are not interested in learning the terminology in English because only the terminology in Arabic is tested in the final exam. For example, teacher 4C stated that:

*Teacher 4C:* Because in the exam it doesn't depend on the English terminology so students don't pay attention to it. ... So, this is the problem we

are facing, if the terminology in English is not included, the students don't care, and this is a problem. [translated quote]

The views of all teachers were similar in that the major change when students join the university will be related to change in language and they concluded that it would be easier to teach medical terminology in English if the broader view on education in Bahraini schools did not place so much emphasis on the final exam. When I asked in school D why terms in Arabic are not taught in English, Teacher 3D answered: '*Because it will not come in English in the exam*' (Teacher 3D).[original quote]. Based on what was discussed in Chapter 3, these data suggest that students' linguistic identity might not be sufficiently developed, affecting learner agency due to the lack of desired linguistic attributes.

### **5.2.3. Theme 3: School Pedagogy: The Role of the General View on Education and Pedagogical Practices in Transition**

This theme includes data in which participants provide information about how they think specific styles of teaching, objects of science education and pedagogical practices in Bahrain may relate to shaping learning identities appropriate for university. The participant comments concerned with this theme included their perspectives on the inadequacy of the use of memorisation, heavy emphasis on the final exam, their beliefs about spoon-feeding pedagogies in relation to university learning and their views on awarding marks. Table 5.3 below presents the summary of major categories within the theme of the role of the general view on education and specific local practices in students' transition with indications of specific codes that were identified in the process of data analysis.

Table 5.3: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of School Pedagogy: Role of the General View on Education and Pedagogical Practices in Transition

Category	Codes
<b>Broader View on Education: Value of Memorisation</b>	critical thinking not suitable for Bahrain; culturally inappropriate; hard to teach critical thinking; impossible to change attitudes towards critical thinking; parents do not understand the value of critical thinking; memorization
<b>Broader View on Education: The Importance of the Final Exam</b>	focus on theoretical part; teaching for the exam; Western teaching not suitable for Bahrain; heavy focus on exam
<b>Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding</b>	teachers prepare everything for students; using model answers; have to use model answers because students require it
<b>Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks</b>	awarding marks; parents' complaints; multiple opportunities for better marks

### 5.2.3.1. Broader View on Education: Value of Memorisation

All science teachers interviewed in this study agreed that Bahraini students are not used to critical thinking approaches to learning. This seems to suggest that Bahraini students will have to undergo considerable changes in identity when beginning Western style higher education. All teachers agreed that the value of critical thinking is diminished in Bahraini schools because science teachers prefer to use styles based on memorisation. One teacher in school D illustrated it in the following way:

*Teacher3D:* The teacher is not even qualified to teach through critical thinking and know how to use it ... It's rarely that teachers use critical thinking, I mean the teachers who use critical thinking are very few ... .. The teachers are not using it, the teacher is only teaching via memorization and that's it. [translated quote]

All teachers also stated that the emphasis on memorisation is so strong because it is culturally ingrained and that teachers will continue to teach in this way.



*Teacher1D*: This is the way (sic) we brought to teach, this is the way how we study, this is the way we teach, this is the way how we pass and this is the way we are going to teach. [original quote]

The interviewees finally agreed that, culturally, students and parents place a lot of value on final marks, which is why they prefer styles based on memorisation which guarantee high scores. Teacher 2B explained that '*they will be happier if (sic) it is easy to have percentage of 99.9*' (*Teacher 2B*). [original quote]

This strong emphasis on memorisation implies, based on the opinion of all teachers, that approaches to learning in Bahraini schools make it more difficult to build learning identities that are suitable for university because students believe that memorisation is the only way of gaining knowledge. For example, as teachers in school A explained '*the mental level of the students is not appropriate for the university. The brain growth did not reach university level*' (*Teacher 1A*) [translated quote] and '*we are the ones who taught them in this way*' (*Teacher 2A*) [translated quote]

Despite this belief, the teachers also reported that due to the traditional view on education that promotes obedience and rigour, it is impossible to teach differently in Bahraini schools because if teachers start implementing critical thinking approaches this, according to teacher 1D, '*will make it worst because to entertain the students while they have to study and take things seriously, this will make a lazy generation (sic) who wants to get entertained in everything*' (*Teacher 1D*). [original quote]

### 5.2.3.2. Broader View on Education: The Importance of the Final Exam

The great emphasis on theory reported under the first theme in this section of the findings can be explained by the statements reported within the category regarding the final exam where all teachers reported that the view on education in Bahrain which assigns great value to the final exam concentrates all teaching '*on the data from the book only*' (Teacher 4B) [original quote]. All teachers also agreed that due to the focus on the final exam, they are required to cover the curriculum in full and that implementing critical thinking approaches that could be more useful for university would not leave enough time to do it. Teacher 3D explained that:

*Teacher3D:* The time is not enough to waste the lecture for that, because the course will not finish this way. The second thing is it is not included in the exam; there is only the theoretical part. [original quote]

Therefore, all teachers believe that due the fact that preparing for the final exam is the ultimate goal of science education, Western models of teaching that could prepare the students for the transition into Western-style higher education are unlikely to be implemented in Bahraini schools. According to Teacher 3D, this is because students feel that '*the most important for them is to have a teacher who can explain and summaries for them, never mind the [critical thinking] strategies*' (Teacher 3D). [original quote] This again indicates that the teachers seem to think that Bahraini students will have to develop new trajectories and negotiate the value of old strategies of how to master the material, which, in turn, might affect their agency. The findings under the categories below provide more support for this.

### 5.2.3.3. Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding

The objective of science education described above, according to all teachers, leads to adopting specific spoon-feeding pedagogies that require the teachers to provide model answers because *'all Bahraini students study only for exams'* (Teacher 2A) [original quote]. Teacher 2D added that *'they want only (sic) a ready teacher to summarise for them and teach them. The good teacher (sic) who is the one who is going to give them, spoon-feed them, make it easier, simplify the subject'* (Teacher 2D). [original quote]. Another teacher pointed out that *'we do it for the purpose of exam, but what we can do? It must be like this. We write everything on the board and teach them the answer'* (Teacher 3D) [translated quote].

Such spoon-feeding, however, in the view of all teachers might cause problems with transition because, considering the literature in Chapter 3, it does not seem that students in Bahraini schools can develop learning identities that teach them how to gain and organise study information independently. The teachers agreed that Bahraini schools are different from university in that they provide the students with all study notes. One teacher in school A compared Bahraini students to a box that contains ready information:

*Teacher2A: No, it's totally different, here we are almost giving them everything ... .. It's in all the subjects not in the science ... .. We give them everything ... .. Like a box, Bahraini students like a box, you give him information (sic) they after they can they open this box and all the information inside. This is Bahraini schools. [original quote]*

#### 5.2.3.4. Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks

Finally, within this last category, all science teachers were concerned that Bahraini students will have to undergo substantial changes in order to make a transition by learning to understand that marks at university are awarded according to specific criteria, as opposed to schools which, in the view of all participants, are too lenient in this respect. These perspectives suggest considerable changes in learning trajectories. The majority of teachers reported that they change students' marks *'because the fathers and mothers (sic) makes problems if their childrens don't do well in the exams'* (Teacher2B) [original quote] Teacher 2A, for example, agreed and stated that *'there is people, they maybe if her son lose half degree, they make for you a big problem and they will go to the manager. This is not a good teacher they will say'* (Teacher 2A). [original quote]

Greater negotiations of identity may also be the result of what the teachers reported about multiple opportunities of retaking the exams. The teachers seemed to imply that undergoing transition might be even more difficult because the school practices that allow the students to retake the exam until they are satisfied with their marks do not build learning identities that prepare students for the rigours of universities.

*Teacher2A: We don't like to repeat and repeat for them, but they sometime they tell us, you know, repeat for them, give them a chance ... .. And we give them many chances, not one exam, till we take the best that's why (sic) their marks its coming up.* [original quote]

#### **5.2.4. Summary**

The data presented in section 5.2. answers the first research question in that it explores the perspectives of the science teachers which is the first group of secondary teaching staff relevant to this study. This data also addresses the second research question in that it demonstrates the teachers' perspectives on the role of practices and structures in science education, English language input, as well as broader school pedagogy in relation to student identity and agency change. Relevant details are provided below.

The findings reported in relation to the first deductive theme of background knowledge demonstrate a certain level of confidence science teachers have in their programmes which, in turn, indicates that, in their view, the movement through the educational outcomes of the medical university might be eased for Bahraini students because these learners enter university with sufficient background knowledge. At the same time, a sense of inadequacy regarding the current policy in teaching science could also be noted when the teachers concluded that the old programmes which were delivered to the cohort of students concerned in this study were more suitable for university for they provided more in-depth coverage of the science topics. This inadequacy was also reflected in the teachers' comments regarding the assessment policy in schools, as well as the difficulties in adopting critical thinking pedagogies caused by too much emphasis on theory.

As far as the deductive theme of the English language is concerned, the science teachers felt that a big drawback of science education in terms of making the

transition lies in the lack of medical terminology in English, which was reported to be linked to the broader view on education in Bahrain.

Finally, the statements in relation to the third deductive theme of pedagogy indicated that the great value of memorisation, the strong emphasis on the final exam, the spoon-feeding practices, as well as ways of awarding marks may play a negative role in students' transition. These statements led to the foundation of two conceptual categories which were named here as 'broader view on education' and 'blame on practices'. These and other conceptual categories will be explored in the discussion chapter where I will use them to argue the contribution to knowledge this study will make. However, taken together, the statements related to the deductive themes very clearly imply that several changes in agency and identity will be required from Bahraini students in order to make the transition. These include developing an understanding that learning is not only based on memorising theory, that the lack of medical terminology in English will obstruct the movement through the learning outcomes, that the system of assessment at university will be more rigorous and more focused on the knowledge and finally that spoon-feeding will not be practised in the university community. The next sections of the findings chapter explore the patterns of language education in Bahrain, as well as the perspectives of English teachers on the transition process.

### **5.3. English Language Teachers (Questionnaire Findings)**

The results presented here were collected through a questionnaire (see Appendix 8) that was devised to investigate the general tendencies in teaching and assessing English. This focus was informed by the literature review which suggested that investigations into teaching and assessing English in school could create better understanding of university transition in terms of change of language because the type of transferability of linguistic strategies to university programmes depends on how language curricula in schools are implemented (Mavor, 2001). This focus also allowed me to argue the contribution of school practices to transition which is highlighted by the socio-cultural theory of the Communities of Practice. All this allowed exploration of whether the skills and level of linguistic tasks that are currently emphasised in language education in Bahrain help or hinder the students' transition by comparing the results with the responses from students and university lecturers regarding the role of the English language in the transition. This will also be explored in the discussion section. Finally, the initial questionnaire responses from teachers in each school were used in focus groups that were conducted following the questionnaire to initiate the discussion about the focus of language education in Bahrain.

10 schools across Bahrain were purposively selected for this study (for sampling procedures, see section 4.6.1) and 85 English language teachers were requested to complete the questionnaire. The return response rate from this investigation was 100%. Mean responses from all participant schools across the country were compiled and the conclusions drawn here are based on univariate item analysis that was conducted for each question in all sections of the questionnaire. The

results are presented separately for writing and reading. Below, I present the discussion of only raw results but a more detailed analysis will be presented in the discussion chapter to show how these findings compare to other findings in the area and what it means for students' transition. The second level of analysis in the discussion chapter will allow drawing final conclusions in relation to the role of the English language in students' transition and to contribute to understanding of transitions in terms of language change.

### **5.3.1. Teaching Writing**

In this section, the teachers were asked to respond 'never', 'very rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always' to each of the 15 items examining the general teaching techniques used by language tutors in government schools in Bahrain during composition classes. The questions in this group concerned the degree of the teachers' attention given to the correct use of grammar, lexis, and language mechanics when teaching writing. The staff members were also asked how often they stress specific writing strategies and how much emphasis they put on the development of ideas. The teachers were also asked to indicate whether they focus more on the writing process or on the final product. Table 5.4 shows the percentages of the average responses to the items in the writing section of the questionnaire.

The results shown in the table below indicate that between approximately 40% and 50% of teachers in the study were found to stress all elements of writing in their teaching. This is reflected across the 'Always' column, where only appropriateness of vocabulary, style and independent writing strategies scored less percentages. In



terms of the linguistically oriented components of writing, grammar and spelling are most frequently emphasized with figures ranging 85% for grammar and 77% for spelling across the two positive categories of 'often' and 'always'. As far as cohesive aspects of writing are concerned, the biggest focus is given to the organisation of writing with 85% across the two positive categories of 'always' and 'often' and sequencing of ideas scoring 49% for 'always' and 35% for 'often'. Finally, the items related to the general approach to teaching writing indicated that the writing product and the writing process are equally emphasised with approximately 80% across the positive categories. The purpose of writing was highlighted at 54% for 'always' and 29% for 'often'. Independent writing strategies were also emphasised by the majority of teachers (nearly 70%).

Table 5.4: Teacher Responses (%) to Section B of the Questionnaire - Teaching Writing

<b>Question: When I teach writing, I concentrate on:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Very Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
1. Capitalisation	1	9	14	28	38
2. Punctuation	1	7	20	28	41
3. Spelling	1	5	14	33	44
4. Appropriateness of Vocabulary	1	2	20	40	33
5. Technical terms	4	5	27	36	24
6. Grammar	1	1	11	44	41
7. The organisation of writing	0	1	11	33	52
8. The development of ideas	0	0	15	36	47
9. The sequencing of ideas	0	4	9	35	49
10. The purpose of writing	0	4	11	29	54
11. Writing process	1	0	16	38	44
12. Writing product	1	1	12	35	49
13. Style	1	1	19	44	34
14. Both, the process and the product	0	1	13	35	46
15. Independent writing strategies	1	5	19	39	28

\* Percentages may not equal 100 because not all teachers answered all items

Within writing strategies, the findings imply that a large number of teachers place more emphasis on grammatical and mechanical aspects of language teaching,

rather than areas related to text coherence. Important trends were also illustrated in Table 5.4 in relation to the focus of writing, where great importance of the writing product, the writing process and the development of ideas was shown. This has specific implications as far as the role of pedagogical structures in language education in Bahrain in higher education is concerned because the literature reviewed in section 3.4.3 suggests that some of the patterns indicated in Table 5.4 should play a positive role in students' transition but, at the same time, some of them can make it more difficult. This will have implications for students' agency and I will come back to this issue in the discussion chapter with additional implications for the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice which suggests that patterns of language formed in one community will affect the membership of individuals in another (Eckert, 2006).

### **5.3.2. Assessing Writing**

Here, the teachers were asked to indicate the most commonly used techniques while assessing students' writing. Using a 5-point Likert scale, the staff responded to items regarding specific marking techniques, giving feedback, evaluating content, style, as well as language errors in learners' assignments (Table 5.5).

The findings suggest that the majority of teachers provide students with a lot of feedback because the responses in Table 5.5 suggest that the majority of English teachers correct students' errors (about 70% across the two positive categories of 'often' and 'always'), give the correct answers to students (34% for 'often' and 27% for 'always'), focus on both the content and the language (about 80% across 'often' and 'always') and pay special attention to style (45% for 'often' and 18% for

'always'). The results related to teacher emphasis on marking for content, language and style are specifically important for this study for they allow drawing comparisons with other findings in section 3.4.3. of the literature review regarding the role of teaching the students to be able to convey scientific content and to express themselves clearly in a foreign language using appropriate language and form in students' transition to higher education. I will return to this issue in the interviews with students and university lecturers and will analyse the joint findings in the discussion chapter to point out to the importance of this study for Communities of Practice which highlight the importance of patterns emphasised in specific communities, such as schools, in building students' agency suitable for other communities, for example, university (Eckert, 2006). This will contribute to theory in terms of understanding transitions in the context of language change.

Table 5.5: Teacher Responses (%) to Section B of the Questionnaire - Assessing Writing

<b>Question: When I assess my students' writing:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Very Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
1. I follow one specific technique.	16	21	34	22	5
2. I correct all my students' errors.	1	6	19	45	27
3. I just point out the error without the correction.	24	22	33	15	4
4. I point out the error and give the correction.	0	9	27	34	27
5. I mark the piece of writing without any comments.	52	23	18	7	0
6. I comment on the piece of writing without any marks.	38	31	14	15	1
7. I mark the piece of writing for content only.	42	20	22	14	0
8. I mark the piece of writing for language only.	20	13	23	26	18
9. I mark the piece of writing for both content and language.	0	2	16	35	46
10. I point out the way in which a piece of writing is good or bad.	2	7	18	54	16
11. I pay special attention to style.	0	7	29	45	18
12. I ask the students to correct the writing of one another.	12	28	45	9	5
13. I discuss errors with the students.	0	13	23	40	24

14. I ask the students to read out or I read out good pieces of writing	0	19	39	23	19
15. I feel that I am short of time to correct students' writing in detail.	16	18	45	14	7

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\* Percentages may not equal 100 because not all teachers provided answers to all questions

### 5.3.3. Teaching Reading

The results presented in Table 5.6 were collated based on the average responses given to items connected with teaching reading. The reading skills contained in section D of the questionnaire included general skimming and scanning techniques, as well as interpreting textual and visual information. They also asked the teachers about the importance of paraphrasing ideas and being able to recognise and make use of different elements of a text. These skills were described in the literature review as important for students beginning science higher education (Northedge, 1997).

As far as teaching reading is concerned, the teachers in this study seem to pay the greatest amount of attention to reading techniques that aid general understanding of a text. These include identifying the main ideas (40% for 'often' and 40% for 'always'), inferring the general meaning of the messages in a text (53% for 'often' and 29% for 'always') and selecting important information (39% for 'often' and 38 for 'always'). The figures recorded for more focused reading procedures were also quite high and indicated about 70% across the two positive categories of 'often' and 'always' for guessing the meaning of unknown words and 80% across 'often' and 'always' for finding specific information. The least frequently emphasised reading skills were related to summarising, interpreting graphs and tables, as well as evaluating texts, where figures for each were recorded at only about 30% across both categories of 'often' and 'always'.

Table 5.6: Teacher Responses (%) to Section D of the Questionnaire - Teaching Reading

<b>Question: When I teach reading, I concentrate on:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Very Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
General understanding of a text	0	2	8	32	58
Finding specific information	1	2	16	47	33
Identifying the main ideas	0	2	16	40	40
Summarizing	1	8	54	28	6
Interpreting visual information	4	6	31	42	14
Interpreting graphs and tables	2	11	45	28	9
Inferring meaning	0	4	13	53	29
Guessing the meaning of unknown words	0	0	21	39	38
Paraphrasing ideas	6	16	47	25	6
Selecting important information	1	2	26	54	14
Evaluating texts	11	22	39	22	6
Predicting	1	9	29	44	15
Recognizing different elements of a text	1	14	32	38	14
Reading speed	2	16	46	27	8

\* Percentages may not equal 100 because not all teachers provided answers to all questions

In terms of teaching reading, the results show that the most common reading techniques practised in Bahraini schools are based on general understanding of texts. Some teachers also use more focused methods and require the students to read for specific information. However, skills such as summarising, interpreting graphs and tables and evaluating texts have not been rated high in terms of the percentages presented in Table 5.6. This might have specific implications for Bahraini students beginning higher education for the literature in Chapter 3 suggests that when students do not practise skills of interpretation and evaluation in a foreign language in school, their chances of making a transition might be diminished because their agency to cope with the demands of study in a foreign language might be limited (for example: Northedge, 1996). The second level of analysis of these findings in the discussion chapter will show whether reading patterns formed through school in Bahrain provide students with sufficient agency to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university. It is also

hoped that these findings will partially help to explain how useful Communities of Practice is a lens for understanding transition.

### 5.3.4. Assessing Reading

In this section, various assessment techniques were examined and participant responses were obtained based on the questions contained in section E of the questionnaire. The items asked the teachers to indicate their preferences in terms of the type and format of reading questions, as well as what reading skills are tested in Bahraini schools by marking 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always'.

Table 5.7: Teacher Responses (%) to Section E of the Questionnaire - Assessing Reading

<b>Question: When I assess my students' reading:</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Very Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
I check students' abilities to provide word-for-word answers	2	6	29	46	14
I check students' abilities to recall specific information from the text	0	4	28	53	14
I check students' abilities to analyse information	0	6	39	44	11
I check students' abilities to interpret meaning	0	9	28	51	11
I check students' abilities to evaluate the text	6	14	47	29	2
I use multiple choice questions	1	15	41	32	9
I use T/F/NG questions	0	6	44	40	9
I use open-ended questions	0	5	24	46	25

\* Percentages might not equal 100 because not all teachers provided answers to all items

The data presented in Table 5.7 indicates that the most frequently used types of questions in the assessment of reading are items which ask the students to recall specific information from the text (67% across 'often' and 'always') and which check the students' abilities to provide word for word answers (60% across 'often' and 'always'). In addition, over 60% of teachers reported that they also like to use questions that require interpretation of meaning (51% for 'often' and 11% for

'always') but only about 30% (29% for 'often' and 2% for 'always') of staff emphasise items that ask the learners to evaluate a text. The majority of English tutors in this study (55% across 'often' and 'always') often seem to pay attention to analytical skills. In terms of the format of assessment, the preferred type of questions seems to be based on open-ended tasks, with nearly three quarters of the overall responses for positive categories of 'often' and 'always', followed by 'True/ False' and multiple choice items with 49% and 41% respectively across both 'often' and 'always'.

The data gathered in relation to the assessment of reading in Bahraini schools suggests further conclusions in relation to the value of school practices for students' transition. The majority of English teachers in this study indicated that the most frequent methods of assessing reading comprise activities that ask for specific word-for-word information. Checking the students' ability to interpret meaning appears to be less important and verification of skills related to the evaluation and analysis occurs in less than 50% of tests. What implications this might have for students' agency will be explained in the discussion chapter where these results, along with the findings from the student and lecturers interviews will be brought together and compared with observations in relevant literature to make a contribution to theory that will highlight the importance of language in cultural transitions.

### **5.3.5. Summary**

The results from the questionnaire presented here show the patterns in teaching and assessing the skills of the English language in Bahraini schools. This

questionnaire was based on the items that were identified in the literature review as essential for achieving literacy in science which has been found to facilitate students' transition to higher education. The sections on writing indicate that a lot of emphasis is placed on language mechanics, the writing process, the writing product and development of ideas and that assessment is based on correcting all students' errors and providing them with correct answers. The results in relation to reading suggest that skills based on interpretation and evaluation of information are not emphasised either while teaching or in assessment, and more attention is paid to finding specific information. These findings will be explored in the following section with the English teachers to explain what determines the patterns of language education in Bahraini schools and to answer the research questions through explaining how these patterns affect students' agency in terms of having to cope with studying science in English. These findings will also be explored with students and university lecturers in the second part of this findings chapter to demonstrate if these patterns match what is required at university and what changes in student identity and agency were required because of them, which will also help to answer the research questions. In the discussion chapter, these explorations will allow drawing conclusions in terms of the role of pedagogical structures of language education in Bahrain in students' transition, exploring how useful Communities of Practice are as a framework for looking at transition.



## 5.4. English Language Teachers (Focus Groups)

The data reported here were collected during 10 visits to government schools in Bahrain and 60 English teachers were interviewed in focus groups sessions, 31 were male and 29 were female (for a detailed description of the research site, the participants and the sampling methods, please refer to Chapter 4). The focus group interviews were conducted to explore how English teachers view the issue of transition in terms of students' linguistic development formed through specific school pedagogies and how this might impact the transition in terms of language change.

A coding scheme presented in Table 4.7 in Chapter 4 was used to code the transcripts from the English teachers which led to the formation of three main analytical themes. These were: (1) *The English Language: Teachers' Perspectives on the Influence of the Broader School Structures on the Language Programme and the Consequences for University Study*, (2) *Background Knowledge: Perspectives on the Importance of Medical Terminology in English* and (3) *School Pedagogy: Teachers' Beliefs about the Role of School Practices in Transition*. Each of these themes had several conceptual categories which are listed, along with their corresponding codes, in relevant tables below (Tables 5.8-5.10). Some codes that emerged during the data analysis here were omitted. These mainly related to teacher training and lack of teacher involvement in making decisions about language programmes. These codes arose in discussions regarding practices or pedagogy, however, they were omitted because, despite being seemingly linked to the Communities of Practice, they actually did not add to the understanding of how they affect transition. This was because rather than focusing

on practices that could or could not be transferred to the university, these codes explained why English education in Bahrain might be poor. The meaning of the conceptual categories identified under each theme in relation to transition will be explained below, but their importance for arguing the contribution to theory this study will make will be presented in the discussion section after the second level of analysis.

Each school was randomly assigned a letter of the alphabet, starting from A to J and participants were given numbers from 1-8. Subsequently, the codes were applied in producing a matrix for ordering and synthesising data from each school into recurring conceptual categories. As a result, ten separate matrixes were created which were later compared to look for any similarities and differences in relation to these conceptual categories across all teacher groups. This matrix was explained in Chapter 4 and an example of one of the matrixes can be viewed in Appendix 6. After all transcripts were completed, specific coded segments, with interviewee codes and letters assigned to individual schools, were extracted to be used as direct quotations to support what is argued here. So, for example, a narrative from the teacher who spoke first in school B was coded Teacher 1B. All quotes here were extracted from the original English and pauses were indicated by ... .., missing words by square brackets and grammatical errors by (sic).

### 5.4.1. Theme 1: The English Language: The Consequences of the School Structures and the Language Programme for Transition

Four categories were identified under this first deductive theme of the English Language and comments that were grouped here included teachers' perspectives on the role of the nature and structure of English education in Bahrain in students' transition. Some of the conceptual categories that were developed here were also identified with science teachers in the previous section and the degree of overlap between these and previous findings was found in relation to inadequacy of policy regarding assessment, more student-centred approaches and with raising multiple opportunities for students to improve their marks. The first category below was also identified with the science teachers but the comments here differ in that they show a lack of confidence in the suitability of the language programme for university. The table below presents all categories identified under Theme 1 with their associated codes.

Table 5.8: Categories and Codes within the Theme of the English Language; Teachers Perspectives on the Influence of the Broader School Structures on the Language Programme and the Consequences for University Study

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Lack of Confidence in the Language Programme</b>	more focus on all skills; more emphasis on speaking; teach about the demands of university; link between school and university; developing productive skills; more writing; importance of reading
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Communicative Approach</b>	communicative approach not suitable for Bahrain; communicative approach not appreciated in Bahrain; following strict teachers; GTM; student control
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment</b>	project; behaviour; easy to get marks; little effort; copy and paste; not transferable to university
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Lack of Progression Criteria</b>	no achievement criteria; students progress without achieving passing grades; different from university; students will think the same will be at university

#### **5.4.1.1. Lack of Confidence in the Language Programme**

The English teachers across all groups agreed that the current language programme in Bahraini schools does not prepare students well for university for the programme is structured to focus on the final exam, neglecting in this way, for example, *'the skill of speaking (sic) since it is not here in the final exam, nobody pays much attention to it'* (Teacher 4D).

This, in the teachers' view, will make the transition more difficult because, for instance, Teacher 1H thinks that *'at university they have to speak, they have to communicate, they also have to give presentations'* (Teacher 1H). These perspectives are significant for the discussion of learning identities in Chapter 3 where I pointed out to the importance of expected learning attributes and their relationship to agency. Based on what the teachers reported here, Bahraini students might struggle with forming appropriate coping strategies for it seems that their identity formed in the previous community does not provide them with sufficient resources.

The importance of good English skills for students' transition was often discussed by the interviewees who felt that good comprehension and production language skills can make it easier for students to cope at university. Unfortunately, the interviewees were not confident that this would be easy for Bahraini students because, for example, the writing genres emphasised in the school programme are not relevant and there is little connection between what is taught in school and what is required at university.

*Teacher 4J:* If they go to the college where all the subjects are taught in English, they will have to be able to speak well to express their opinions.

They will also have to have good listening comprehension to understand what they are saying. Writing should be specific to their needs, but here, (sic) like a letter or a story, I don't think it's relevant. So they need to connect, to make a link between the college and high school.

#### **5.4.1.2. Inadequacy of Policy: Communicative Approach**

All interviewees felt that the current policy that requires the teachers to teach via communicative approaches could be beneficial for students' transition if it was possible to implement them in the Bahraini context. However, the teachers at the same time agreed that the traditional school structures that encourage obedience and teacher-centred approaches do not teach the students that learning can come through interaction in English because, according to teacher 1H, when teachers use communicative approaches '*the students think that English is easy because teachers have fun and teachers play*' (Teacher 1H). Teacher 1H also reported that [Bahraini students] '*follow teachers who are strict*' (Teacher 1H) and cannot appreciate the benefits of opportunities to interact in English. Teacher 5D agreed:

*Teacher 5D:* In my opinion, not all methods are suitable here. I think a GTM [Grammar Translation Method] would be suitable for those students. I know it's an old method but it is a suitable one for them. With the communicative approach, they make a big noise and they don't learn. Or some of the students work, the others copy from them and then that's it. They need something that would allow the teacher to control the class more.

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) of teaching English requires translating whole texts word for word and memorising numerous grammatical rules and vocabulary lists. This, in the teachers' opinion, suits the cultural framework of Bahraini students more but does not develop communication skills that are needed for university.

The importance of these data in relation to student agency is reflected in what has already been highlighted in this findings chapter in the section with the science teachers. Similarly to the science tutors, the English teachers seem to think that due to the common practice in school, Bahraini students will have to develop new trajectories and negotiate the value of old approaches to teaching English, as well as their effect on the coping strategies at university. The findings below show that these coping strategies might additionally be affected by the inadequacy of assessing English, which, again, may require considerable negotiations of meaning on the part of the students.

#### **5.4.1.3. Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment**

The English teachers interviewed here agreed that the assessment scheme currently applied to the language programme does not create opportunities for students to build agency required for university. For example, Teacher 1E, said that *'I think the problem lies in the way we assess our students (Teacher 1E)*.

This is related to the continuous nature of assessment in school which allows the students to accumulate marks for activities other than mastery of the material which, in all teachers' opinion, makes it easier for students to pass. The continuous assessment consists of three main components: (1) observation of students' behaviour, (2) short class quizzes and (3) the project so Teacher 6D, for example, explained that *'if they get 30 marks for the project and for the behaviour,(sic) it is obvious, we are giving them marks for nothing' (Teacher 6G)*. Another teacher also agreed:

*Teacher 3D:* The third of the total mark is given to students without any effort. We have observation, which is also worth 30 marks and you can't

give them less than 20 – 25 marks. They copy and paste it from the Internet or they submit it in a foreign language.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, being able to accumulate marks in this way limits, in the teachers' view, the ability of students to cope with the rigours of university and poses some threats to their transition because, as teacher 4J explained, '*they pass and with this attitude they go to college*' (Teacher 4J).

#### **5.4.1.4. Inadequacy of Policy: Lack of Progression Criteria**

Very closely linked to the previous category is what the English teachers also reported in relation to the lack of clear-cut student progression criteria. This category was not identified with the science teachers in the previous section, however, it appears that it can be linked to the statements that were made there in relation to giving students multiple opportunities of raising their marks.

All teachers felt that the current progression policy that allows the students to move to the next educational level without meeting specific criteria will make the transition more difficult in a way that it will allow them to think that the same will be applied at university. That is why all teachers agreed that in order to be better prepared for the rigours of university and Teacher 3J suggested that '*the system [in school] should be changed because if they fail, that means that their level is not good to take other classes and they need to understand that*' (Teacher 3J).

*Teacher 5F:* I have students in my class who don't know the alphabet. So it makes me think, how come this student passed and came to my class? So before moving the student from one level to another, the student should achieve a specific goal. Some of the students in our school, and not only in (sic) ours, you will find it in different schools, too,

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<sup>6</sup> The students often submit projects in French or in German and the projects should be written in English.

they failed their third intermediate, even if they fail twice in the exam, they will still move them to the secondary level and pass pass pass.

#### **5.4.2. Theme 2: Background Knowledge: Perspectives on the Importance of Medical Terminology.**

One category was identified under the deductive theme of background knowledge and it was found to be related to the perceived inadequacy of the current language programme that, in the teachers' view, should focus more on teaching medical terminology. Since this category was identified previously by the science teachers as an important linguistic element but also as an element of background knowledge, it was decided that it should be assigned here to the deductive theme of background knowledge. Moreover, as explained earlier, it will again be used as a conceptual analytical category in the discussion chapter as a lens of looking at Communities of Practice as a socio-cultural theory suitable for explaining transitions. The table below contains the codes associated with the category of *Inadequacy of Policy: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Courses*.

Table 5.9: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of Background Knowledge: Perspectives on the Importance of Medical Terminology

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: ESP Courses</b>	ESP should be taught; ESP increases chances at university; ESP equips with subject-related language skills; science teachers should work with English teachers

##### **5.4.2.1. Inadequacy of Policy: ESP Courses**

The responses of English teachers in this category corroborated with the perspectives of science teachers who stated that the lack of medical terminology in English will make it more difficult for Bahraini students to move through the



educational outcomes of the medical university. These data suggest that students' linguistic identity might not be sufficiently developed, affecting learner agency in that lack of appropriate language resources will limit their capacity to take strategic actions. According to the theoretical framework, these resources could assist the students in their movement from the periphery to the centre of the new university community of practice, but according to the English teachers they were denied to students at secondary level by inadequate teaching policies.

Unlike the science teachers who associated the lack of medical terminology with the final exam, the English teachers blamed it on the inadequacy of the current language teaching policy which does not include ESP courses. All interviewees felt that the old policy which had English for Specific Purposes programmes was much better because, according to, for instance, Teacher 6G, '[the courses] *were all specialised, related to their field and (sic) that they were interesting for students (sic) for university*' (Teacher 6G).

The English teachers unanimously agreed that the level of students' professional language in English is zero but their transition to university could be eased if ESP courses were introduced again or, as suggested by Teacher 3A, if science teachers '*give it [the medical terminology] to the English teachers and they will teach them ... .. In science books, there are English equivalents of the basic terms in Arabic*' (Teacher 3A).

*Teacher 1E:* Especially science students are always the best, in all schools in Bahrain, they are taking care of their studies, if we give them 'Beginning

Scientific English'<sup>7</sup>, like we used to in the past, (sic) that would help them with the university studies.

### **5.4.3. Theme 3: School Pedagogy: Teachers' Beliefs about the Role of School Practices in Transition**

The categories within this theme are the specifics that were identified in relation to the broader deductive area of school pedagogy and contain teachers' views on the role of three school practices in students' transition. Other comments included here are linked to the broader view on education in Bahrain which also determines specific school practices. The two conceptual categories that emerged under Theme 3 are *Broader View on Education* and *Blame on Practices* which were linked by the teachers to the emphasis on the final exam, model answers in writing, lack of self-study strategies and ways of awarding marks in school. Based on what the teachers discussed here, it seems that these were believed to play a negative role in building students' identity and agency that could be suitable for university. Similarly to what was inferred from the findings obtained from the science teachers, the data here indicate that Bahraini students will have to develop new trajectories and engage in many negotiations of meaning in terms of what they had previously been taught about learning and how this may affect their progression from the periphery to the centre. The summary of all categories identified under the theme of school pedagogy and their associated codes is presented in Table 5.10. All categories presented here were also identified with the science teachers in the previous section.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Beginning Scientific English' is the name of one of the ESP courses that was taught to science students in the past.

Table 5.10: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of School Pedagogy: Teachers' Beliefs about the Role of School Practices in Transition

Category	Codes
<b>Broader View on Education: Focus on the Final Exam</b>	exam determines teaching; exam prevents development of skills; no teaching grammar; students only interested in the exam; grammar needed for university
<b>Blame on Practices: Model Answers</b>	models of writing; rely only on model answers; unable to write independently; students' thinking in English
<b>Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding</b>	need to teach self-study; centralised system of education; focus on the teacher; need self-discipline skills; note-taking
<b>Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks</b>	students complain about marks; awarding marks; not common at university

#### 5.4.3.1. Broader View on Education: Focus on the Final Exam

The comments from the English teachers within this category were similar to the ones from science teachers in that both groups of interviewees highlighted that the great value of the final exam concentrates all teaching only on the material that will be included in that exam.

*Teacher 1A:* The students study for the final exam. They only want to study because they will have the same question in the final. They don't want extra information. The exam is the only thing. So, whenever we give them a lesson they ask: 'Teacher is this going to be included in the final exam?'

This results in teaching from the book because, according to Teacher 8C, '*the texts and examinations concentrate on the book*' (Teacher 8C) but to linguistically prepare students for university '*we don't want examinations to concentrate on the book, we want to encourage the students to read outside the book and teach the skill*' (Teacher 8C).

For example, the majority of teachers stated that one of the language areas that should be emphasised more to prepare students for university is grammar. Good

knowledge of grammar was considered by all teachers to be important for students' transition because, as Teacher 2H highlighted, '*students must know the rules and they don't know the tenses*' (Teacher 2H). Teacher 6C agreed but added that '*unless it is included in the exam, teachers don't pay much attention to it and students don't want to learn it*' (Teacher 6C). Teacher 1C agreed with Teacher 6C:

*Teacher 1C:* It's teaching for the exam and I hate this motto. Why is it? Because the students are learning only for the exam. Some of them might study for other reasons, but still, the main, the general aim of our education is for the exam. That's why there is no grammar in the exam, there is no grammar in students. So I think the exam determines the way I teach. I teach grammar or speaking, and I give them extra activities but it's not working because it's not in the exam.

#### **5.4.3.2. Blame on Practices: Model Answers**

The strong emphasis on the final exam not only results, in the opinion of many teachers, in teaching inappropriate skills but also forces the teachers to provide students with model answers. This, in teachers' view, can be blamed on the practices of 'learning off' the model answers that are ingrained in school pedagogies but which prevent the students from achieving the levels of free expression in English required at university.

*Teacher 4F:* This is something that is very sad. In the writing courses, they usually give models of writing, so teachers stick to the model, students stick to the model, and we are not allowed to give them anything different. When it comes to the final exam, if you want to come up with ideas that are more creative and when the students can express themselves clearly, the newspapers will write that this is irrelevant and prevents the students' progress. So there are a lot of complaints about teachers. If you want to give them just a little bit of free writing, this will be a problem. And the paradox is that when they explained the objectives of the curriculum it was aimed at creating creativity and free expression. This is only in theory; in practice it is completely different.

Therefore, all teachers agreed that what is practised in Bahraini schools affects students' transition in a negative way because, according to Teacher 3B for

example, *'they have ready-made writing, they memorize it and when you ask them to write an independent sentence, outside that writing model, they cannot (Teacher 3B)*. This, in the teachers' view, will have negative consequences for coping with language demands at university because if students do not find something to reproduce, they will not be able to write about it. Some teachers reported that this has already been noted at the school level when several students taking the final exam were unable to meaningfully apply the model answer they had learnt to the context of the exam question.

*Teacher 3E*: I remember once, I taught them to write how to complain about an item you bought. There was a fault and you return it back to the shop, they had to write a complaint letter. So, what we did in the class was about the hairdryer, that you plug it in and that it made a sound and smoke came out of it, etc. And then in the exam, they were to write about a book, complain about a book, so they said, we plugged it in and smoke came out and it made a horrible sound. So you know, they don't even have the sense, the thinking.

#### **5.4.3.3. Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding**

The statements under this conceptual category only confirm the sense of blame regarding the spoon-feeding practices that could be noted in the section with the science teachers. Teacher 1I reported that *'[students] are used to receiving everything from the teachers (Teacher 1I)* and Teacher 8C added that *'problems with self-study are linked to the system of education' (Teacher 8C)*. However, Teacher 8C continued and said *'we don't want the teacher to be the focus, we want to encourage the students to study (sic) for themselves, not to depend on the course of the study at school' (Teacher 8C)* if they want to be successful at university.

One teacher remarked that s/he attempted to teach students how to take notes independently, which in that teachers' opinion was very successful.

*Teacher 5F:* One of the curriculums for the commercial students, 215, there is something very nice about it, trying to teach them how to take notes. Instead of taking 5 or 10 minutes in the class for this activity, I took about two lessons because I liked it. I wanted to teach them how to take notes, to prepare them for the university. I tried to explain to them why this was important, I told them they wouldn't be able to follow everything in the lecture, so I tried to show them how to select the important piece of information, how to write something in brief. And they got it, it was very nice.

#### **5.4.3.4. Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks**

Finally, the comments reported under this last category also corroborated with the earlier perspectives of the science teachers who suggested that students' difficulties with developing identities as university members might be blamed on the practices related to awarding marks.

All English teachers reported that they are required to change marks because, as Teacher 4C explained:

*Teacher 4C:* Otherwise they [students] will be angry with us. So this is an important point and when we give them what they really deserve, they might go downstairs to the headmaster and complain. The students are at the zero level and they ask for 20 out of 20.

Teacher 4J agreed and stated that this often results in situations where students *'don't work hard because they know that at the end of the semester they will complain and they will get a good mark. And they pass and with this attitude they go to college'* (Teacher 4J). This, according to all interviewees, will require the students to develop a new understanding of what learning involves because at third level the students will have to understand that their grade will depend only on the compliance of their work with specific marking criteria.

*Teacher 3H:* When they go to the university, they will be in great shock, because there is such a big gap between what they were used to here and what they will have to deal with there. Whatever they hand in there, they will be evaluated according to this, nobody will be reviewing their marks or grades.

#### **5.4.4. Summary and Conclusion to Part 1**

Rogus (1985) describes societal factors as one of the main barriers to successful education and greater self-discipline. The author claims that 'schools reflect rather than determine the values of society' (p.272). The reports from the English teachers in this section in relation to all three deductive themes confirm this in that they demonstrate how certain societal values determine school practices in Bahraini schools and what role this might play in students' transition to university. They also answer the research questions in that they provide details of teachers' understanding of transition based on the perceived role of the lack of medical terminology in science, the nature of language education in national schools and their general pedagogy in students' transition.

The results reported here under the first theme of the English language suggested that the communicative curriculum and teaching of appropriate production and comprehension skills, which could enhance students university careers, cannot be fully integrated in Bahraini schools due to certain cultural views on education that favour teaching for the test. These results also indicated the lack of confidence in students' agency and the general feeling that students' ability to cope at university might be compromised by their linguistic skills. Finally, it was also reported that this ability might be compromised due to the ease with which marks in school could be obtained.

The data in relation to the theme of background knowledge showed further inadequacies in the language programme where it was concluded that the lack of medical terminology in English will make it more difficult for students to move through the educational outcomes of the university. The teachers felt that, as a consequence of this, students will have to develop new identities and become agents that can cope with a completely new material.

This, in the opinions of all teachers, will be hard because of the findings reported under the third deductive theme of school pedagogy. These findings indicated that the students will have to undergo many developments due to the local practices of awarding marks, providing model answers and spoon-feeding and not expect that the same pedagogies will be practised by the university.

Most importantly, the findings from all three deductive themes showed that teachers are aware of students third level needs but that implementing strategies and pedagogies that would address these needs may be impossible due to demands the societal values place on education system. This led to the development of the conceptual categories of inadequacy, lack of confidence and blame which will be used in the analysis in the discussion section to explore how these views contribute to our understanding of transition.

Drawing together the findings presented so far from both groups of secondary teachers, it seems that Bahraini students beginning higher education might face many challenges while attempting to move through the educational outcomes of the university programme as their teachers suggested that the practices and the broader view on education in the community of Bahraini schools do not develop



agency in students that would allow them to cope at university. On the other hand, strong confidence of the science teachers in the science programme suggests that transition might be eased because of good background knowledge that will assist the students in the mastery of the material at university. In contrast, the lack of confidence on the part of the English teachers in students' linguistic skills suggests that this mastery of knowledge might be more difficult.

Therefore, through interviewing students in the second part of the findings chapter which follows next, I aim to explore how the students feel about what has been presented by secondary teachers and which of the factors mentioned by the science and English teachers, and any other, played a role in their transition. Similarly, the data from university lecturers will also be presented in this part and their perspectives on the role of school practices, science education and language abilities in the transition of Bahraini students will be explored. It is believed that comparing the perspectives from the community of schools and the community of the medical university will generate meaningful data that will help to develop a better understanding of transition but also to explore how helpful the model of Communities of Practice can be in explaining this process.

## ***Part 2 – Findings Obtained from Participants at the University***

### **5.5. Foundation Year Students**

The aim of this part of the research was to explore the students' experiences with their transition after the first year of study at the medical university. The students' perceptions as to what role factors associated with the English language, subject-specific background knowledge and secondary school practices played in the transition in that first year of study were sought here. The broader societal aspects of Bahraini schools were also explored and their impact on student changes in identity and agency was also investigated.

Likewise with the participant groups in Part 1 of this chapter, the data were analysed using the coding scheme in table 4.7 in relation to the three deductive themes of background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogies. Comparisons were made among individual respondents within each group and between the groups of students that took part in this investigation. Similarly to the English and science teachers in the previous sections, matrixes of data were created for each group of participants to look for similarities and differences in opinions of students in all groups. These matrixes were built to order and synthesise the data to construct an index of raw data consisting of codes, categories and verbatim text (Ritchie et al, 2003, cited in Bryman, 2008). The data was organised thematically, according to the deductive themes and this is how it is presented below. Selected students' verbatim responses from the original English are also included to support what is argued here and symbols such as (sic) and

square brackets have been used to indicate grammatical errors and missing words.

Pauses will be indicated by ... ..

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with the students and the joint analysis from both rounds of interviews is presented here. The sample in the first round of interviews consisted of four groups of Bahraini students who have just completed their first year at the university. Two groups consisted of students in the English Language and Communications programme (ELC) (n=10 and n=12) and the other two were formed of students in the Foundation Year (FY) who, having gained higher scores on the IELTS test, were exempt from the language course (n=7 and n=6). Such sampling was useful for comparing data between low language and high language groups in order to establish if difficulties with transition could be related to the English language. No such differences were noted, which is an interesting finding and the participants explain this in the sections below.

Individual students were coded using acronyms ELC1 and ELC2 for students in language groups 1 and 2 and Non-ELC1 and Non-ELC2 for students exempt from the English programme. Individual students were subsequently given numbers from 1 to 10 in language group 1, 1 to 12 in language group 2, 1 to 7 in non-language group 1 and 1 to 6 in non-language group 2. So, for instance, a response from student number 4 in language group 1 was coded as ELC1 Student 4 and a response from student 1 in the second non-language group was coded as Non-ELC2 Student 1. The students who participated in the second round of interviews (n=9) were given the same codes as in the first round.

### 5.5.1. Theme 1- Background Knowledge: The Positive Role of Science Base in Transition

Two categories were identified under this first deductive theme with the students and they were related to the science base the learners brought with them from school and the translation process they use for studying at university. Students' confidence in these two categories was noted in the analysis process when they explained how background knowledge increased their understanding of the new material, helped them overcome language difficulties and facilitated the translation process.

The conceptual category of confidence in science base has already occurred with the science teachers who also believed that good background knowledge in science could ease the transition of students into the medical programme. I will return to the category of confidence in the discussion chapter but first I present selected participant comments in relation to background knowledge below. Table 5.11 contains the categories identified within the theme of *Background Knowledge: The Positive Role of Science Base in Transition* and their associated codes.

Table 5.11: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of Background Knowledge: The Positive Role of Science Base in Transition

Category	Codes
<b>Confidence in Sciences: Good Background</b>	studied previously in school; know it in Arabic; helps with learning in English; strong science
<b>Confidence in Sciences: Translation</b>	translating from Arabic; helps in identifying words; increased time of study

### 5.5.1.1. Confidence in Sciences: Good Background

The responses collected in relation to subject knowledge revealed that all medical students regard this area as their strong point. For example, one Non-ELC student reported that *'the science at school was so strong'* (Non-ELC2 Student 1), and another one agreed that it enhanced their understanding of the lecture content and helped them overcome language barriers because *'the basics of science, (sic) we have it from school and we are just relearning it now in English'* (Non-ELC1 Student 5).

All students reported lack of difficulties with moving through the learning outcomes of the Foundation Year (FY) programme and expressed great confidence in their background knowledge. One Non-ELC students talked about it in the following way:

*Non-ELC1 Student 3: What was easy was that all the material that we are taking now, we (sic) have taken in government schools, maybe even in deeper ways, not in a way we are [studying it] now, so that's why it was very helpful. Because we know what they are talking about, we understand the whole subject.*

These findings suggest an increased sense of agency among the students throughout their study in the FY. It is quite clear that students' confidence in good background knowledge facilitated their movement from the periphery to the centre of the new community, despite the lack of appropriate linguistic attributes. Lack of these attributes, in light of the literature discussed in Chapter 3 regarding the relationship between identity and agency, could have been expected to prevent this movement. It is also quite clear that the confidence in science and memorisation strategies additionally increased students' sense of agency in

relation to negotiating their learning identities at university. The findings in the section below provide evidence for that, highlighting that being able to adopt old coping strategies enabled the students to meaningfully act on the old practice in the new setting.

#### **5.5.1.2. Confidence in Sciences: Translation**

The students in all groups reported that their learning of lectures is based on translating from English to Arabic and then back to English and ELC2 Student 1 explained that *'some people, they translate the whole lecture from Arabic'* (ELC2 Student 1). However, translating did not seem to be a problem for any of the interviewees because, as they all agreed, the good background knowledge assisted them in the translation process. Non-ELC2 Student 3 explained that *'we have studied all the material that was given but it was in Arabic, so now, when I'm translating I am just using the dictionary and then I go 'Oh, that's that one'* (Non-ELC2 Student 3). The only negative impact of the translation process was noted in relation to the prolonged time of study because, for example, ELC1 Student 2 stated that *'when I study the lecture, it takes me three hours, but for somebody from the private school, it takes one hour. And this makes me crazy'* (ELC1 Student 2).

#### **5.5.2. Theme 2: The English Language: Practices and Policy in View of Third Level Education**

The conceptual categories that emerged here within the deductive theme of the English language were *Blame on Practices* and *Inadequacy of Policy*. Both of these categories were also noted in various sections of the findings from the

English teachers and the responses of students here indicated that what was predicted by the teachers in terms of negative consequences of policy regarding the language programme and specific practices involved in teaching English had some kind of impact on students' experiences with the transition. The categories of blame on practices and inadequacy of school structure are very important in this study because they are helpful in uncovering data that will have a specific meaning for Communities of Practice as a socio-cultural theory for understanding transition, which will be discussed in the discussion chapter in more detail. The summary of all categories and codes that emerged under the theme of the English language is presented below in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of the English Language: Reflections on Some Practices and Policy in View of Third Level Education

Category	Codes
<b>Blame on Practices: Memorising Model Answers</b>	memorising worked in school; difference in language skills now; not able to write freely; writing needed for exams; important to write clearly
<b>Blame on Practices: Lack of Speaking Skills</b>	didn't practice speaking in school; teachers spoke in Arabic; some students are shy to speak English; some students won't ask questions for fear of making mistakes
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Lack of Medical Terminology in English</b>	value of medical terminology; impacts study time; general proficiency not important; students need medical terminology

### 5.5.2.1. Blame on Practices: Memorising Model Answers

When talking about obstacles to transition in relation to the English language, the students explained that the emphasis on the final marks in school results in teachers providing model answers who, as one Non-ELC student stated '(sic) *give us a topic and [tell us to] write on it and that's it, (sic) to give our marks (Non-ELC1 Student 2)*. Another student agreed and added '*but they don't focus on teaching*

*English (sic) on long term basis' (Non-ELC1 Student 4), which is why, according to ELC1 Student 6, 'we have a high level of English at school but low level of English at uni because we didn't get used to the strategies' (ELC1 Student 6).*

Lack of these strategies, in the students' opinion, created some challenges in terms of coping with the language demands when they started university because, memorising model answers in school resulted in students not knowing grammatical rules and syntax which, in turn, hindered their performance in exams *'because to answer the question, you must write it in your own words. So if you don't have the ability (sic) of writing in English, you will have a big problem' (Non-ELC2 Student 3).* ELC1 Student 3 agreed with Non-ELC Student 3 by saying that *'for me in the first semester, I know the answer but when I wanna write it, it twists my tongue; I don't know how to put the information. (sic) This kind of simple things is affecting us' (ELC1 Student 3).*

All students highlighted the fact that they had no difficulty learning the material but answering examination questions was challenging because of their inability to write freely in English because *'you have to write in a way that the doctor will understand' (ELC1 Student 4).* Non-ELC2 Student 5 explained that it was important because *'you may understand the idea but you couldn't transfer it to the other end and the doctor misunderstands it and you will lose your mark and you know the answer' (Non-ELC2 Student 5).*

When the model of Communities of Practice is used in transitions, it is suggested that how language is developed in a specific community affects students' participation in another. The statements above support this when the students say



that the practice in school made it more difficult for them to express the scientific content. At the same time, it is also important to note that the students did not say that it prevented them from learning the material. This allows us to begin to think that the power of students' agency might be a more important factor than inadequate practice. In the sections below, the students blame the schools for not giving them sufficient opportunities to develop appropriate identities but is it really that important for their transition in light of what has been reported so far?

### **5.5.2.2. Blame on Practices: Lack of Speaking Skills**

The transition of students was also limited, in the interviewees' view, by the fact that English teachers in school did not sufficiently practise speaking in English. The students, however, felt that it was important because:

*Non-ELC2 Student 6:* If teachers and doctors all speak in English, you are forced to speak in English. There is no way out but in school, even if the English teacher speaks in Arabic, you're gonna say two sentences in English and then flip to Arabic.

Lack of speaking skills, therefore, affected the sense of agency of some students who, as explained by ELC2 Student 3, '*might feel shy, they feel shy that they might (sic) do a mistake (ELC2 Student 3)*' and who, as a result, choose not to ask for clarifications when they are struggling with something, for example, in tutorials.

ELC2 Student 4 agreed:

*ELC2 Student 4:* It's not only the participation in the tutorials, it's even when some students that were with us in the batch, if they don't get anything [don't understand the material], they never ask. And then at the end, they will fail.

### 5.5.2.3. Inadequacy of Policy: Lack of Medical Terminology in English

Interestingly, despite some comments regarding the writing skills reported earlier, the students in all groups agreed that their general proficiency in English did not play any major role in the transition because memorising the information in the lecture slides without using other references does not require good English skills. Non-ELC2 Student 2 explained that *'because everything is clear, we are just taking the (sic) basis from the lectures, so we don't really have to go to other references, because it's just the basics, just the foundation (Non-ELC2 Student 2)* and another students added that *'I don't think that the college students need that, I think they (sic) will be more for the medical terminology' (ELC1 Student 5).*

All students emphasised that *'they should teach subjects in English in government schools because when they [students] graduate, they don't need Arabic skills' (ELC2 Student 4).* One of the students emphasised that at university *'it helps, it makes shorter the time of study' (Non-ELC1 Student 2).* Some students who attended the language course provided by the medical university, which was described in Chapter 2, also stated that medical terminology was useful for their transition because it gave them the opportunity to study sciences in English.

*ELC1 Student 2: ELC<sup>8</sup> is useful, like (sic) for the medical terminology. Even the pre-session<sup>9</sup>, when I came here, I wasn't used to studying scientific things in English. I had to use the dictionary first but now I'm OK.*

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<sup>8</sup> English Language Class (ELC) run at the medical university

<sup>9</sup> Pre-session Course in English is offered to students prior to their start in Foundation Year. The materials used in this course are based on the learning objectives of the core subjects in the FY.

### 5.5.3. Theme 3: School Pedagogy: The Role of Broader School Structures in Students' Transition

This theme consists of seven categories which include comments regarding the positive role of memorisation in students' transition, the initial shock of university linked to change in structure and assessment, as well as what was predicted earlier by both groups of secondary teachers in relation to the consequences of spoon-feeding and ways of awarding marks for transition to third level. Two new sets of comments were also identified here; these were made in relation to the role of teacher-centred approaches and Western influences on the culture of Bahrain in students' transition, which have not been identified with any other participant group so far. The conceptual categories included confidence, blame, inadequacy, broader view on education and broader culture. Table 5.13 summarises all categories and codes identified under the deductive theme of school pedagogy.

Table 5.13: The Categories and Codes within the Theme of School Pedagogy: Students' Feelings about the Role of Broader School Structures in Their Transition

Category	Codes
<b>Confidence in Study Strategies</b>	possible to memorise at university; memorisation supports learning; memorisation provides back up; majority of tasks at university based on memorisation
<b>Lack of Confidence: Change in Structure</b>	lecture-based style; large groups; lack of interaction; forced to study on their own
<b>Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment</b>	lack of continuous assessment at university; difficult to study for the finals; material overload; continuous assessment gives students confidence
<b>Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding</b>	School did not prepare for university; summaries from teachers; using teacher notes to study
<b>Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks</b>	marking at university very strict; schools lenient; schools give marks for anything
<b>Broader View on Education: Teacher-Centred Approach</b>	schools don't communicate with students; students don't speak in front of others in school; schools don't develop confidence

### 5.5.3.1. Confidence in Study Strategies

We could see in the previous sections of the findings that acquiring knowledge in science was reported to be based on memorising texts. It seems that the students in this study managed to transfer these study strategies to the context of the medical university and therefore did not have to undergo any changes in their learning identities. This was additionally supported by the strong sense of agency revealed under Theme 1, which some students return to in the quotes below.

ELC2 Student 1 explained that transferring strategies was possible because *'some of the subjects, you need to memorise, like anatomy, there are books and you need to memorise (ELC2 Student1)* and ELC2 Student 4 added that *'there are certain subjects, like in physical development, they never change, they are concepts, you have to memorise it (ELC2 Student 4)*.

It seems that the students' sense of agency was quite strong when at university because, as they all stated, they felt that the memorisation techniques they used to study science in school supported their learning because, as ELC1 Student 3 explained *'of course that we need to understand the lectures, but it is, I think like 60% to memorise' (ELC1 Student 3)*. Another student agreed and emphasised that knowing that they could rely on memorisation gave the students confidence in the material and created a sense of security.

*ELC2 Student 2: I think memorising is a backup for understanding. When you understand something and when you, like, memorise it, you feel confident.*

Even when you go (sic) in the exam and you forgot the things you understood, at least you memorised it.

### **5.5.3.2. Lack of Confidence: Change in Structure**

Students' confidence in their ability to study that they brought with them from school, however, was diminished when a dramatic change in structure related to lecture-based large class teaching occurred. All students agreed that they had to develop new, more independent learning identities because, as Non-ELC1 Student 7 noted, *'they are used to something else in school that direct communication with the student and the teacher and there were just 20 or 24 in the class but now, there are like 80 or even more. And they don't get the attention they used to get in school'* (Non-ELC1 Student 7).

This lack of personal interaction, according to many students, resulted in poorer transition because access to help was reduced. The lack of lecturer availability made it more difficult for students to acquire the material which sometimes needed additional explanation. In schools, this help was always provided.

*Non-ELC1 Student 7:* And you know, the teachers were always in class and when you needed them, [you] just [needed to] knock on the door and enter. Here you have to send an email, to (sic) take a meeting. And for example, one of the doctors here might be teaching nursing, or another year, so they are not (sic) easy to get. So we had some opportunities to interact. Whereas here it's just (sic) give a lecture and go. And whenever you don't understand, just find someone to explain it to you.

### **5.5.3.3. Inadequacy of Policy: Assessment**

A change in structure was also noted by the majority of students to be a factor in their transition when they realised that the school policy based on the continuous assessment was no longer adequate and that the university followed a high-stake summative assessment scheme.

Many students referred to the lack of continuous assessment at the university as one of the biggest difficulties and reported that this has caused some problems for students in the Foundation Year.

*Non-ELC1 Student 5:* The evaluation that is here, I think it's the only (sic) one that follows the English system in Bahrain. So that poses the largest load on the students because the majority of our grade (sic) goes on the final exam ... .. while other universities, even medicine, like for example AGU<sup>10</sup>, they have less (sic) load on them because their final exam might be 40%. So that makes it hard, for example, we have friends from other universities, they can't understand the load that you have, they don't understand (sic) how is it to get to an exam here.

The students agreed that the change in the system of assessment was quite significant for their transition because Non-ELC 1 Student 7 explained that in school the marks from the continuous assessment allowed the students to think that '(sic) *you have something in your pocket that makes you think "Ok, if I mess up in this exam, I have something already"* (Non-ELC 1 Student 7). Here at university, it was no longer possible so '*it freaks you out obviously*' (Non-ELC1 Student 7).

#### **5.5.3.4. Blame on Practices: Spoon-Feeding**

The participants reported that the majority of students 'freaked out' when facing problems with mastering large amounts of material and with understanding how to study. All students linked their difficulties to the spoon-feeding practices in school and blamed their schools because, as one Non-ELC student highlighted, '*they didn't prepare us at all in terms of studying because they gave us, like, summaries and told us to study those* (Non-ELC2 Student 3). Non-ELC2 Student 6 agreed with Non-ELC2 Student 3:

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<sup>10</sup> Arabian Gulf University (AGU) is another medical school in Bahrain.

*Non-ELC2 Student 6:* At school they didn't give us (sic) that much to study, they would give us papers, summaries of the book, we would just study (sic) that and go to the exam and it was easy. So when we came to the university, I wasn't ready to study that much, you know, for the whole month and then go to the exams.

The students agreed that they had to develop new learning practices because they had to learn how to become more independent learners and how to prioritise information, so much so that, according to Non-ELC1 Student 2, *'the language was not an issue at first but an understanding of what they university wants, what will come in the exams. What we need to focus on and what lectures are more important than the others (Non-ELC1 Student 2).*

What students reported here points out to the importance of practice in that the quotes from the students indicate that the negotiated meaning of what learning involves built some boundaries between the two communities of practice. At the same time, the students did not report that this negotiated meaning prevented them from crossing the boundaries, suggesting that perhaps their increased sense of agency due to confidence in science was more powerful in crossing these boundaries than the practice. This is particularly evident in the statement of student Non-ELC1 Student 2 who said that language was not a problem, despite the fact that the practice that was used to teach was reported in this study to be inadequate.

#### **5.5.3.5. Blame on Practices: Awarding Marks**

The students also blamed the school practices related to awarding marks and stated that they had to undergo some sort of personal change which, in ELC1 Student 1's view, required understanding that *'the marking in here is very strict. In school, if I don't know the answer I can write anything about it, you will get*

*something at least' (ELC1 Student 1). ELC Student 5 agreed that the strict marking criteria at university was a shock to them because if 'at school (...) if you go and talk to them, like 'Teacher, why didn't you give me this mark?' They're gonna give you this mark. (sic)It's OK' (ELC2 Student 5).*

### **5.5.3.6. Broader View on Education: Teacher-Centred Approach**

Some difficulties with transition, according to all interviewees, were also related to gaining more confidence in speaking in front of others.

*Non-ELC2 Student 1: We are more confident talking in front of people, like in presentations, that's one big thing that we never even did in school but teachers should actually do that for the kids, for the students (sic) in the effort, in like, making them more confident. That's really one big change that I had in Foundation.*

ELC2 Student 3 stated that the broader structure of schools which places the teacher in the centre *'didn't teach us how to be more confident ... .. We (sic) don't have such a thing in our school. It's missing, you know, the way they taught you and they communicate with you' (ELC2 Student 3).*

### **5.5.3.7. Broader Culture: Western Influences**

Finally, despite the fact that all the factors listed above and that the feelings of inadequacy and blame which developed in the students when they entered university caused some difficulties with the transition, the students emphasised that they were not the reason for not making the transition. All students agreed that students who do not make it are the ones who do not study and Non-ELC1 Student 7 highlighted that it failure cannot be contributed to culture because *' [they] are probably not studying, not catching up with their understanding of the material or*



*not, so it's their fault, their personal fault, you can't blame the culture for it (Non-ELC1 Student 7).*

The students reported that they were prepared for the realities of Western education because of the multiple Western influences in the country. They even stated that such broader school structures as separation of boys and girls did not affect their transition when they came to a mixed-environment because, as one student explained, *'it's OK because even if I (sic) don't live in a mixed environment in school, I lived in it in institutes or another programme, so it's not an obstacle (Non-ELC1 Student 2).* In terms of students' cultural identity, the participants agreed that it was easy to make the transition because, as noted by one Non-ELC student, *'Bahrain culture is relatively open compared to others, especially in the workplace, education wise, school, university, college, higher education institute where you have many cultures (Non-ELC 2 Student 6).*

### **5.5.3. Summary**

This section of the findings chapter presented data from the FY university students who discussed the levels and nature of changes that were required from them to make a transition in relation to the three deductive themes inherent to this research. This data answered the first research question in that it presented the perspectives of students on their transition and indicated the role of science background knowledge, the English language proficiency and the patterns through which it was shaped, as well as broader school structure in this transition.

The students in this study demonstrated a high level of confidence in relation to the first theme of background knowledge and highlighted the positive impact of science

education on their transition in that good background knowledge facilitated their learning, compensated for weaker language abilities and assisted them in the translation process. Within the second theme of the English language, the interviewees here substantiated the predictions of the English teachers in that they blamed the practices and policy regarding the language education in Bahrain for memorising writing, not teaching professional terminology and not developing speaking skills. Under the third theme, the students also substantiated what was previously predicted by both groups of teachers and revealed that spoon-feeding, leniency with marks, lack of self-discipline and too much emphasis on continuous assessment caused some problems with the transition. Finally, the broader societal views on schools were found not to be helpful in building students' levels of confidence but the broader societal culture was found to be helpful in the transition process because Western influences on Bahrain allowed the students to better engage with Western structures of learning. The meaning of these findings for the socio-cultural theory underpinning this research will be presented in the discussion chapter, but first, in the next section, I present the perspectives on the transition of the last group of participants in this study – that is, university lecturers.

## 5.6. Foundation Year Lecturers

In this last section of the findings chapter, I explore the perspectives and views of the foundation year lecturers at the medical university on the transition of Bahraini students. The sections below summarise the qualitative findings from six semi-structured interviews on the faculty's views on the issue of transition in terms of three deductive themes of the English language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy. Therefore, the statements below include the faculty's expectations in terms of English and importance of good English language skills for the core subjects delivered in the foundation year and for the specific demands of the university tasks in this year. Other statements also demonstrate how students' transition is perceived in reference to learners' previous school experience in terms of pedagogy and the current pedagogical structures of the medical university. Finally, comments regarding the transfer of science-background knowledge are also included.

All six lecturers that teach in the foundation year were interviewed. Data from all lecturers was compared and contrasted and segments of raw transcripts were put in a matrix consisting of the main deductive themes and relating to the coding framework presented in Chapter 4. Lecturers were randomly given numbers from 1 to 6 and their responses were coded, for example, *Faculty 1* or *Faculty 5*.

The findings below are organised thematically and, similarly to all previous interviews, I present the data under the three deductive themes : *Theme1: Background Knowledge: Views regarding the Science Base and Approaches to Study, Theme 2: The English Language: Feelings about the Importance of*

*Language Proficiency and Theme 3: School Pedagogy: Views Regarding School Structure and Some Practices.* The conceptual categories that were found here include *Awareness of Differences between School and University, Adequacy or Inadequacy of Policy or Practices, Confidence and Blame*, which extensively overlap with the categories presented in the sections with other participants. The summary of these categories and their associated codes can be found in relevant tables under each theme (5.14 – 5.16). Finally, to support what I argue here, selected extracts from the transcripts are presented verbatim from the original English and pauses and missing words are indicated by ... .. and square brackets.

As indicated earlier, this last set of conceptual categories, along with the categories that were identified across all participant groups will be examined in the discussion section to help to establish the value of Communities of Practice as a socio-cultural theory for understanding transitions. They will be used as a lens to look at what is proposed by Communities of Practice in terms of the role of school practices, ways of acquiring subject-specific background knowledge and language in students' transition in references to what was presented in Chapter 3.

### **5.6.1. Theme 1: Background Knowledge: Views Regarding the Science Base and Approaches to Study**

The categories that were identified under this theme and which are presented in Table 5.14 include *Lack of Awareness of Differences between School and University, Adequacy of Study Strategies and Adequacy of Memorisation.* The comments made here by the university lecturers suggested that despite the differences in the levels of programmes, students are still able to transfer their

study strategies from school and achieve success in mastering the learning outcomes by using methods based on memorisation. This in light of the theoretical framework indicates that the transition of Bahraini students will be facilitated because the findings show that there is some kind of continuity of practice across the two communities in this study.

Table 5.14: Categories and Codes within the Theme of Background Knowledge: Lecturers' Views Regarding the Science Base and Approaches to Study

<b>Category</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Lack of Awareness of Differences between School and University: Depth of Knowledge</b>	university more demanding; different curriculum base; students' confident about their background knowledge; confidence in background knowledge
<b>Adequacy of Study Strategies</b>	translation; students translate at university; translation works at university; high achievers use the same study techniques
<b>Adequacy of Memorisation</b>	students memorise; memorisation leads to understanding; good students memorise; learning at university based on memorisation; very little memorisation; emphasis on skills

### **5.6.1.1. Lack of Awareness of Differences between School and University**

All faculty stated that beginning the Foundation Year (FY) might require the students to undergo many developments for learning the curriculum at university may pose additional demands on students related to the depth of the material. Faculty 4 noted that *'I don't think they've taken it into consideration what they learn here and I think it's a large step in what they have learned before, what they learned in [Faculty 4's subject] and where the curriculum is based (Faculty 4).*

One lecturer explained that students are confident about their background knowledge and that is why they do not realise the challenges the level of demand related to the depth of the material will pose to their transition.

*Faculty2:* They assume that they know all about the kidney because they did it in the secondary level but what they don't appreciate is that the extent of understanding of the function of the kidney is far more detailed at third level education than it is in secondary. And that applies to all secondary level systems, they don't cover it to the depth we would but the students perception is that 'I've done the kidney before, therefore I know all about it so why should I do it again?

### **5.6.1.2. Adequacy of Study Strategies**

At the same time, all faculty also agreed that the students who seem to have made the transition almost seamlessly are those students who are able to apply the knowledge from school to the university context. Lecturer 5's view, for example, was that Bahraini students:

*Faculty5:* (...) worked out their way of doing that and what they are doing is translating English into Arabic and back, some of the materials that we do with them is what they studied in their Arabic curriculum and they are able to transfer some of that knowledge across.

All lecturers were in agreement that transferring this knowledge is possible because it seems that what made the students high achievers in school also makes them high achievers at university. This indicates that only minor changes in agency and identity might be required. The confidence of students discussed here by the lecturers that transferring background knowledge through translation will guarantee success at university also points out to the significant role of learner agency in transitions which, as demonstrated in the quote above, results in constructing some sort of an independent practice. This independent practice is the strategic action students seem to have developed because, as explained below,

their sense of agency might have been increased due to the 'tools' given to them in school.

*Faculty2:* When I look at the list of high achievers I rank them based on the raw results, there are plenty of high achievers who've come to us with scholarships from Tawjihiya<sup>11</sup> for instance, who are high achievers as well. They have been able to make that transition almost seamlessly and I often ask them and it seems that what has worked for them in secondary school also works for them here. Obviously they are making some adaptations but they seem to have all the tools that are required to remain high achievers here.

Faculty 4 agreed and stated that:

*Faculty 4:* We've seen, we've done a lot of stats on it and we've seen the students that come from the national system will soon be as well off as those coming from the international system and in general their marks tend to be higher.

### **5.6.1.3. Adequacy of Memorisation**

The interviewees agreed that, similarly to what the students stated in the previous section, the high achievers at university have a great ability to recall and that the adequacy of memorisation as a learning technique builds up levels of comprehension required by the medical university. It seems that the adequacy of memorisation also builds up levels of confidence in students as learners and increases their sense of agency to take strategic actions such as translation of the lecture content.

*Faculty2:* When I ask the high achievers 'How do you do it?', they very quickly tell me they've just learnt the material. I think that the high achievers have cracked how they personally learn and they are able to do it. And in most cases they just go through every piece of information we give them and they learn it, whether it's by rote learning I don't know, I think that their comprehension issues goes hand in hand with it, they automatically comprehend because they absorb a lot of information, it's already there.

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<sup>11</sup> Tawjihiya – national secondary qualification in Bahrain awarded after three years of secondary education.

That is why the faculty think that Bahraini students can transfer their study strategies from school and the majority of them also agreed that a lot depends on memorisation in most of the modules in the Foundation Year, which minimises these changes even more. For example, Faculty 4 explained that memorisation is dominant because the majority of the material requires the students to label diagrams and remember the steps of life cycles.

*Faculty4:* [It] requires a lot of memorisation and you will see a lot of the questions that require them to label the diagram, so they are required to memorise the labels of the diagram ... .. You take them through the steps but again they have to learn the steps, you should know the first step, you should know the second step, some of them are taught in cycles, some of them it's just a repeated thing. They don't really have to figure it out for themselves. You just tell them how it works and they are happy enough to learn it.

Faculty 2 agreed with this view and explained that eliminating memorisation is unavoidable because of the specific nature of some subjects that require an extensive knowledge of diagrams. He also added that this nature of programmes facilitates the transition of students with lower English proficiency and makes the role of language less important.

*Faculty2:* We try and avoid it, but it is unavoidable, particularly if you present a diagram and you ask them to label that diagram. You do have to learn the diagram. There are quite a few questions like that and the reason we moved over to that is because we're in an international university, you have various levels of English and therefore to get the information from the students with a minimum amount of written English, I think it's probably fair to the whole student body rather than to expect a written essay of 500 words on a particular topic.

Only two lecturers disagreed that learning in their modules is based on memorisation where Faculty 5 explained that *'very little is direct recall. The majority, I would say about 80% would be required to apply it to particular examples, and those examples may not have been given in a lecture'* (Faculty 5)



and Faculty 6 stated that learning in his module ‘*is based on compliance with skills*’ (Faculty 6) [which cannot be memorised].

## 5.6.2. Theme 2: The English Language: The Importance of Language Proficiency

Table 5.15 below summarises the main categories and codes that were grouped under the theme of *The English Language: Feelings about the Importance of Language Proficiency*. The lecturers’ comments under this theme indicated a lack of blame on language as a major factor impacting transition in a negative way but, at the same time, they also implied their awareness of the impact poor language may have on the transition in general. Other comments were conceptualised as disregard towards language accuracy for the lecturers indicated that they do not pay attention to language mistakes, as well as inadequacy of raising the admissions criteria in terms of English which was derived from the lecturers’ statements about students being able to cope at the current language level.

Table 5.15: Categories and Codes within the Theme of the English Language: Feelings about the Importance of Good Language Proficiency

Category	Codes
<b>Lack of Blame on Language</b>	can be more difficult for low language users; English not a major factor; Tawjihiya students very successful despite low English; top students from Bahraini schools where English is low
<b>Awareness of the Language Impact</b>	English impacts translation; loss of information; dominance of language, time consuming
<b>Poor English</b>	accuracy not important; key words; spelling not important; demonstration of knowledge; marks for effort; language mistakes do not impact marking
<b>Inadequacy of Raising the English criteria</b>	not necessary to raise criteria; taking opportunity from students; language not the main factor

### 5.6.2.1. Lack of Blame on Language

The faculty in this study generally agreed with Faculty 2 who noted that *'if the English language is poor, their [students'] ability to absorb the information is very compromised'*(Faculty2). They also acknowledged that having to simultaneously bring one's level of English up and learn the subject information must be difficult for the students and that this might result in poorer transition in terms of moving through the learning outcomes.

*Faculty5*: They are thrown into the deep end, so probably before they even have an English class, they have a physics lecture or chemistry lecture and so on, so their English language level or skills are not there to allow them to learn normally the other subjects, so they are basically on a losing track at a very start and this can serve to demotivate them.

At the same time, however, all interviewees stated that students with good English struggle as well and that a poor command of the English language is not a major factor contributing to transition.

*Faculty5*: They might be weak in the English language but I don't believe that that's one of the major factors. I don't think that that's happening because of the English language. I've had people who are very capable English language speakers but when you look at the demographic of the students who are failing, there are a large number of high English language ability students who are failing and failing miserably.

Faculty 3 recalled his own observations and concluded that *'if you could remember, the people who have been very successful over the past six years that were at the very top, they were all the people from national government schools'*<sup>12</sup>(Faculty 3). Faculty 1 supported this observation and when asked

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<sup>12</sup> The English language of students from national schools is very low, a lot lower than that of students from other schools in Bahrain and abroad.

whether he would blame the English language for difficulties with transition, he answered *'I wouldn't, no, because we get some Tawjihiya students that are excellent, and some of them have got first class honours'* (Faculty 1). These findings have implications for what has been raised earlier in this chapter regarding 'inadequate' linguistic identity of students. What the faculty said here with regards to the English language seems to support the great role of agency in transitions because it was once again stated that the lack of specific linguistic attributes does not stop the students from moving from the periphery.

### **5.6.2.2. Awareness of the Language Impact**

Despite agreeing that language is not a major factor in the transition, however, the interviewees stated that they are aware of the fact that poor English skills might hinder this process. Faculty 4 noted that this is so because:

*Faculty4:* A lot of them will translate what we're doing from English into Arabic so they can learn it and then back into English again, so they go through probably having to learn it in Arabic and then having to learn it in English again.

Faculty 1 agreed and reported that the scientific content might be lost in such a long translation process, which leads to numerous distortions in the meaning of the concepts taught and to dominance of language.

*Faculty1:*What you find is that those who haven't got the language skills, those who don't have the English, the competency in English to express themselves what they do is they hear you talk in English and they translate it into Arabic and then back into English to get the answer, that's a long way and what becomes dominant? It's the language that becomes dominant and the idea is lost and that's the problem for those who haven't got the competency in English.

Some problems for less competent language users may, in the opinion of the lecturers, occur when students try to learn the material from the Power Point

lectures. It was explained in Chapter 2 that the medical university uses Power Point lectures as main learning resources, especially in the Foundation Year, and the respondents in this study agreed that everything the students need to know is included in the Power Point slides and *'yes, it's always on the slides'* (Faculty 1). However, because the Power Point is not a written account as such, students with weak English abilities will face challenges connected with the change of language because, according to Faculty 2, *'they have to be able to understand what's written on Power Points and that might not actually be complete sentences, that could be bullet points'* (Faculty 2). Understanding the Power Point, therefore, requires such skills from students as synthesising and connecting information which students with poor language proficiency will not have. Additionally, Faculty 2 explained that:

*Faculty2: When you're actually giving a power point lecture, you're filling in the gaps in the actual power point. So you expect them to be able to write notes on their power points or on their paper, to further explain it themselves. They have to be able to write English in an intelligent way.*

Faculty 1 agreed that this might be an issue for lower language users and added that *'their reading skill has to be fluid, it has to be easy, and then, the expression ... .. if they are not able to logically follow through each part, they won't understand what they get'* (Faculty 1). Earlier faculty statements suggested though that this does not seem to be the problem for Bahraini students who seem to be proactive about their deficiencies in English by referring to their background knowledge.

### **5.6.2.3. Poor English**

The lack of skills discussed above was not seen as the major problem also because of the general disregard of lecturers towards language accuracy when marking students' work.

All lecturers agreed that they do not verify the correctness of language in students' assignments but rather look for demonstration of knowledge, which, again, makes the role of the English language less important and requires fewer changes in students' agency.

*Faculty 5:* For instance, if a student has some key words that are necessary to demonstrate an understanding but those key words are not necessarily in the right place, or a sentence that actually fully makes sense, I would give a certain amount of marks for at least the key words. In terms of structures, I would give a certain amount of leeway if the way they write [refers to concepts taught in Faculty 5's module] in a clear way. If they are not 100% accurate, I will still award marks for parts of it. I am not trying to do this because I am trying to bring people up or anything like that but if I feel that it is a demonstration of knowledge, then I will give them marks for it.

It was generally agreed by all lecturers that *'as long as you can make sense of it and you know that they know their stuff'* (Faculty 4), full marks are awarded. The faculty also agreed with what Faculty 4 stated about students who fail. Faculty 4 said that it is *'people who simply don't know it, even if they have good English, they have just written really really bad stuff and you know that they don't know it'* (Faculty 4).

#### **5.6.2.4. Inadequacy of Raising the English Criteria**

Because language was not seen by the lecturers as the major factor in students' transition, the faculty agreed that raising the admissions criteria as far as English is concerned is not necessary. Faculty 5, for example, stated that *'it is the students with questionable motivation or vague educational record'* (Faculty 5) who are less likely to make the transition. Similarly, Faculty 2 agreed that to keep raising the minimum requirement in terms of English would take an opportunity from students at a very young stage in their life.

*Faculty2*: I think that if you raise the entry criteria too high, there are a group of students out there who really want to become doctors. And I think to limit them based on high entry criteria, it's a bit unfair, I think we have in this university a philosophy that we give a student an opportunity, and I will be slow to raise the minimum requirement.

### 5.6.3. Theme 3: School Pedagogy: Views Regarding School Structure and Some Practices

The categories that were identified under the last theme of school pedagogy referred more broadly to all secondary contexts, rather than to the context of Bahraini schools in particular. The lecturers agreed that the concepts of blame on school practices, inadequacy of school structures for outcome-based tertiary education and lack of self-discipline in students that emerged here are applicable to the whole student body, rather than Bahraini students alone. The interviewees, however, made some statements specifically related to pedagogy in Bahraini schools and these are highlighted below. Table 5.16 summarises the main categories under the theme of *School Pedagogy: Views Regarding School Structure and Some Practices*, as well as their associated codes.

Table 5.16: Categories and Codes within the Theme of School Pedagogy: Faculty's Views on School Structures and Some Practices

Category	Codes
<b>Blame on Practices: Coaching</b>	university less controlled; difficult for students because of coaching in school; learning autonomously; some students are lazy; schools look over the shoulder of students
<b>Inadequacy of School Structure vs. Outcomes-Based Programmes</b>	structure of third level is a shock for students' lecture-based style of teaching does not match school; common structure of schools does not match the structure of higher education
<b>Blame on Practices: Study Skills</b>	students lack study skills; importance of pre- and post-lecture preparation; the importance of revision
<b>Blame on Students: Lack of Self-Discipline</b>	students do not study; lack of application to study; students who fail do not study

### **5.6.3.1. Blame on Practices: Coaching**

The faculty stated that, generally, transition of students from secondary to third level learning depends on students' ability to become self-directed learners and on developing agency and learning identity suitable for what Faculty 5 called 'a *less controlled, like a university style environment when they have a lot more responsibility for their own progress and learning*' (Faculty 5). So, all lecturers agreed with Faculty 5 who said that 'a *number of our students do not know how to make the transition from having somebody looking over their shoulder to monitoring their own progress*' (Faculty 5). Faculty 5 also stated that this applies to all students, not only Bahraini learners and 'I *don't think it's down to social or cultural issues*' (Faculty 5), especially that, as Faculty 2 explained, 'sometimes it's the *study skills, sometimes it's the English language, sometimes it's the general background knowledge in the sciences, sometimes it's just poor adaptation of people along the whole course*' (Faculty 2) or, as Faculty 4 added, 'it's just the *international [students] are more lazy or something, I don't think its cultural*' (Faculty 4). Nevertheless, the lecturers believe that many students have to undergo developmental changes because, as Faculty 6 explained:

Faculty6: Most will have come from an environment where they are coached closely, third level is different. While we do have a mentor system, young students still find this difficult. Some also find it difficult to learn how to learn autonomously.

### **5.6.3.2. Inadequacy of School Structure vs. Outcomes-Based Programmes**

Developments and changes that are characterised by the autonomy discussed above may, in the view of all lecturers, be necessary to cope with the pedagogical

system at university which is very heavily lecture-based, especially in the initial stages of the medical education and which, in turn, requires the students to study independently. Therefore, Faculty 2 highlighted that *'it is very important that they learn to crack that knot in FY as quickly as possible or they won't survive'* (Faculty 2).

Faculty 2 continued by saying that inadequacies of secondary policies that require teachers to coach students become very obvious when transitions are concerned because what was common practice at secondary level does not match common practice at universities.

*Faculty2:* Second level is going through a course book and doing homework at night time. The teacher actually leads the student through the whole course, and kind of teaches and helps them through the revision, whereas at university level we deliver a programme, we examine a programme and its very much up to a student to teach themselves how to study, so there is a lot of self-discipline involved which perhaps they weren't used to in second level.

Faculty 3 referred specifically to Bahraini schools and stated that developing an identity suitable for the new system might be quite difficult for Bahraini learners in particular, especially in terms of participation in tutorials because *'they didn't let them think about things so it was reciting by heart'* (Faculty 3). Faculty 1 agreed with this by saying that due to the fact that *'the way the students were taught in schools was continuous'* (Faculty 1), which meant that *'if there is a class, there will be a teacher in the front and he has to be telling them what it is, not them telling him what they think the answer is'* (Faculty 1), Bahraini students will find it difficult to participate in tutorials which require exchanging opinions and accepting the view of others.



### 5.6.3.3. Blame on Practices: Study Skills

In terms of the broader student body, however, the lectures felt that common school practices that require going through a course book and doing homework are responsible for the lack of appropriate study skills which were seen by the faculty as essential in students' transition. These skills included pre-lecture preparation, post lecture revision, as well as time management.

*Faculty3:* Study skills is also a problem. There is a probability that they waste their time. We put the lectures up before the lecture time, so the students should read the things before they come to class and then you tell them about things and they have some kind of background and they understand it better. The other way is to do this immediately after the lecture, read the notes and memorise refresh what was in the lecture and they are able to relate the information. Also, the have to do continuous revisions, they need to know that what you studied today, you cannot leave for four weeks, you have to go back to it and so on.

Faculty 5, for instance, reported that because of the lack of good study skills '*quite often I have students who come to me and they will say that they have read their lectures two three times and they haven't assimilated any of the information*' (Faculty 5). Faculty 4 agreed and stated that this is because students do not understand that '*leaving revision till the end of the academic year prevents students from assimilating the information before the exam*' (Faculty 4).

Taken together, the findings reported under the third theme of School Pedagogy, despite outlining many problems that result from inadequacy of practices at secondary level, do not suggest that these practices are a deciding factor in transition. This adds to the implications made earlier with regards to the power of agency where it was evident that despite inadequate practice at secondary level, students can still have confidence in themselves as learners and use it to facilitate their movement towards the centre of the university community. The findings under

the last category in this section give further support for this claim by referring to levels of self-discipline of individual students.

#### **5.6.3.4. Blame on Students: Lack of Self-Discipline**

However, the biggest blame for not making the transition was assigned by the lecturers to the students themselves. In the earlier sections, the faculty listed many factors that can affect transition, however, they all felt that the biggest factor is related to the students' lack of discipline and application to study.

This was already indicated earlier, under the section regarding the importance of language accuracy where one lecturer stated that unsuccessful transition cannot be blamed on the language but on the fact that students did not know the information. Faculty 4 claimed that *'a lot of students will tell you that, like you ever go to the Student Progress Committee<sup>13</sup>, a lot of them just come in and admit that they didn't bother. Or didn't turn up to lectures'* (Faculty 4). In Faculty 5's opinion, this is unacceptable because *'if you're studying medicine in my opinion, if you cannot show the necessary application of discipline to turn up for class on a regular basis and pass your exams, you do not deserve to be a doctor'* (Faculty 5).

Another Faculty agreed with this and stated that students who do not make the transition are the ones who do not study.

*Faculty 2:* If I see a blank page and I say 'What's the issue there?', they don't say because I don't have the perfect answer [in English] and I haven't written it down, they quite happily admit that they know nothing so they put nothing down, so again, I don't think that there is any hidden meaning behind that, if they knew the material, they would put it down ... .. 99 times out of 100, if the information isn't put down, the information hasn't been there in the first place.

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<sup>13</sup> Student Progress Committee aims to determine why students fail.

#### **5.6.4. Summary and Conclusion to Part 2**

The university faculty that were interviewed in this final section of the findings discussed a number of issues related to transition under the three deductive themes of background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy. They answered the research questions by giving their perspectives on what factors they believe play a role in students' transition and how the pedagogical structures of secondary schools, science background knowledge and language proficiency can limit students' agency and impose changes in learning identity.

The lecturers' responses under the first theme of background knowledge indicated that students might face some problems with the transition because most of them are not aware of the depth of knowledge that is required at the medical university and that students' perceptions that 'they know all about it' (Faculty 2) might prevent them from developing agency and identity suitable for third level. At the same time, the faculty pointed to the adequacy of study strategies from school and memorisation for mastering the material at the university and suggested that their present agency might be sufficient to cope with the demands of third level study.

Some more evidence for that was provided by the responses under the second theme where the faculty expressed a lack of blame on the English language for students' transition and where they stated that it is the students who do not know the information that perform poorly in examination tasks. At the same time, the faculty demonstrated awareness of how and why lack of appropriate language skills might affect the transition but they also acknowledged that they tend to disregard language mistakes, which allows the students to move through the

educational outcomes without putting an extra burden on their already limited agency. That is why the faculty highlighted that raising the admissions criteria in terms of English is unnecessary.

Finally, under the third theme of pedagogy, the lecturers talked about inadequacy of school structures for tertiary lecture-based education and blamed school practices for not developing appropriate study and autonomy student skills in order for secondary learners to be able to cope with the change of system. However, these comments were made more in relation to secondary contexts in general, rather than Bahrain itself. The only type of comments that was made specifically about Bahrain focused on the role of teacher-centred approaches in students' ability to participate in tutorials. The biggest blame, however, was put on students themselves and their inability to apply themselves to study in a disciplined manner was linked to their struggles with transition.

The next chapter in this thesis draws together the findings from all participant groups in relation to the three deductive themes inherent to this research to show how the observations made here compare to observations in other relevant studies and whether the findings from this study contribute some new understanding of transitions in the context of language and culture change. In this next chapter, I will also conduct the second level of analysis where I will focus on the conceptual categories identified across all participant groups to argue the contribution to knowledge of this study in reference to Communities of Practice as a useful or possibly inadequate socio-cultural theory for understanding transitions.

## ***Chapter 6 – Discussion***

The previous chapter presented the findings of this research. These findings answered the research questions in that they offered insights into the transition between school and university from the perspectives of teachers, students and university lecturers. They also explained how they, as participants, perceive the role of school practices, English language education and science knowledge in students identity and agency change required to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university. This focus was adopted, following the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice which, when used to understand educational transitions, suggests that an important aspect of this process is exploring the meanings the participants construct surrounding their old and new communities because these will have an impact on learners' participation in a new community (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). This study also used a questionnaire whose aim was to identify teaching patterns in language education and which was grounded in recommendations from Mavor (2001) who suggested investigating the context in which language education occurs in order to understand transitions.

The findings in Chapter 5 were organised thematically according to the three deductive themes of English language, background knowledge and school pedagogy that guided this research. The aim of the discussion chapter is to compare and contrast the participant perspectives in relation to these three themes and the conceptual categories within them to explore how the findings of this study contribute to any new understanding of transitions in the context of language and culture change. A second analysis of the conceptual categories under each theme is also conducted here to establish if the model of Communities of Practice can

provide a useful framework for understanding transitions. This chapter therefore begins with the discussion of the conceptual categories in relation to the deductive themes and finishes with explaining their relevance for Communities of Practice.

## **Theme 1: Background Knowledge**

I focus in this first part of the discussion chapter on the significance of science background knowledge in the transition of students in this study. The significance of background knowledge in transitions that take place in the context of language change has been presented in the literature review (section 3.4.) where I discussed research findings which argue that when good background knowledge is identified in students, enhanced transition to university is reflected in their increased ability to study because language weaknesses are overcome with the help of good knowledge of the material in subject-related areas (for example: Chen and Donin, 2007; Usó - Juan, 2006).

### **1.1. Confidence in Science Base: Using Identity to Overcome Difficulties with the English Language**

The discussion of the research findings in Chapter 3 related to the compensatory effects of subject-specific knowledge on students' linguistic ability suggested that language students with good background knowledge experience less difficulties in learning the subject material in the new context because they can refer to the memory of the material studied before (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1980; Usó - Juan, 2006; Wang et al, 2010). The findings presented in this study imply that this should also apply to the students beginning third level science education in this research for the confidence of science teachers, the students and the university

lecturers about the levels of science background knowledge students bring with them from school suggested that Bahraini learners can compensate for the weaknesses in English proficiency by referring to their background knowledge in science. The comments from the science teachers indicated that in their view the movement through the educational outcomes of the programme in the Foundation Year (FY) might be eased because these learners enter university with sufficient background knowledge. Similarly, the responses collected from the students also revealed that all medical students regard this area as their strong point. As shown in the findings chapter in section 5.5, good bases in science were reported by the students to enhance their understanding of the lecture content and to help them overcome language barriers because they could relate to the memory of what they had studied in Arabic after they translated the lecture notes. University faculty additionally substantiated this view by agreeing that, despite the greater depth of the material required at the medical university, the students were still able to transfer what they learnt in their Arabic curriculum and simultaneously perform at the level of language and knowledge required at third level.

This confidence in science base implied that undergoing transition was enhanced because the students did not have to engage in many negotiations between existing and expected attributes, which eased their change into successful university students. The students felt that their dispositions and attributes as learners who have strong knowledge in science enabled their participation in the new community and that their past dispositions were not challenged by the expected norms, increasing in this way their sense of agency. Only small adaptations in the strategic action that had to be made in order to cope with the

demands related to the mastery of the new material reinforced the students' images of self as learners and the sufficient resources in the form of good science base increased their capacity to take strategic actions and achieve a viable way of being (Ecclestone, 2009). The students and faculty in this study reported that actions taken by Bahraini learners to study the material at secondary level also worked for them at the university. And even though the faculty felt that some adaptations were required to respond to the greater depth of the material at third level, the strategic action to learn the science content in school was still perceived by them as successful at university. While it is important to acknowledge that the successful transfer of strategies from school to university could have been facilitated due to the specific didactic pedagogy in the Foundation Year, and that this might be challenged when students move on from the foundation course, the great confidence with which students in this study approached learning has some implications for the theoretical framework adopted here.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research recognises that the practices that shaped learners' predispositions and ways of acquiring knowledge that guaranteed success in one community may not be transferable to another, suggesting that former learning identities prevent students from moving from the periphery to full participation and making transitions ineffective (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). And while the majority of research adopting this framework for understanding transitions demonstrates a rather negative impact of these practices on this move, the data collected here imply that the role of these practices was diminished in light of how students felt about themselves as learners. This suggests a slightly different angle of looking at transitions than that proposed by



the Communities of Practice but I will return to this issue in the final section of this discussion chapter.

The fact that science background knowledge was believed by the students and the lecturers in this study to compensate for the lack of linguistic proficiency is in keeping with the majority of results from academic studies in the literature review that focus on the effects of subject-specific knowledge on student learning in foreign language contexts (for example: Usó-Juan, 2006; Martinez, 2008). However, what could be considered as a novel finding in this study, and therefore offering a slightly different understanding of transitions, is the fact that in this study neither strong nor weak language students reported difficulties in acquiring the subject material. This challenges a substantial number of findings in academic literature that focus on the relationship between background knowledge and language proficiency in transitions and indicates that further work should be done to strengthen the value of the findings presented here.

For example, Chen and Donin (1997) claim that students with better foreign language proficiency have better chances of acquiring the subject knowledge and Usó-Juan (2006) add that only students above a specific linguistic threshold are able to compensate for weaker language abilities with their background knowledge. These claims have been contradicted by the data collected here because both low-language and high-language groups of Bahraini students interviewed in focus groups reported no difficulty in acquiring the material, or they rather said that their difficulties in acquiring the material were related to the lack of professional science language, which was not taught in school in English, rather than to their general language proficiency. Therefore, these findings offer a new understanding of

transitions in the context of language change because they suggest that language proficiency might not always be the key player in transitions where change of language of instruction occurs. They also suggest that future work related to the language proficiency in transitions should be conducted to explore the issues of the linguistic threshold.

On the other hand, the findings obtained from the participants in this study which suggest that general language proficiency might not be the most important factor in transitions where language change is involved substantiate what has been discussed in the literature review in relation to the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) vs. Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and their role in disciplinary learning. There, Rosenthal (1996) argued that it is CALP rather than BICS that affects students' transition to university because it is only CALP that is applied in academic settings. And indeed, the perspectives of the students in this study provided similar insights for the students stated that their transition would have been easier if they had previously been taught medical terminology and if the schools had taught them the writing skills that are needed now at university to express academic subject matter and to carry out the types of assignments demanded of them in examination tasks. The lecturers at the university additionally substantiated this by revealing that it is the knowledge of professional key terms and the skilfulness in writing to explain scientific concepts in English, rather than correctness of sentences, that allows the students to move through the educational outcomes at the university. However, despite these similarities with Rosenthal's (1996) conclusions, the findings in this study still challenge the

enormous role of CALP in transitions, suggesting new ways of looking at transitions in the context of language change.

The findings in this study which suggested that good science base can compensate for deficiencies in a foreign language challenge the role of CALP because they contradict what Rosenthal (1996) claims about weaker language students. Rosenthal's (1996) concern is that if CALP is not sufficiently developed, students might focus their attention on acquiring the language rather than the content of the lectures. This was also somewhat the concern of the faculty at the medical university who agreed that, in general, when students' language skills are compromised, language becomes dominant in the learning process and the meaning of the scientific material is lost. On the other hand, the same lecturers also stated that Bahraini students in particular seem to be able to overcome these language issues because of what they had learnt in the sciences in school. The students reported the same with great confidence and acknowledged that lack of CALP could have been a problem if it had not been for their strong background in sciences.

Cummins (1981) discussed this in his work on the role of BICS and CALP in disciplinary learning and emphasised that focus on language becomes dominant only when the content taught in lectures is unfamiliar to students. This does not seem to be the case with this case study which supports Cummin's (1981) claims that students who are well educated in their disciplinary areas in their native language, are able to overcome difficulties with CALP more easily. Most importantly though, by supporting Cummins (1981) and by challenging, for example, Chen and Donin (1997), this case study offers a new perspective on

transitions which suggests that when transitions occur in the context of language change, it is neither general language proficiency or CALP that play a major role. On the contrary, it is perhaps the background knowledge, which in this study was science, which becomes the key player in transition in the context of language change and which determines the degree of change in agency and identity required to move through the educational outcomes of university programmes.

I explained in section 3.5.6. that agency is understood in this study as the capacity to take strategic actions in order to achieve the desired outcomes (Ecclestone, 2009). The students and lecturers in this study reported that, in order to learn the material in university classes, Bahraini learners adopt a strategy of translating from English into Arabic and then back into English. So, it seems that the strategic action taken by Bahraini learners involves relying on their science background knowledge, rather than L2 proficiency shaped through the school practices which they use to study the material in English. This requires little change in agency because once the lecture is translated into Arabic, the students can study the material in the same way they used to in school. As a result, their participation is not threatened by the practices of the community which did not build sufficient L2 proficiency which, in turn, seems to suggest that Communities of Practice might not give sufficient considerations of what learners can do with their individual agency.

Finally, the science teachers interviewed in this study pointed out to an important inadequacy of the current policy requiring teaching science in Bahrain. They talked about the inadequacy of the new science curriculum for students' transition in that they felt that the current science programme does not cover important areas, for example, of organic chemistry or anatomy which are required at university. And

while the students in this study graduated from the old programme, this change in curriculum, in the teachers' view, might have negative consequences for future Bahraini graduates wishing to study at university. This, however, will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis where I will discuss some practical implications of this research. The next section still focuses on the background knowledge but in terms of ways of acquiring science.

## **1.2. Adequacy of Study Strategies: Making Sense of Memorisation in University Settings**

When discussing the significance of this study in section 3.5.2 in the literature review, I stated that one of the broader aims of this research was to develop an understanding of approaches to studying science at secondary level can be transferred to the context of the medical university. Exploring this 'fit' was an important objective of this research, following the recommendations from Torenbeek et al (2011) who argued that if learning conceptions about how the subject can be mastered are continued from school to university, transition to higher education is facilitated. This is in good agreement with the experiences of the transition of the students in this study who reported fewer problems with learning in their first year because they were able to transfer the learning strategies from school to university. In the view of the students, the course in the university did not start off 'too academic' (Torenbeek et al, 2011), which resulted in better psychological adjustment of Bahraini students beginning higher education through building feelings of confidence and making them feel that they are 'fit' for higher education.

This also suggests that successful transition of study strategies resulted in fewer changes in identity because the students felt that their study strategies were adequate and therefore that their attributes as learners were valuable at university. Communities of Practice argue that learner identity is in the foreground of educational transitions because the practices of the new community require the students to reconsider their attributes as learners (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). And if students on the periphery find that their attributes are completely invaluable in that community, transitions become negatively affected because developing a new understanding of what learning involves can be very challenging (ibid). The learners in this study felt strongly about their learning identities because they found that what made them good learners in school also made them good learners at university. Therefore, their participation in the new community was not threatened by the practices of the university because students' strong feelings about themselves allowed them to progress. This has specific implications for Communities of Practice as a model for looking at transitions which I will explore towards the end of this chapter.

These findings have separate implications for what has been reported in the section with the science teachers where their perceptions regarding the fit of the science programmes for university was also explored. Despite the fact that the teachers felt that science education in Bahrain is based on lower-order skills and that students might need to develop more advanced study strategies when at university, the findings from the students have led to the establishment of another 'fit' which showed that, contrary to what the science teachers believed, memorisation approaches to studying science in school are also suitable for the

medical university. This needs contextualising in terms of the didactic pedagogy in the Foundation Year and acknowledging that these conclusions may change if we explore the transition to more senior years at the university. However, concluding that memorisation can also be applied at university has additional implications which will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Nevertheless, what is important here is that the students in this study demonstrated that memorisation helped them with comprehension of science required at university level, which was also in agreement with the reports from the university faculty. The faculty at university indicated that more emphasis is placed on understanding of science at the university than perhaps it was in school, however, they at the same time admitted that successful students at university are those who are able to use what worked for them in school at third level and who have a great ability to recall information. Additionally, also contrary to what the science teachers predicted, the majority of lecturers also admitted that a lot in their classes depends on memorisation, which was also the perception of the students who stated that learning in FY modules was largely based on memorisation.

These findings offer a new and interesting understanding of transitions where cultural change is a major contextual element. The majority of academic literature in this area proposes that transitions in the context of cultural change are affected by the lack of transfer of learning identities that were formed in school in one culture to schools or universities in another (for example: Hirshy and Wilson, 2002; Sheridan, 2010; Druzhilov, 2011). Usually, this literature focuses on Asian students transferring to a Western mode of learning who find it difficult to go beyond rote approaches to study that characterise Asian systems of education (Jin, 2011,

Yang, 2011; Bhattacharyya, 2010). This often affects students' agency in that it limits their ability to cope in Western contexts where they are often required to go beyond rote (*ibid*). Similar conclusions are drawn regarding the students from the Arab Gulf Countries where dissemination of knowledge is characterised by memorising theory from the book (AHDR, 2003). However, this study offers a different perspective on these conclusions because it suggests that it is possible to transfer study strategies from school to university, even though the two institutions are from two different cultures. This capacity for transferring skills learnt in one context to another context allows for a smooth transition from the identity of a school student to that of a university student because the expected norms at the university do not challenge learners' images of self and require minimal negotiations between their existing and expected attributes.

This study offers two possible explanations for this. One is that studying in Western higher education is not always based on higher-order skills for the lecturers in this study were quite happy to admit that the majority of learning in their modules requires the students to memorise the labels of diagrams and steps of various life cycles. The second one is that when memorisation is culturally ingrained, it can lead to deeper understanding of concepts (Po Li, 2011).

According to Po Li (2011), when memorisation is considered as a culturally imbedded construct, it is believed to lead to a deeper understanding of concepts because it is underpinned by deep cultural values. In other words, when memorisation is perceived by a nation as working hard, it becomes something more than rote learning and the cognitive process of memorising becomes more intricate. That is why it is often used to enhance learning (*ibid*). The findings in this



study, as well as other findings in the literature review and the background chapter (for example: Shirawi, 1987 or Al-Sulaiti, 2002), show that in Bahrain memorisation is a learning approach that was developed by the societal beliefs of the nation who values memorisation for making students work hard and for giving them opportunities to acquire large amounts of knowledge. The faculty in this study stated that Bahraini students believe they are working hard if they are memorising. They also stated that when they actually do so, it seems to work for them because they are able to simultaneously absorb a lot of information and perform at higher levels. These findings therefore seem to support the view on memorisation by Po Li (2011), which is also in line with what the students in this study said earlier about memorising – that is, that it leads to developing comprehension levels required by the university and that it gives them back-up for understanding. These findings also seem to offer a slightly different understanding of transitions in the context of cultural change because they demonstrate that, unlike many studies cited earlier, memorisation techniques developed in school strengthen, rather than limit, students' agency because they allow them to build a bridge at the end of which they are able to perform at levels of comprehension required at third level.

## **Theme 2: The English Language**

The English teachers interviewed in this study felt that Bahraini students are not linguistically prepared for the demands of the university because the current policy of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that could develop better third-level English skills is inadequate in the context of Bahrain. The teachers implied that English programmes based on the communicative approach to language teaching

do not suit the Bahraini culture because students tend to think that games and interactive activities are not effective teaching tools. As it was explained in Chapter 2, this approach was introduced into the English curriculum in Bahrain to shift the focus of language programmes from teaching discrete language items to developing communication and higher thinking in English (Al-Baharna, 2005). However, the statements made by the teachers here imply that the traditional view on education is still preferred by both the students and the teachers because the students do not think that they can learn through games and the teachers believe that the Grammar Translation Method and more focus on grammar can better prepare students for university. This, in the teachers' view, does not help in developing students' identity suitable for university and does not give enough focus to medical terminology that was seen by the English teachers as essential for successful transition. Relevant perspectives are discussed below.

## **2.1. The Perspectives on the Role of Students' Linguistic Identity and the Practices that Shaped It in the Transition**

The data summarised above suggest that, despite attempts to adopt the curriculum in Bahraini schools that emphasises the development of higher order linguistic skills, its successful implementation may not take place. This also supports what is argued by Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) who claim that administrative decisions act as an independent variable affecting the community of teachers, students and their parents. This means that what happens with a particular decision is impacted by what the teachers and students want (*ibid*). What it means for this study is that programmes based on Singaporean models are not likely to be successful in the Bahraini context because the negative reaction from students and parents

reinforces the traditional approach to language teaching. Teaching English in Bahrain is therefore focused on rote methodology that, as explained by the teachers, prepares students for the final exam rather than university. The same view was also shared by the students who linked their weaknesses in areas of language to the pedagogical approach based on memorisation and to the great value of the final exam.

Due to these approaches to language pedagogy, the teachers seemed to lack confidence that students in Bahraini schools develop appropriate production and comprehension skills, which could result in fewer changes in identity and not threaten students' agency when they arrive at the medical university. This is because, for example, the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 has shown that third level students need to be able to convey science that was taught to them in their own words (for example: Grunel et al, 2007), which, in the view of the English teachers, Bahraini students are unable to do because their learning of the English language is based on memorising model answers. In light of the definition of identity adopted in this study, this seems to suggest that Bahraini students leaving secondary school had not developed appropriate 'language' attributes which, in Ecclestone's (2009) understanding of identity, would mean that they do not have appropriate 'capital'. And if they do not have this 'capital', they cannot take strategic decisions about how best to cope with university study, which means that their sense of agency might be threatened.

On the other hand, the findings from the questionnaire completed by the same teachers indicate that refining, clarifying and connecting ideas is emphasised in writing classes in Bahraini schools. So, as far as the findings from the

questionnaire are considered, the results imply that Bahraini students are likely to be taught what is required in terms of writing strategies and that their sense of agency should not be threatened. At the same time, in terms of teaching reading, the questionnaire results show that the most common reading techniques practised in Bahraini schools are based on skimming of texts. Some teachers also indicated that they use more focused methods and require the students to read for specific information. However, skills such as summarising, interpreting graphs and tables and evaluating texts have not been rated high in terms of the percentages presented in Tables 5.6 and 5.7, which indicates that the focus on teaching reading in Bahraini schools may result in poor adaptation of Bahraini graduates at university.

Relevant literature on the subject of academic reading skills, which was cited in Chapter 3 and which was also used for the development of the questionnaire used in this study, presents a set of established techniques that have been proved to be beneficial for university students. These usually include predicting, making guesses, making notes and inferring meaning (Jalilifar et al, 2008; Hyon, 2001; Baker and Boonkit, 2004). In addition, Baker and Boonkit (2004) claim that skills such as summarising information and evaluating it in terms of its relevance to study characterise good university students for they are linked to self-reviewing and selecting relevant information. The university lecturers interviewed in this study also highlighted this and stated that, while at university, the students need to be able to read between the lines on the power point slides, follow logically from the text and be able to interpret information in an intelligent way. The students, on the other hand, did not feel that reading was important because they were able to learn

the material through word-for-word translation of power point lectures. The students, however, reported that the way writing was taught in school affected their ability to write in English, which was the only general language skill that was seen by the students as having any role in the transition.

The comments from the students regarding the language pedagogy indicated that learning of writing was entirely based on memorisation which contradicted the findings from the questionnaire. The interview data from the same teachers who completed the questionnaire contradicted the questionnaire data, too. These are interesting observations which will be discussed again in the conclusion chapter of this study, however, the fact that interview and questionnaire data are contradictory does not affect the understanding of transitions in the context of language change this study proposes.

The perceptions of students and English teachers in this study were similar in that memorisation aspects and other cultural influences governing language education in Bahrain were seen by both groups of participants as playing a negative role in the transition because they resulted in low language proficiency of Bahraini students. Nel et al (2004) substantiate this by concluding that students who were previously educated in traditional systems develop language proficiencies that are too low to cope with the demands of disciplinary study at university. Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) agree and argue that low levels of the overall proficiency in the target language often lead to the use of only lower-order language strategies which are not usually sufficient for students to study their disciplines at university. And while Nel et al (2004) arrived at these conclusions through analysing students' reading profiles and Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) used a reading strategy

inventory, the faculty at the medical university in this study provided similar insights through data from qualitative interviews. The faculty agreed that, generally, lower language proficiency affects students' transition because having to simultaneously bring their level of English up and learn the subject information must be difficult for the students and that this usually results in their compromised ability to learn. Rosenthal (1996) argues that such situations might cause problems with transition because students with poor language proficiency tend to focus on the language while attempting to learn the science content, not being able, at the same time, to distinguish if what they are learning actually makes sense.

The findings of this study, however, offer a different perspective on the role of the overall language proficiency where the change of language occurs. Despite the low language proficiency of Bahraini students which resulted in some difficulties in writing the answers to exam questions, these students still managed to make a successful transition. This was facilitated by their strong background knowledge which assisted the translation process and by the fact that the demand of disciplinary study allowed them to apply the memorisation techniques from school. Therefore, the findings of this research challenge authors such as Nel et al (2004) or Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) and open areas for further investigation by suggesting that low language students have enough agency to cope with the demand of university study and that this demand is not always a lot higher than it was in school. These findings additionally support what was discussed earlier by Torenbeek et al (2011) who write that if the courses at university are not too academic, transitions can be facilitated by the transfer of study approaches from school. This was also shown in this research, challenging literature which argues

that students must develop higher-order language skills in order to cope at university (Ballard, 1996; Dhieb-Hiena, 2003; Scaramozzino, 2010).

In terms of Communities of Practice, the perspectives of the students and the university lecturers in this research indicated that patterns of language formed through school practices do not negatively affect the transition. This challenges the emphasis of this theory on practices within communities as a useful lens of looking at transitions. Communities of Practice propose that following specific rituals guarantees membership in a community and that this affects transition because identities formed through these rituals are not the 'ideal' identities in another community (Ecclestone, 2009). In the context of this study, this would mean that linguistic attributes of students which were clearly seen by participants as inappropriate for higher education, due to specific societal views on education and their associated practices, would prevent their transition. However, being proactive about other aspects of students' identity, specifically the background knowledge, made the role of the general view on education and the schools pedagogies less important in the transition process. This suggests that becoming a member of a new community might not always be pre-determined by students' previous context but it rather depends on what learners can do with their identity regardless of this context.

Finally, it is also possible that the specific considerations that the lecturers at the medical university give to students' compromised ability in English make the role of language even less important in this research. The faculty reported that they do not pay attention to language mistakes and they do not mark the students down for incorrect grammar or syntax. They focus on the key words instead whose presence

in students' writing demonstrates the mastery of knowledge. Yore and Treagust (2006) who are cited in the literature review call this a three language issue which means making compromises between students' everyday language (L1), language of instruction (L2) and science language (L3). The authors state that when lecturers give considerations to students' L1, L2 and L3, the learning of science might be enhanced. The lectures in this study reported to give many such considerations, making, at the same time, the role of English less important in students' transition to the medical university.

These and other findings discussed in this section therefore support what was proposed by Mavor (2001) in terms of understanding transitions. In her paper on the transition of Portuguese students to an English speaking university, Mavor (2001) proposed investigating the context in which language education occurs and the context in which this language will be applied. This, in Mavor's (2001) view helps in developing new understandings of transitions and the role the English language may play in them. This approach also helped to develop a new understanding of the role of language in the transition studied here which indicates that whenever transitions occur in the context of language change, it should not be assumed that the level of language proficiency will limit students' agency. This certainly was not the case with the students in this study and the university faculty made this very clear by stating that language was not an issue and that rejecting



students with IELTS 5<sup>14</sup> will unfairly take an opportunity from students at a very young stage in their life.

## **2.2. Medical Terminology: How Did the Participants Feel about Its Importance?**

I argued in Chapter 3 that in order to talk about the role of foreign language in students' transition, it is the CALP, rather than students' general language proficiency, that needs to be considered for its lack may create little opportunities for students to study the material. The data presented in the previous section implied that the participants in this study also share this view, however, what also needs to be noted about CALP is that it is only developed in academic settings which provide students with opportunities to learn professional language and that the achievement in sciences is dependent on the degree to which this language has been developed (Rosenthal, 1996). And while I have discussed other aspects of CALP earlier in this discussion chapter, I focus in this section only on the medical terminology.

The responses of the English and science teachers in this study indicated that opportunities of teaching medical terminology are limited in Bahraini schools and that is why the current pedagogical setting of science and English was seen by the teachers not to be preparing students well for university. The science teachers reported that the opportunities to teach students the medical terminology are there because the science course books in Bahraini schools feature sections on medical

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<sup>14</sup> IELTS 5 is a minimum admissions requirement at the medical university. This is a lot lower when compared with the parent university in Dublin or many other international university where this criteria is usually IELTS 6.5.

terminology where professional terms are presented in both languages, Arabic and English. However, due to the broader view on education and the great value of the final exam, these terms are taught only in Arabic because only terms in Arabic are tested in the final exam. The English teachers reported that it is simply the inadequacy of the language teaching policy that does not provide the students with opportunities to learn medical terminology. Lack of opportunities to develop CALP, in teachers' view, limits students' agency to study science in English, forcing them to take strategic actions that would enable them to still study science successfully but without the capita of professional jargon. The teachers suggested that this could be changed if English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses were introduced into the national curriculum.

These suggestions concur well with what has been presented in academic literature regarding ESP courses (see, for example Mesh, 2010; Crawford Camiciotolli, 2010; Donesh-Jezo, 2011). This literature acknowledges the great value of such courses for disciplinary learning in that they have been found to increase students' motivation to learn English and to enhance discipline-related language proficiency (for example: Baghban, 2011). The teachers in this study shared the same view by stating that when these courses were taught in Bahrain, greater motivation to learn was noted in students and greater opportunities in terms of developing discipline-related language proficiency were provided. The students in this study agreed by acknowledging that if medical terminology had been taught in school, their transition would have been easier.

My own research conducted prior to this doctorate substantiates these claims in that it shows that assistance in learning medical terminology in English provided to

students in one of the university courses was found the most useful as far as student support is concerned (Hayes et al, 2011). The findings in this study also suggest this for the low language students who were interviewed here and who attended the language course mentioned above stated that they found medical terminology classes very useful in moving through the educational outcomes. The broader findings of this study, however, suggest that despite the lack of CALP the students did not experience that many difficulties with the transition. All students agreed that it only impacted the length of study because they had to spend more time finding words in the dictionary. It did not, however, impact their understanding of the lecture content, which was suggested by the literature on CALP in Chapter 3.

As reported in the literature review, Rosenthal (1996) concludes that when professional language is not well developed, learning of the content material becomes learning the terminology where no conceptual knowledge is acquired. The students in this study offered a slightly different view by implying that despite not having any knowledge of the professional jargon, they were still able to acquire the material with understanding. This was said to be possible because they were able to refer to the memory of what they had studied before, which helped them overcome language difficulties and understand the material better. The lecturers in this study seemed to agree with the students' point by stating that language is not an issue in this transition and that they have seen Tawjihya students scoring the highest marks and outperforming international students.

The findings from the students and the lecturers regarding medical terminology open further discussion about the role of school settings in transitions proposed by

the model of Communities of Practice. Considering the findings from both groups of secondary teachers and using the lens of Communities of Practice, it could be assumed that the transition of Bahraini students is likely to be difficult because the broader cultural context of schools does not offer opportunities to develop CALP. However, similarly to my previous point regarding the general language proficiency, it can also be argued here that how the students feel about their identity and what they can do with it to overcome the difficulties related to the lack of CALP is more important. The responses from the students in this study, as well as the lecturers indicated that even though CALP is not an attribute of Bahraini learners – that is, it is not part of their identity, they have other attributes such as background knowledge and adequate study strategies which assist them in moving through the educational outcomes and which, at the same time, diminish the importance of CALP in their transition. So, it is possible then that looking at transitions through the lens of opportunities given to students in the context of their school communities may not be sufficient and an additional focus on students' individual agency should also be considered.

Other aspects of language education that were viewed by the English teachers were related to spoon-feeding and lack of progression criteria. These were also mentioned by the students as factors that affected their agency and identity, however, these will be discussed jointly with the perspectives of the science teachers and university lecturers in the following section of this discussion which focuses on the role of school pedagogy in cultural transitions.

### **Theme 3: School Pedagogy**

The discussion of the narratives provided under this last deductive theme inherent to this research addresses the claims made by the research reviewed in the literature review which argued that in order to build a better understanding of how students' transition may be affected by school environments, explorations of secondary contexts must be presented. There, researches by, for example, Swart et al (2010), Yunus et al (2007) and Carroll and Feltham (2007) offered indications that students' transition depends on the development of efficacy skills through school, however, why or why not certain skills were developed was not discussed. In contrast to these researches, the transcripts presented here offer insights into the context of Bahraini schools and their perceived role in students' transition.

#### **3.1. Memorisation vs. Critical Thinking: The Perceived Differences between the Two Communities of Practice**

The findings in relation to school pedagogy suggest that critical thinking is seen as something new in Bahraini schools because the science teachers reported that the traditional view on education in Bahrain reinforces rote-based teaching approaches and that many teachers do not know how to teach via critical thinking pedagogies. It was also suggested that despite its general usefulness for third level education, as described by academic literature (for example: Huerta and McMillan, 2005) and as perceived by the participants themselves, its value for education seems to be diminished in the Bahraini society. Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) link this to the fact that different cultures of learning place emphasis on different pedagogical approaches and the findings presented here clearly imply that the acquisition of

theoretical knowledge takes priority over the development of critical thinking skills in Bahraini schools.

It was generally agreed in all teacher interviews that critical thinking and problem solving strategies are not favoured by the teachers in Bahraini schools. In fact, it was also acknowledged that very few teachers seem to use the new critical thinking approaches. Parents were also reported by the participants to not like these new strategies because they do not understand their value. The secondary teachers explained that children's abilities in Bahraini schools have always been measured by the scores on performance test, on which students have been able to score 90% or more. With the new strategies, this is no longer possible, which is why parents tend to think that their children's abilities are not measured accurately. That is why all secondary teachers assumed that preparing Bahraini students for Western higher education, which is known to favour more critical thinking models of learning (for example, Serpell, 2007), might be difficult and that memorisation-based approaches will require the students to undergo many changes in identity and agency.

Interpreting what the teachers seem to imply about the changes in identity and sense of agency using the understanding of these two concepts adopted in this study (section 3.5.6) suggests that because students critical thinking skills do not characterise their traits as learners, Bahraini learners might have to completely reconsider the ways in which their community taught them to acquire knowledge if they want to make the transition. In terms of agency, the teachers seem to imply that because of the lack of critical thinking skills, the students might discover that the strategic action of memorising the material will no longer be valuable at

university. This will cause agency change which will be reflected in finding new coping strategies.

These perspectives of secondary teachers match what Jin (2011) writes about cultural transitions. Jin (2011) explains that various cultures of learning differ in their perceptions as to what constitutes best education and concludes that, due to these differences, his students transferring from traditional models to a Western system of education often found that the approaches to learning that had worked for them in school could no longer guarantee success in the Western context. On the contrary, these conclusions do not match the perceptions of the students in this study regarding their experiences with transition who reported that their approaches to learning were continued from school.

Both, the students and the university lecturers in this study stated that the way Bahraini learners master the lecture content is based on translation and memorisation and they both agreed that it works at the medical university. This approach to study has been reported by secondary teachers to stem from the broader view on education in Bahrain which sees learning based on rote and drill as the only way of achieving competency. This was also acknowledged in the relevant background literature in Chapter 2 (Al-Sulaiti, 2002).

It is possible therefore that Bahraini students are not able to learn in any other way and that influenced by the old approaches to learning, they will feel that when content is not reproduced word-for-word from the lecture, they have not learnt it and they have not demonstrated sufficient levels of competency. Bragt et al (2010) claim that such situations often take place in transitions because when students do

not know how to study in new learning environments, they will try to use old learning techniques. Jin (2011) believes that this can cause problems with transition because often approaches formed in school do not match approaches at university, especially in cultural transitions. The insights gained through the perspectives of the participants in this study suggest something different and the data presented here offers a new perspective on understanding transitions – a perspective which suggests that ways of acquiring knowledge in Western and non-Western settings do not necessarily differ and that transitions between cultures can be in fact enhanced, rather than prevented, by a strong sense of learner agency that students bring with them from school. And while it needs to be highlighted once more that we are talking about transition to FY which is meant to be aligned with school programmes, what has been concluded here has implications for Communities of Practice as a model for understanding transitions.

What it means for Communities of Practice as a model of looking at transitions is that perhaps focusing solely on identity, this model should additionally consider the role of learner individual agency in transitions. Admittedly, both students and all secondary teachers in this research agreed that pedagogies based on memorisation do not prepare well for university, which matches the model of Communities of Practice, however, how the students feel about their memorisation skills and what they can do with them to become successful learners is not considered in this model. The fact that the university lecturers reported that a lot of content in their classes can be learnt through memorisation probably helped the students to transfer their ways of learning to university. At the same time, it was also indicated that memorisation is not a preferred way of study because the



lecturers stated that study at the medical university requires comprehension, reading between the lines and intelligently selecting information. Therefore, following the model of Communities of Practice, one would expect that students would try to follow the practices of the already existing members in order to ensure participation. Instead, it seems that the learners in this study decided not to conform to the existing practices of the new community because their responses suggested that they strongly felt that they could progress through the university programme using memorisation. The model of Communities of Practice does not give considerations to such situation and I explore this in the last section of this discussion chapter.

### **3.2. Inadequacy of School Practices and Pedagogy: Do the Participants Feel that the Transition of Bahraini Students is Different because of the Context of Their Schools?**

Contrary to the claims of the students and the university lecturers in this study about being able to continue study approaches from secondary to third level, the findings obtained in relation to broader school pedagogy suggest that the cultural practices of spoon-feeding and relying on teachers for study notes cannot be transferred to the context of the medical university. The outcomes-based programme run by the university was seen by the students and the lecturers to challenge students' agency and identity for having to individually select the information related to the learning outcomes, coping with the demands of the high stake summative assessment and developing self-reliance posed demands on students they have not experienced before.

This has initially been predicted by the science and English teachers in this study whose view was that spoon-feeding and opportunities of gaining marks for participating in class activities will definitely obstruct the transition of students because when they go to university, they will have to develop a new understanding of what learning involves. Bragt et al (2010) write about making meaning out of the learning process in the new setting as one of the biggest obstacles to transition. According to the authors, making transitions is related to the development of three types of regulation strategies – that is (1) self-regulation (students make meaning themselves), (2) external regulation (somebody else provides the meaning for students) and (3) no regulation strategies (students are unable to make meaning of learning). Bragt et al (2010) argue that students with self-regulation strategies are best suited for university, however, the students who were externally regulated at secondary level, like the students in Bahraini schools who were said in this study to be regulated by the model answers for the exam, can end up with no regulation strategies and fail as soon as the external regulation is missing in the tertiary setting. Nevertheless, the students selected in this study, despite being educated in the highly regulated secondary context, seemed to have managed to make the transition and develop effective self-regulation study strategies. This offers a different to Bragt et al (2010) understanding of transitions in that it suggests that agency of individual students may have more power in transition than the cultural practices of their school contexts. This also suggest reconsidering the main assumptions of Communities of Practice regarding the role of practices in participation in the new community, implying that the links between former self-efficacy strategies of students developed in previous communities of practice and

their participation in higher education might be weaker than suggested by this model.

Additionally, while spoon-feeding might be more noticeable in Bahrain than it perhaps is in other countries, the findings reported here reflect what is usually found of students beginning higher education – that is, that their problems with learning are very often associated with lack of time management and study skills because they were not sufficiently promoted at the secondary level (for example: Yunus, 2007; Cemaloglu and Filiz, 2010; Swart et al, 2010). This has also been noted by the university faculty in this study who agreed that Bahraini students are no different from other students because most secondary systems do not give students opportunities to develop appropriate third level skills. According to the university lecturers, most students at the medical university lack pre-lecture preparation, post-lecture revision and planning skills because of the undemanding nature of study at the secondary level which involves going through the course book and doing homework. This, however, was not linked by the faculty to national culture but to the general nature of secondary programmes.

The findings above therefore suggest that it should not be assumed that when transitions occur in the context of culture change, the students from non-Western cultures will have to undergo different changes in identity or agency than students from Western cultures. The findings from the study by Balduf (2009) can be used to support this conclusion for despite studying in American schools and then moving to the American university, Balduf's (2009) students were found not to have developed appropriate study strategies. These students linked their lack of third level skills to the undemanding nature of school tasks and stated that they did not

need time management or note-taking skills because grades in school always came easily and spending time in advance to prepare for exams was not necessary. The students in this study reported similar experiences with secondary education which suggests that it is more the general nature of secondary study, rather than its cultural context, that might be a more powerful factor in transitions.

What is also important is that Balduf's (2009) students did not make the transition to the university because all students that were interviewed in her study were on academic probation. These students blamed their schools for not creating sufficient opportunities for developing skills needed for university and stated that this was the major reason for the lack of success at university. Bahraini students, on the other hand, despite the lack of these opportunities in their schools, still managed to make the transition and categorically stated that it has had nothing to do with the school context. This supports what I argued earlier about the more powerful role of individual agency of students rather than the cultural background of their schools in the transition to higher education.

Another set of school practices that was seen as inadequate by all school teachers was related to the schools' tendency to alter students' marks on request and to allow learners to move to the next educational level without achieving minimum progression criteria. As early as in the 80s, Shirawi (1989) already noted that this might be a problem and wrote that because school teachers and administration in Bahraini schools have always offered everything for students without asking for anything in return, they have taught them that success comes easily. It seems that this attitude is still held in secondary schools in Bahrain today for the participant responses collected in this research indicate that not only are students' marks

changed when students request it but the learners can also present work of very low standards and still achieve a passing grade. The students acknowledged that this resulted in quite a shock when they discovered that marking and progression criteria were very strict at the medical university and, similarly to what the teachers predicted, they admitted that it resulted in many changes in agency. However, again, despite obstacles created by school environments they stated that they have managed to make this transition and they reported that it is the students who could not apply themselves to study in a disciplined manner that failed. This view was also shared by the university lecturers in this study who agreed that it is not the culture of schools but rather students' willingness towards greater discipline that is the most important factor in the transition.

These and other findings in this section increase our understanding of transitions in that they suggest through participant voices that individual agency of students may play a bigger role in transitions than the nature of their school environments. Authors such as Nordell (2009) or Balduf (2009) argued in chapter 3 that students who come from undemanding school environments expect that when little effort produced success in school, it will also produce success at university. However, these students are often disappointed when ways of gaining marks or completing tasks at secondary level can no longer be transferred to university, at which point they find themselves unable to study (ibid). And while the comments in Chapter 5 suggested that Bahraini students might have had similar expectations, they did not imply that these students were unable to study because of them. On the other hand, the findings from this research suggest that despite the light-hearted manner with which study was reported by the students and secondary teachers to be

approached at secondary level, and despite little effort that was said to be required to be successful at secondary level, the students are still able to develop new ways of dealing with the demands of their study and move towards greater discipline, even though the schools did not seem to require it from them. This suggests that the agency of students might be a stronger factor than the power of school practices, adding a new perspective to understanding transitions and suggesting that the heavy emphasis on school practices proposed by the Communities of Practice could perhaps be reconsidered.

### **3.3. Making Sense of the Broader View on Education and Cultural Background in the New Community of the University.**

Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) argue that the variables of school pedagogies are usually associated with the broader societal culture of a specific community. According to the authors, schools have to adapt to their societal context and their internal processes need to be tailored to match what the society believes should be the goals of education. Academic literature in Chapter 3 argues that very often the societal culture of students plays an important role in transitions which occur in the context of culture change, and more often than not, this societal culture has been found to impact transitions rather negatively (for example: Bhattacharyya, 2010; Serpell, 2007; Yang, 2011).

For instance, when writing about transitions from Asian to Western cultures of learning, Hirshy and Wilson (2002) note that Asian students might find it difficult to overcome difficulties connected with shyness and making mistakes while in Western settings because the view on education in Asian countries that is based

on rote learning does not allow for making mistakes. Through memorisation this system reinforces students' ability to reproduce knowledge, which reduces the chances of students making mistakes, unlike in, for example, Western-type classes where learning is often based on questioning the opinions of others (*ibid*). Bhattacharyya (2010) drew similar conclusions also in relation to Asian students who educated in centralised systems with a high-degree of teacher-dependence found studying at a Western university too overwhelming. Bhattacharyya's (2010) students faced difficulties in adapting to the outcome-based system of learning because they were not able to receive individual attention and teacher's assistance in large-size classrooms where teaching was based on lecture-delivery. And while the students and the university lecturers interviewed in this research reported similar learner difficulties in adapting to the new outcome-based system, they also agreed that there were other aspects of Bahraini culture and schools' vision on education that played a role in the transition of students in this study.

A common conceptual category in this research that arose with both groups of teachers, as well as the students was related to the broader aims of education in Bahrain that place the greatest value on the final exam. The secondary teachers explained that education in Bahrain tends to be viewed as effective when it concentrates on the final exam and end-of-school results. The English teachers, for example, noted that students and parents are only interested in passing English with a high grade, rather than knowing English. Schools are therefore forced to cater for these interests, ignoring the broader aim of language education at secondary level which should lead to the development of higher-order language strategies that are needed at university. The science teachers held the same view

and stated that they cannot teach higher-order skills in science because the great value of the final exam forces them to concentrate on the theory from the course book. The students reported that because of the focus on the final exam, they did not develop appropriate language skills.

The teachers' perspectives regarding the broader view on education suggested that because of this great value given to the final exam, Bahraini students will have to undergo considerable changes in identity and agency in order to be able to cope at third level. The changes in identity that relate to the conceptual category of the broader view on education were already discussed in relation to having to develop critical thinking skills but the teachers also talked about them when discussing the role of the final exam in Bahraini schools. The data from the teachers implied that due to so much focus on theory that is given in the final exam, students leave secondary schools without higher-order skills in science, which is an important attribute missing from their identities and which might require many negotiations between existing and expected norms, decreasing in this way their sense of agency. Similarly, the focus on theory was also seen as not providing students with appropriate resources, limiting their ability to take strategic actions to respond to normative expectations embedded in the learning outcomes of the Foundation Year programme.

The perspectives regarding the role of the general view on education in identity and agency shifts presented above echo Suciú and Măță (2011) who suggest that the role of secondary education should not only concentrate on making sure that students pass the subject knowledge but also on societal change and development of students' agency that will allow them to cope with the demands of the bigger



world out there. This, however, is in disagreement with what the students and lecturers in this study feel about the role of this view in the transition for, as already explained in this discussion chapter, higher order language skills were not essential and the focus on theory and memorisation created by the emphasis on passing knowledge was perceived by the participants to facilitate, rather than obstruct the transition. These findings therefore seem to offer a new lens on the role of culture in transitions, indicating, contrary to the majority of literature in Chapter 3, that the cultural capital of students from non-Western systems can sometimes play a positive role in their careers in Western higher education. These findings also suggest that what is proposed by Communities of Practice in terms of focusing on the broader socio-cultural influences on community practices in researching transitions might not be the most useful lens of trying to understand this process and that future work focusing on these issues could be very useful.

Some more comments regarding the role of the broader view on education in transitions were identified in one category with the students where the learners explained that the lack of opportunities to speak in front of and interact with others in school resulted in identity changes when they began university. The learners reported that on entering university, they had to develop new attributes of plucking up the courage to speak confidently in front of others. The students reported that being given opportunities to speak, for example, in class presentations or exchanging opinions was missing from school pedagogies which matches what Hirshy and Wilson (2002) write about centralised systems – that is, that students who are educated in teacher-controlled environments find it hard to transit to

Western contexts because they are not used to being given a voice and learn through interactions with others.

In the background chapter to this study, it was stated that, in their role of substituting families, schools in Bahrain are meant to 'strengthen the teacher's power and to ensure the subjugation of the students to this power' (Qaddummi, 1995, p.317). This means that learning takes place through drill and the teacher (*ibid*) which, at the same time, means that the concepts of students giving presentations and becoming some sort of expert groups, which are encouraged at Western universities (Serpell, 2007) might be difficult to grasp in Bahraini schools because the traditional view on education holds that only teachers know correct answers.

The students' responses in the following category, however, indicated that, despite the difficulties encountered due to the teacher-controlled nature of Bahraini schools, these students might have in fact been better prepared for changes demanded of them by Western models, than, for example, the students of Hirshy and Wilson (2002), for they reported that their exposure to Western culture prepared them for studying at a Western university. When discussing transitions to higher education, Tinto (1993) proposes that students are sometimes unable to adapt to a new university environment because of the level of incongruence between their own social and cultural context and the context of the university. Chavous (2002) also writes about incongruence in transitions and states that the cultural fit of students for a Western university depends on the level of exposure to Western cultures prior to beginning higher education. This has some implications for this study for, despite the fact that the students agreed that having to speak in

front of others was quite difficult at the beginning, because schools did not give them the opportunity to do so, the Western influences on education and industry in Bahrain prepared them for this. Even aspects such as working in mixed-gender groups were not seen by the students to be a problem for they acknowledged that despite not experiencing this form of learning in school<sup>15</sup>, they were exposed to it, for instance, in private language institutes.

These findings substantiate Chavous's (2002) and Tinto's (1993) conclusions regarding the positive role of pre-university exposure of students to the Western culture in making transitions. They also imply that exploring the level of exposure of students to their university culture can be a more useful framework of looking at transitions, instead of focusing on cultural differences between the two settings. The students in this study categorically agreed that it is not the broader societal culture or even its impact on school structures that play a role in transitions. Their view was that it is rather related to having to make appropriate adaptations to meet the normative expectations of the medical university. The students, and also the faculty at the university, very clearly stated that it is the graduates who do not make these adaptations that fail and that these adaptations are not conditioned by the cultural contexts of students but rather students' individual willingness to develop greater self-discipline. Therefore, linking these adaptations to available resources derived from the community and how an individual strategically packages these resources to integrate them in a new community, like it is done from the socio-cultural perspective proposed by Côté and Levine (2002) and presented in section 3.5.6.2, seems to be inappropriate in the context of this study.

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<sup>15</sup> National schools in Bahrain are segregated and girls and boys study separately.

The findings from this research which suggest that success at university depends on the degree of individual self-discipline, on the other hand, are in keeping with the theory proposed by previously cited Tinto (1993) who claims that apart from cultural incongruence, students' success in higher education depends on individual changes in agency that need to take place in order to make academic adjustments. The socio-cultural theory underpinning this study proposes that this agency is conditioned by the practices of school communities which determine learners' ability to gain membership in a new community. The last section in this discussion chapter will focus on these ideas and will use the findings of this research to argue if Communities of Practice can be a useful framework for looking at transitions.

#### **4. Communities of Practice in Transitions: Do They Give Enough Attention to Learners' Individual Agency?**

In Chapter 3 of this thesis I argued that when students' transition into higher education is viewed from the perspective of Communities of Practice, this transition is seen as being affected by not knowing the 'knowing how' of the university because the new university practices differ from the practices familiar to the students. By conveying relevant research findings, I implied in that chapter that studying transitions using the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice leads to an understanding of what changes in identity, connected with the move from one educational setting to another, can affect transitions and that these changes are related to having to acquire new skills, language patterns, knowledge or meaning that are valuable in the new community, but that might have not been valuable in previous settings (Crafter and Maunder, 2012).

This study, therefore, began with the assumption that the groups of teachers in national schools in Bahrain and the medical university are two separate communities of practice and that exploring the degree of transferability of schools' unique practices to the university context would help to understand this transition that took place in the context of language and culture change. However, as I progressed through this research, I began to realise that an important factor of the transition studied here, perhaps more important than, for instance, the language patterns at secondary level or school pedagogy, was the students' strong feelings about themselves as learners and what strategic actions students could take based on these feelings to make a successful transition. Communities of Practice in transitions, on the other hand, do not seem to consider the power of learners' agency in the new context but rather focus on the power of the new community on learners' identity change (for example: O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). This has led me to propose that more work related to learner's individual agency should be done within Communities of Practice as a model for looking at transitions and this is what I would like to argue here.

Communities of Practice position learning as embedded in wider social and cultural practices which are perceived as valuable within a given community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Therefore, when learners enter a new community, they become peripheral participants whose integration into this community depends on identity shifts they will have to undergo to be able to acquire the practices of the new community (ibid). The way this framework is understood in transitions suggests that change in identity 'is in the foreground because the new and strange practices force reconsideration of practice and therefore shifts in identity trajectories

(O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007, p.315). This framework therefore proposes that in transitions not all practices in one community will cause positive or required identity shifts, which might prevent full participation of students because their contextual practices do not match the practices of a new community of practice (ibid). That is also why, as explained in Chapter 1, RCSI Bahrain offers the orientation programme which teaches students about the practice at university so they can learn about the required norms as soon as possible.

The findings in this study, on the other hand, suggest that despite this lack of the match between the contextual practices in schools and the university, full participation in the community of the university was reported to still have been achieved by the Bahraini students in this research because of the strong intraindividual agency of students and their strong feelings about themselves as learners. This resulted in them being undeterred by the new and strange practices when they became novices on the periphery of the university community, which does not support the central role of these practices in transitions and suggests more focus on individual agency.

The conceptual categories of inadequacy, blame and lack of confidence in school pedagogies and practices related to teaching English and science identified in the findings chapter were believed by both groups of school teachers to mark the students' transition. This was expressed in the interview comments referring to studying in Arabic and then in English as a factor, insufficiency of the mental level of the students for transition due to memorisation or experiencing a great shock when at university due to ways of awarding marks in school and spoon-feeding, just to name a few. This suggested that students' learning identities formerly

formed in school could be under threat when entering university, as students would find themselves as puzzled novices who could feel like outsiders that were unsure about how to progress into the new community. At the same time, the conceptual categories that indicated confidence in students' background knowledge and study strategies that students had already had at the periphery stage, have led me to conclude that students were able to feel they had become legitimate members of the new community, regardless the perceived inadequacy and the blame on the former school practices.

The findings in this research have therefore suggested that how the students felt about their agency – that it was not limited because of the good background knowledge and their ability to transfer learning identities from school without making any major academic adjustments, was more important than the practices that made them successful in school but, as the data in this research indicated, could not make them successful at university. Believing that students were fit for higher education seemed to enable them to act on their cultural background and to face the challenges in the new community, avoiding in this way problems with transition born out of uncertainty of not knowing 'the knowing how' of the university (Crafter and Maunder, 2012). O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) argue that there is no shortcut to gaining membership in communities but through mastery of the required practice and negotiation of identity. The students in this study demonstrated that this shortcut exists for despite being given the practice by the medical university during their orientation period, they decided not to follow it and consciously choose ways of being they felt confident about.

For instance, in Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of Communities of Practice, the use of language within a community and the patterns of language formed in this community are key to legitimate peripheral participation. These were perceived unimportant in the transition considered here because, despite suggesting, through the questionnaire results and interviews, that strategies used to teach English in the communities of Bahraini schools formed patterns that were inadequate for university, the power of students' agency seem to have compensated for the anxieties connected with the lack of participation at the periphery stage that could have been caused by inadequate language education.

Similarly, while Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that identity shifts are always required by the participation in a new community, the data from this study have suggested that this participation can also depend on what the students already know or how they understand learning. The students in this study were confident that they could learn by memorisation and their strong feelings about memorisation as a good learning technique allowed them to find ways of applying it to the university context, reinforcing their images of self as learners. The university faculty interviewed in this study agreed that translating and memorising is not a normal practice at university because the translation process leads to the loss of scientific information. They, however, admitted that students who do it are successful, suggesting at the same time that what Lave and Wenger (1991) propose about identity changes should be further investigated in the context of transitions for the data in this research imply that these changes may not be required due to novices' strong feelings about their study strategies.



Wenger (1998) argues that boundaries can be crossed by trying to sustain connections between different communities of practice and that learners' agency gives them the potential to create various forms of continuity between them. This is supported by the data in this research which suggest that, as opposed to following the new practice that was imposed on them by the university during the orientation week, Bahraini learners chose to sustain the connections between their school and university communities by relying on their old practices and their enhanced sense of agency. This sense of agency helped them form trajectories that spanned boundaries and linked the two communities of practice, sustaining at the same time their identity as learners throughout the process of transition.

The findings presented in this thesis, therefore, seem to imply that more research is needed on the role of students' agency in the model of Communities of Practice in transitions, rather than focusing only on practices surrounding education. Drawing on the criticism by Lea (2005), I would like to argue that Communities of Practice is a top-down model for understanding transitions which does not take enough account of how the students feel about themselves as learners and what they can do with it to facilitate their transition to higher education. It is worth considering here that Bahraini learners might themselves constitute a community of practice but it is their agency that 'promote[s] specific artefacts to focus future negotiation of meaning in specific ways' (Wenger, 1998, p. 91) , rather than the legitimate practice provided to them by the university. These learners have developed their own ways, or what I called in Chapter 5 'an independent practice', to have a satisfying experience at university and in this sense they constitute a community of practice (ibid). However, rather than following the practice given to

them by the university to achieve the desired goals, they used what they know subconsciously to facilitate their learning and this is where the power of their agency is demonstrated.

The notion of Communities of Practice has been influential in theorising transitions into university by recognising the context in which these transitions take place (for example: O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Tobbell et al, 2010). However, this research has suggested that focusing on the educational context in which learners are located might not be sufficient to understand transitions and that more attention should be given to learners' agency when they are on the periphery of university.

According to Communities of Practice, learners beginning higher education are legitimate peripheral participants because they are new to the practices of a university and they will remain on this periphery unless they undergo identity shifts (Lave and Wenger, 1991). I would like to propose, based on what this case study has suggested, that graduates beginning higher education can sometimes be 'agentic' participants – which means that they are able to become legitimate participants in a community, not because they change what they know about learning but because they are able to be proactive about their learning identities. Therefore, it is hoped that, despite the small scale case study design of this research, the findings will generate implications within the existing research literature and will help to focus more attention on learners' agency within the Communities of Practice as a model for theorising transitions.



## ***Chapter 7 – Conclusion***

As it was indicated in Chapter 2, the Ministry of Education in Bahrain has introduced a number of reforms in the past decade to develop an education system that would be fit for purpose. In terms of secondary education in particular, the most significant reform was an introduction of the unified track system whose aims was to align secondary education in national schools with other international programmes and to give students opportunities to join various universities in Bahrain and overseas (Ministry of Education, 2008). This involved a comprehensive review of curricula and introducing new teaching approaches that were discussed throughout this research.

However, the ideas that brought me to this research which were discussed in the context of this study (section 1.1.) suggested that Bahraini students were perceived by the senior management at the university as lagging behind other international learners, particularly because of their compromised proficiency in the English language and the science education they receive in schools. The problems of Bahraini learners were linked by the staff at the medical university to the cultural context of their schools which is generally perceived to play a negative role in their transition to a Western university. Hence, I adopted the socio-cultural theory of Communities of Practice as a theoretical framework in this study for this theory focuses on the role of practices in communities and their wider societal contexts in educational transitions.

I, as a researcher, however, decided to approach the issue of transition from the interpretive stance and not to make any assumptions about the role of the English

language, science education or school pedagogy in the transition studied here. So, as opposed to determining which of the factors mentioned in the context of this study was the most important, the aim of this research was to explore how the participants felt about these factors in relation to transition. Hence, the three deductive themes of the English language, science background knowledge and school pedagogy that permeated this research.

Many previous studies that deal with these three themes in educational transitions tend to suggest that strong links between students L2 proficiency, subject-specific background knowledge and school pedagogy and transitions exist (for example: James, 2006; Hook and Jones, 2002; Hailikari and Nevgi, 2010). However, this study explored these links and made a contribution to understanding transitions in the context of language and culture change, evaluating at the same time the usefulness of Communities of Practice as a lens of looking at transitions.

The main research questions that were posed in this study included:

1. What are the perspectives on transition of:

a) secondary teachers?

b) students?

c) university lecturers?, and

2. How do participants perceive the role of school practices, English language and science background knowledge in students' identity and agency change to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university?

To address these questions, I adopted a case study methodology that allowed me to gain in-depth insights into one transition through the combination of focus group and semi-structure interviews, as well as a descriptive questionnaire. The samples that were involved in the study included secondary level science and English teachers, FY university students and faculty members at the medical university that teach the Foundation Year programme.

This final chapter of this thesis begins with the assessment of the limitations of this study, followed by the summary of the main findings and their significance in terms of understanding transitions and the Communities of Practice as a model for looking at transitions. I then propose some practical implications and I finish this chapter with recommendations for future research.

### **7.1. Limitations of the Study**

I am aware that this research might be criticised for the case-study design and its scope that focuses on the transition of one group of students to a particular university. However, as Bryman (2008) argues, case study researchers do not aim at producing data that can be generalised in the positivist way but rather at generating rich and in-depth findings that will represent the case information about which can be used for future research. Moreover, the representativeness of cases chosen for this study, the triangulation process, the saturation of data within each participant group and among all groups, and the respondent validation techniques that were adopted in this study address this criticism and strengthen the interpretation of data presented here.

I am also aware that, although I informed all participants that I was there not to judge their professional practice or level of education, for example, in schools, my presence and the fact that I work at the medical university might have influenced the participants' responses. Additionally, the fact that the school teachers were aware of the fact that this research was approved by the Ministry of Education might have led the teachers to believe that I was looking to evaluate the programmes in Bahrain and propose solutions for improvement. This was reflected in a lot of comments asking for professional training or the fact that there was little cooperation between the teachers in school and the central administration. That is why, as explained in Chapter 5, those codes were omitted in this research because they did not match its objectives. Similarly, student responses could have been affected by the fact that I was their tutor at the university and that I was looking for specific answers in terms of science or the English language. It is also possible that the confidence in science base and the study strategies claimed by the students might have been influenced by their wish to indicate to their peers that they were doing very well at university.

Finally, I wonder if I allowed enough time during the interviews for all issues to be explored and whether influenced by my own experience of the context I did not decide to finish the interviews too soon. And even though I did not stop the interviews unless all codes were identified, it is still possible that an opportunity of longer interviews could have generated additional data.

## **7.2. Restatement of Findings and Their Significance**

To explore the role of the science background knowledge in the transition studied here pools of data were generated from the interviews with students, secondary teachers and university lecturers. The significant findings from these three groups of participants were that they indicated a high level of confidence in students' science base. This, in turn, based on the literature review, suggested that the movement through the educational outcomes of the programme in the Foundation Year at the medical university might be eased because Bahraini students enter higher education with sufficient background knowledge. This also indicated that little change in identity might be required on the periphery of university because Bahraini students seem to have the required attributes. Additionally, the data from the students and the university lecturers in particular suggested that learners' individual agency and their strong feelings about themselves as capable learners who are fit for higher education helped them overcome language difficulties in learning the material. The agency the students brought with them, therefore, seems to have led to the development of strategic actions that were reflected in adopting the translation process as the best method of making the transition. These findings have led me to reconsider the value of some subtleties of Communities of Practice in understanding transitions and made me develop an understanding that students' individual agency may play an equal to, if not a more important role, in students' participation in higher education than school practices.

In terms of the English language, the significance of the findings from this case study in the broader areas of transitions in the context of language change was reflected in the participants' statements which suggested the diminished role of L2.



Despite the fact that the English teachers predicted a compromised transition due to the inadequacy of memorising model answers, mismatch between the goals of education in school and university, as well as the inadequacy of policy which results in the lack of focus on higher-order language skills and medical terminology, the students and the university lecturers suggested that these characteristics of English education in Bahrain may not in fact be a problem in the transition. This was reflected in the participants' views that Bahraini learners' are able to take other strategic actions in order to overcome the difficulties that could have been caused by the practices of their former community. These actions particularly in the context of this study refer to relying on science background knowledge and using it to compensate for the lack of CALP. However, the ability to take these actions, regardless the lack of appropriate linguistic attributes, suggests that considering individual agency in addition to identity which is already at the forefront of Communities of Practice could be a valuable expansion of this theory.

Finally, the findings from this case study in relation to the third theme of school pedagogy also seem to offer a new understanding of transitions. Whilst the perspectives of all participants regarding the negative role of the lack of time management, note taking, lecture preparation and self-efficacy skills caused by spoon-feeding pedagogies in the transition corroborate with other research in this area, the data with regards to the broader societal view on education and its impact on school pedagogies suggested different conclusions to the ones presented in literature in Chapter 3. The literature in this chapter implied that students were taught how to study in a way that suits the culture and that this way often does not match the ways of learning in the new culture (for example: Serpell, 2007; Yang,

2011). The perspectives of both groups of secondary teachers in this study match this in that they suggest that the broader view on education which values the final exam and which, in turn, promotes learning by rote cannot be transferred to the context of the university. The findings from the students and the lecturers, on the other hand, suggested that these approaches are not inadequate and that they can in fact facilitate the transition. The important aspect of these findings, however, was not so much the fact that these approaches could be transferred but rather what strategic actions Bahraini learners were able to take in order to transfer them and how they felt about being able to transfer them. Relying on their strong background knowledge and putting confidence in memorisation, the students in this study adopted a strategy of translating the lectures. This allowed them to still study in the way they used to in school, without having to undergo any major changes in identity. The students' individual agency, therefore, seems to have facilitated their participation in higher education, despite the broader societal views that resulted in parenthood pedagogy in Bahraini schools and that had built identities that were perceived by the participants as unsuitable for higher education. It seems therefore that due to this individual agency, Bahraini graduates were able to move from the periphery even though, previously in school, they were used to the fact that grades come easily, receiving marks for class activities, being looked after by their teachers and progressing without meeting specific knowledge thresholds.

### **7.3. Practical Implications**

One of the most important implications for practice arise from the use of the questionnaire in this study. This questionnaire was used in this research following the recommendations from Mavor (2001) who advises investigating the context in

which language education occurred prior to coming to university in order to understand transitions. That is why I devised a questionnaire, using relevant literature (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2004; Baker and Boonkit, 2004), which focused on identifying the main patterns of teaching and assessing the English language. This focus was believed to enable me to talk about the role of school practices in relation to the English language in the transition. The focus of this questionnaire was also very closely linked to what is proposed by the model of Communities of Practice in transitions – that is, that the language discourse in one community is key to participation in another (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Nevertheless, as could be seen in the findings chapter, the questionnaire data were contradictory to what was reported in teacher and students interviews. It was later noted in the discussion chapter that this contradiction did not have any influence on the perspective on the role of the foreign language in transitions this study proposes, however, the practical implications for the use of similar questionnaires in social research were quite evident and they should be discussed here.

The plausible reason why these contradictions occurred could be related to the fact that I decided to base this questionnaire on teachers' self-appraisals of how they teach the language rather than on the ratings from their reporting bodies. Jonathan et al (2009), who wrote a paper on teachers' and reporting officers' self-evaluations of teaching skills in Singapore and Bahrain, state that, generally, it is quite common that self-ratings of what teachers do in the classroom tend to be much higher compared to the actual pedagogical behaviour. They also stated that it is particularly common in teaching communities such as Bahrain because of the

Islamic Work Ethics (IWE). According to Jonathan et al (2009), 'the value of work in the IWE is derived from the accompanying intentions rather than from the result of work' (p.268), which is why 'Bahraini teachers seem to engage in more self-promoting to ensure what they indicated in the rating scales were reflective of what was expected (ibid, p.268).

It was already explained in Chapter 2 of this study that Bahraini teachers are expected to teach through the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The items of the questionnaire in this study match many of the CLT techniques because these were described in literature in Chapter 3 as desirable for higher education. It is therefore possible that the teachers who completed the questionnaire recognised these items and overrated their behaviour in the classroom, acting in their self-interest (Jonathan et al, 2009). It is possible that the teachers did it because they thought that the questionnaire was evaluating whether they were doing what they were supposed to do. On the other hand, when the interview questions required them to elaborate more on the difficulties caused by the context in which they are teaching, they were able to reveal the truth because they perhaps thought that this study could result in, for example, reducing the pressure of providing model answers. Consequently, if the questionnaire had been given to the reporting bodies, it is possible that less contradictory data would have been generated because the teachers' responses would have not been left unchecked (Jonathan et al, 2009).

However, whether contradictory or not, the use of the questionnaire was still considered not to be helpful in building an understanding of the transition in this study for, regardless the truthfulness of the responses, it did not take enough

account of what considerations university lectures give to language weaknesses of students and how the students manage overcoming language difficulties using their strong agency. These were the findings that provided a new understanding of transitions in the context of language change, unlike the questionnaire data which only indicated whether Bahrain fits the bracket of good secondary English education or not. Therefore, it has been concluded at the end of this study that the effectiveness of using questionnaires that identify patterns of teaching based on self-ratings might not be effective in exploring transition for such questionnaires do not take into account the complexity of all factors in a social context and the power of learner individual agency. These data, however, could be used for future research which I will discuss in the following section.

Other practical implications that arise from this study relate particularly to the context of Bahrain and suggest important conclusions in terms of the role of the social and cultural context in successful implementation of educational reform. In Chapter 2, it was stated that the Ministry of Education in Bahrain have been continually trying to improve the teaching and learning in national schools by adopting educational models that have been proved to be effective elsewhere. The CLT approach, for example, which has been a successful model of teaching foreign languages worldwide, has also been introduced in Bahrain in the hope that it would help to shift the focus of language education from discrete language items to higher-order skills (Al-Baharna, 2005). This focus was also hoped to help produce graduates who are competent language users and who can cope in many 'real-life' situations (ibid). In science, a more critical thinking approach has also been adopted, following the introduction of the American curriculum that is based

on teaching science through inquiry and scientific reasoning (Al-Hameed et al, 2011).

On the contrary, the findings from this research have shown that interactions between the cultural norms of the teaching community and the types of educational programmes that are designed for them may impact the success of these reforms and affect administrative efforts to align science and language education in Bahrain with Western models. And while these findings have been found not to play a detrimental role in students' transition, contrary to what was assumed when explaining the theoretical framework of this study, they also generated some practical implications for both, the schools and their administration, as well as the medical university.

The important findings in terms of practical implications were that implementing Western models in national schools is restricted by the broader view on education in the Bahraini society and by the great value of the final exam. This shifts the pedagogical practice of teachers from the expectations of the government and, despite many reforms, results in learning based on rote and memorisation.

The practical implications that arise from this are that perhaps instead of trying to completely change what is happening in schools, by moving from traditional to Western approaches that were reported in this study not to suit the culture of schools, this could be done gradually with specific considerations of the local context. For example, Bax (2006) proposes that if some problems with CLT occur due to resistance from the local context, local adaptations of CLT should be seen as equally valid. This could lead to the development of courses that contain

communicative elements but yet retain the core principles of the original programmes (ibid). This could result in better reception of reforms, which in this study was reported to be a big problem, and in increased motivation to learn and better skills development.

The English teachers in this study acknowledged that Bahraini students and parents do not see the value of communicative language teaching because they cannot understand that learning can come through games and group interaction. This suggests that perhaps instead of drastically changing the approach, the Ministry of Education could think of ways of introducing communicative elements into the current teacher-centered and text-book based approaches which could, for instance prevent memorising model answers and graduate better university students. And while making specific recommendations on how to do it is beyond the focus of this study, few suggestions are made below.

One of the ways of gradually introducing CLT could be undertaken by changing the format of the final exam. If a language programme follows the CLT model, it should mainly focus on testing the level of free interaction of learners in spoken and written language (Richards and Rogers, 1986). Therefore, if tasks based on free speech and free writing were integrated into the final exam, they could eradicate problems with memorising model answers because, first of all, students would not be able to predict the exam questions and secondly, teachers would not be pressured to provide model answers. Similarly, if the exams in science contained more free problem-solving tasks, rather than examples based on activities in course books, students would have to learn how to apply, rather than memorise, examples given by their teachers. This way of gradually changing the culture of the

exam and creating more focus on learning could shape different, more suitable for third-level, identities of students and begin a change in teachers' practices.

The findings in this research suggested that changing the attitude of parents and students that gives enormous value to the final exam might be difficult. That is the reason why the government should consider the implications related to making local adaptations as solutions to some of the problems with internalisation of education in Bahrain.

The problem of internalisation also relates to what the science teachers reported about the current science programmes in national schools. Their comments suggested that with the introduction of the new programmes, the coverage of topics essential for university is very superficial which, in their view, might pose threats to graduates' higher education careers. Poor background knowledge has also been noted in literature as an important factor in transitions (for example: Chen and Donin, 1997 or Cummins, 1981, cited in Street and Hornberger, 2008). The government should therefore rethink whether adopting Western approaches, which are unlikely to be fully implemented because of the broader view on education in Bahrain, can be expected to improve science education in national schools or whether introducing some scientific-reasoning elements into the old programmes that were at least found to cover in-depth a wide range of science topics could be a better solution.

If the aim of secondary education is to produce graduates that are suitable for university, it is proposed here that, based on what the science teachers in this study reported about the greater coverage of topics in the old programmes and



considering how the students felt about the power of their background knowledge in science, improving the old approaches with a bit more emphasis on critical thinking in the final exam might be more beneficial for students who wish to continue into higher education.

Finally, the practical implications that arise from this study for the medical university are related to introducing small group teaching into the FY programme. The findings in this research corroborate with other similar researches on transitions in the context of cultural change (Bhattacharya, 2010; Hirshy and Wilson, 2002) in that they suggest that one of the factors affecting such transitions is related to the lack of personal attention from students and to students feeling overwhelmed in large class lecture-based settings. My own research prior to this PhD (Hayes et al, 2013) had indicated that one of the factors related to improved students' performance in the FY was being able to interact in small-size tutorial groups. And while the previous work only indicated that small group teaching was one of the most positively rated factors, the data from this research explains why and strengthens the point about the need of greater student-lecturer interaction in facilitating transitions into higher education.

#### **7.4. Recommendations for Future Research**

Research into transitions using the socio-cultural model of Communities of Practice has been very influential (for example: O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Tobbell et al, 2010; Gourlay, 2009). This study, on the other hand, has shown that perhaps this model does not give enough attention to students' individual agency in understanding transitions and proposed a notion of 'agentic' rather than 'peripheral'

participation as a more useful lens for looking at transitions. However, this notion was only derived based on the findings from one small scale case study where students and lecturers were participants in the community at only one university. A larger sample of universities is therefore required to see if the notion of 'agentic' participation can be developed with more available types of universities that perhaps follow programmes other than outcomes-based, and increase the generalisability of the findings.

Additionally, it is also recommended that future research on transitions in the context of culture change examines whether investigating the level of exposure to a target culture can be useful in conceptualising transitions. The findings in this research indicated that being familiar with Western culture helped the students overcome some psychological discomfort, for example, when working in mixed-gender groups. They also indicated that pre-university exposure to Western influences developed appropriate expectations regarding studying at the medical university. This supports what Tinto (1993) and Chavous (2002) propose about cultural transitions – that is, that the level of exposure to Western culture of non-Western students can be an important factor in cultural transitions. And while investigating these issues more deeply was beyond the focus of this study, primarily because of its socio-cultural framework that focuses on practices and the three deductive themes, future research in this area is recommended. This type of research could demonstrate whether looking into levels of exposure to the target culture could become yet another powerful framework for understanding transitions.

Finally, as the majority of criticism will probably concentrate on the interpretive and perceptual nature of this study, future research could focus on the issues investigated here in a more positivist or quantifiable way. Some research that deals with the transfer of skills and practices between two institutional settings suggests looking at the learning objectives and assessment tasks of the programmes in various institutions through the popular framework of Bloom's taxonomy (for example: Mergendoller et al, 1998; Ubuz et al, 2010 or Yip, 2009). Using Bloom's framework enables building comparable taxonomies and classifications which might satisfy those researchers who believe that numbers and percentages have greater value than participant views.

## **7.5. Closing Remarks**

This study has revealed a detailed picture of the transition of Bahraini students into Western medical education. It has also explored many characteristics of the national schools in Bahrain and the medical university. Most importantly, this study has revealed that these characteristics, although important in shaping students' learning identities, might not be the defining factors of transitions that involve movement from one educational setting to another. Educational studies cited in the literature review, as well as the theoretical framework, recognise that language, ways of acquiring knowledge and school pedagogies are key parties in transitions. However, they seldom indicate that students are agents who can be proactive about their attributes that have been shaped by school environments, which, as it has been suggested in this study, can be an equally powerful factor affecting transitions. This points out that, for example, the findings from my pre-doctoral work that suggested low levels of self-efficacy of Bahraini students (Hayes et al,

2013) may not be valuable in understanding transitions because they built many pre-conceptions about students' identities as university learners, which led me to believe that Bahraini students were likely to do poorly at university. This doctoral work, therefore, taught me that research that aims at identifying students' attributes may not be sufficient because it does not give enough attention to students' agency.

Furthermore, as it was indicated towards the end of the contribution and rationale section in Chapter 1, these studies also tend to focus on only one aspect of educational transitions but the data from this case study suggested that transitions are a rather multi-faceted phenomenon. For instance, students' transition to university has so far been linked and measured in terms of either appropriate learning strategies (James, 2006; Ates and Cataloglu, 2007; Rose et al., 2008, Kennett and Reed, 2009), second language abilities (Hook and Jones, 2002; Spector-Cohen et al, 2001; Hyon, 2001) or subject-specific knowledge (Krekeler, 2006; Hailikari and Nevgi, 2010; Wang et al, 2010). This study, on the other hand, by combining the focus on language, knowledge base and school pedagogies encompasses many aspects of transitions, which increases the value of this research.

Finally, responding to Hamdy's (2008) call for research that would focus on how Western medical programmes are received by the Arab cultures, this study presents findings that picture what role Islamic views on education and specific Islamic curricula, particularly in relation to science, can play in the transition of students into medical education based on Western models. These findings therefore go some way in addressing the gap in knowledge related to the

phenomena of transplanting programmes from what Hamdy (2008) calls ‘the donor institution’ to the recipient culture with its specific values, beliefs and contexts of practice. And while exploring the data from this study in this context is beyond the focus of this research, future work in this area could lead to even better understanding of cultural transitions.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Transcript – Science Teachers

و في جامعة البحرين لا يوجد تخصص. مثال على ذلك في كل دولة كالتيكنولوجيا الحيوية التخصص في شيء معين. هنا يدرسونهم كل المواد معاً. هل تفهمينني؟ أنا أعني لا يوجد تخصص. لهذا الميب هم يعطونهم كل شيء بشكل مختصر. لذا عندما يذهبون للجامعة تكون لديهم مقدمة عن كل شيء.

Teacher2: Because, here in university of Bahrain there is no specific specialization in the certain topics, it's all general, so like we have biology that's it, so they study everything in biology not in specific or in specialization the same thing.

Teacher1: The science student they are taking everything in science but in briefly from each field a little bit.

Researcher: Ok, because when they go later on then, ok. Is that the unified track, right? Or?

Teacher2: This is, yeah, the unified track, yes.

Researcher: Ok, I mean yes. and the boys said also that the books are better in this respect that they have more pictures they are better explanation extra. So this is what you are saying as well, yes? Is this what you?

Teacher2: In the new books better explanation for things.

في الكتب الجديدة شرح أفضل للأشياء.

Teacher3: "Al Obeikan" books has more information but in brief summaries, because they reduce the number of the books, before we had more biology books, now the books are less but have more summarized units.

كتب العبيكان فيها معلومات لكنها بشكل مختصر. لانهم قللوا عدد الكتب. سابقاً كان لدينا كتب أكثر للأحياء. الآن الكتب أقل لكن بها وحدات مختصرة.

Teacher2: Do you mean the information is not enough?  
هل تقصدان بان المعلومات ليست كافية؟

Teacher1: you mean before there were more books, more details.  
تعنيان بأنه سابقاً كانت الكتب كثيرة. والتفاصيل كثيرة.

Teacher1: She said it used to be like more books and more details, now less books and briefs.

Teacher3: But more systems and things.  
لكن الأجهزة والأشياء أكثر.

Teacher1: But they have introduced more topics.

more topics but repetitive so it's bad for knowledge & group to work

*Handwritten notes on the left margin:*  
Brief Summary  
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OIB  
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bullet points  
OIB



Researcher: Ok, more topics, ok. So what is the latest approach now to teaching, you've already mentioned that the critical thinking and higher level skills, is that what you teach now? Or is it based on memorization and reduction of hours extra?

critical thinking  
023

[Teacher2 No, in "Al Obeikan" there are a lot of critical thinking.]

كلا، في "العبيكان" يوجد الكثير من التفكير الناقد.

Teacher1: So do you use it in the right way, or its only depends on memorization?

فهل تستخدمونه بشكل صحيح، أم انه يعتمد على الحفظ؟

critical thinking  
023

[Teacher3: Its rarely to use critical thinking, I mean the teachers who use critical thinking are very few.]

هو من النادر استخدام التفكير الناقد، أعني بأن المدرسات التي يستخدمن التفكير الناقد قليلات.

Teacher1: The teachers, but she is talking about only science.

المدرسات، لكنها تتكلم فقط عن العلوم.

[Teacher3: Yes, only science, the teachers are not using it, the teacher is only teaching the memorization and that's it.]

نعم، فقط العلوم، المدرسات لا يستخدمنه، المدرسات فقط تدرس الحفظ وهذا كل شيء.

Teacher1: You mean she depends more on memorization.

تعني أنها تعتمد على الحفظ أكثر؟

Memorization is still.

teach up for the exam  
(memorization)  
025

[Researcher: Still, and is it because memorization is on the exam?]

Teacher2: Yes, they memorize for exam.

Researcher: So, you teach for the exam, right?

Teacher2: Yes.]

Researcher: So how much percent, how much percent would you say there is of critical thinking and you know higher level skills applications in your teaching, compare to memorization?

teaching for the exam  
025

[Teacher3: Told her that the teacher is not even qualified to the meaning of critical thinking and how to use it? And the time is not enough to waste the lecture for that, because the course will not finish this way. The second thing is it is not included in the exam; there is only the theoretical part.]

1-3  
2-3  
3-3  
025  
operate?



## Appendix 2: Transcript – English Teachers

Researcher: Thank you very much for coming first of all

Researcher: So speaking is good but writing is not good, why is that?

Teacher 1: Because there is no concentration on grammar.

Researcher: There is no teaching of grammar.

Teacher 1: No, no. (others join in) They erase the question in the final exam. So they just, copy and paste in the exam.

Teacher 3: They memorise or learn off by heart. They have samples of writing but they cannot do it themselves. Some of them, but others don't, just copy and paste.

Researcher: Do you agree? (at other teachers)

Teacher 4: This is a big problem in our classes. Our students are very good speakers of English, as if they were native speakers but concerning the matter of writing, the matter of grammatical structure, they suffer a lot. (pauses) And you have to find the solution for this problem. I think you have to find the solution in the final exam. It will have to be the questions (not clear), concerning the grammar. I'm not going to ask you to make grammar as our main test, but the students should know how to write good English.

Teacher 5: We need only one question concerning grammar and vocab, just one.

Researcher: One question on the exam and you say that would solve the problem?

Teacher5: Yes, I think so. (others join in)

Teacher 5: (unclear from the beginning) generally, the students go out and they might get some phrases when they are there so they will be fine there, but when it comes to grammar, then it will be a problem for some of them. Not apply rules. Accuracy.

Researcher: Accuracy, aha. So they are not accurate?

All agree

Teacher3: Students usually study for this thing that are going to be tested.

Researcher: Right ... that's normal. (all laugh)

Teacher2: So, in the final exam, there are no grammar and no structure. That's why when you teach grammar or something like that, students usually ask: "Are we going to have this in the final exam?"

Researcher: Yes, I know.

675 (emphasis) on  
Just exam)

1

SIE  
Skill  
(Not of  
Accuracy)

- OIE ->



new code (CLT)

✓

Teacher 2: I'd like to say that students are good in speaking but not good in writing. Ok, but the modern trend in teaching say that we don't need to teach grammar. A student may acquire an example and follow it, we don't need to teach rules.

Researcher: Do you do this?

Teacher6: That's the modern trend (another teacher says something in the background but not clear). They have to speak, grammatically, they might be wrong but Ok, we accept it. And the point of the exam, I don't need any grammar in the exam, that's my opinion. And the ultimate goal, the ultimate goal of the students is the exam. So, the point of the exam shouldn't be so important, that's my opinion. -025 (Exam)

Researcher: So is this something that determines the way you teach? That's the second question (in the interview schedule). Do you teach for the exam?

(Recording unclear - about 20 seconds)

Teacher5: Our exams are usually skills oriented. We teach grammar but we expect students to use grammar in writing rather than giving them separate questions.

Researcher: That makes sense, right?

Teacher 6: They are self-centered, test-centered.

Teacher 1: We need to introduce, put translation questions on the exam.

Researcher: So that was the case in the past, translation?

Teacher 1: They had translation in the past (teachers discuss this among themselves) / 01E

Teacher 2: So we have to put question for grammar, for grammar, and translation (others agree).

Teacher 6: But there is an important point here that we should mention, that they are good at listening, maybe they learn it from primary school (all agree). They are good at listening.

Teacher 2: they have to know how to apply the essential words. (at university) they mustn't memorise, to answer the question, they will have to know the alternatives). So, if they are not tested in vocab (in the final exam), they needn't know other words. 025 / Emphasis on 6+em)

Teacher6: Here we come again to the point of the final exam, the exam doesn't measure their abilities. Its' reading, just the writing, doesn't measure their abilities. but they memorise, they copy and paste the writing sample.

Researcher: yeah ... because that's enough to pass the exam in school

015 Approaches (02E)

?

### **Appendix 3: Transcript – Students**

Researcher: So first question is, how do you feel about studying at university now? And how is it different from school, now that you have completed your first year, how do you feel about it?

- school  
65

Non-ELC1 Student 1: We got used to the environment and the teaching methods, and, yeah, it was really, we had to jump a big gap between the secondary school.

Researcher: You feel that there was a big gap, a lot of differences.

Non-ELC1 Student 1: Yes, because of the difference in the language. We had some troubles at the beginning in (pauses), not translating, but getting a lot of new words.

English - 03E  
(used: tea)

(some students still coming into the room, so the researcher repeats the first question)

Researcher: We already asked about how you feel about studying at university now, after you've completed a year, would you like to add anything?

Non-ELC student 2: Yeah, for me it was not the issue with the language at first but understanding of what the university wants, what could come in the exams, what I need to focus on (others nod). What lectures are more important than the others.

04E

Researcher: Whereas, before in school it was clear.

015 (change  
5)

Non-ELC Student 2: yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Is there something that you found particularly difficult or is there something that you found particularly easy when you started university?

01B  
background  
(good)

Non-ELC Student 3: What was easy in that all the material that we are taking now, we have taken it in government schools, maybe even in deeper ways, not in a way we are now, so that's why it was very helpful. Because we know what they are talking about, we understand the whole subject because we have already taken it before.

Researcher: So you have this background knowledge.

All agree

Researcher: Do you think good English language helped you or prevented you from progressing? You are different from the ELC students because ELC students have low English.

Non-ELC Student 3: It helps but not a lot. Like a lot of people who have excellent English but they will not score as high as the others. I think it's important to have good English language but it's not the key to success. (all agree)

or English -> 04E

Researcher: So, what's the key to success then?

new code - self-discipline

Non-ELC Student 1: it depends on the person, how hard he is working (pauses). If we have two people and one has higher level of English than the other one but if the other one works harder than the other one, he can achieve what the first one.

Researcher: So, you wouldn't say that good English language is necessary for success?

Non-ELC Student 1: It makes shorter the time of study, the ways of studying. (all agree)

Researcher: So, what's the key factor then? Because you said that's not the issue.

Non-ELC Student 2: Preparation, preparation, working hard, looking for past paper questions to understand what is going to come in the final exams. Also, reading outside lectures because if you read outside lectures the lectures will be easier for you to understand.

Non-ELC1 Student 4: Just attending lectures, I think that's it for the Foundation Year.

Researcher: Easy, yeah? (All laugh). Nothing complicated about university?

Non-ELC1 Student 3: For me, like revising the lectures after you taken them, even like you say 'I don't have time', but if you try, after each lecture, if you revise it, it will be easier, because the day you start to leave one lecture, then the whole thing is going to (not clear but probably 'accumulate'). -> study skulls (new)

Researcher: So, more of a systematic study, yes? And some kind of self-discipline?

All agree

Researcher: Tell me about your reading and writing requirements in your content classes. What do you write?

Non-ELC 1 Student 1: Well, only in the exams.

Non-ELC1 Student 3: We only have short notes at the end of the semester.

Researcher: Do you find short notes easy or difficult? Do you find it difficult to get the content across?

Non-ELC 1 Student 1: For us, Arabic native speakers, we understand but then to write it in a neat way, you have to rely on your sources.

OIE skulls

Break

2



no of skulls



## Appendix 4: Transcript – Lecturers

Question 1: what in your opinion are the biggest problems the students face?

Faculty5: well, there is different students have different problems, I would say that, if we're talking about students who fail, I think that the vast majority of our students who fail, their problem is motivation and adjusting to a different type of environment, which is also related to motivation.

Interviewer: what do you mean by different type of environment?

Faculty5: as if in a less controlled, like a university style environment when they have a lot more responsibility for their own progress and learning. So I believe that a number of our students do not know how to make the transition from having somebody looking over their shoulder to monitoring their own progress. Well, basically ??? their own progress.

Interviewer: do you think that has anything to do with the English language?

Faculty5: I think that some students who have very poor English language ability can end up in the screw because of their low level. I think that the numbers are very small but I would say that there a couple of students who could end up there because they come in with such a low level of English that, and they are thrown into the deep end, so probably before they even have an English class, they have a physics lecture or chemistry lecture and so on, so their English language level or skills are not there to allow them to learn normally the other subjects, so they are basically on a losing ??? at a very start and this can serve to demotivate them. Now, I am thinking about a couple of examples from my experience over the past number of years. they definitely have very poor English and I would say that this definitely contribute to their motivation

Interviewer: but that's not the biggest factor, the English language ?

Faculty5: no, I don't think it is. I would say that it is students making the transition. Self-discipline, motivation and also understanding of the study skills that are required and management, something like study management. Quite often I have students who come to me and they will say that they have read their lectures two three times and they haven't assimilated any of the information. If they read them two or three times already that would take a significant amount of time so if what they are saying is true then they have invested some time, they have been committed to it, so maybe they are not lacking motivation, and they are not lacking discipline but what they are lacking I study skills, the key skills that are required, you know, note taking, condensing their notes, identifying the key learning outcomes, doing exmples, applying rules to other cases or other scenarios, practising tutorial questions, past paper questions. and some of them haven't done any of that.

Interviewer: how about the English language, don't you think that they are lacking the English language as well?





02 English -> not a fact (new note)  
04E

Faculty5: they might be weak in the English language but I don't believe that that's one of the major factors. I don't think that that's happening because of the English language. I've had people who are very capable English language speakers but when you look at the demographic of the students who are failing, there are a large number of high English language ability students who are failing and failing miserably.

Interviewer: and at the same time those who are in the English language are first honours.

Faculty5: yes.

02 English  
04E

Interviewer: what are the expectations of the English language then?

Faculty5: it is a disadvantage for the students to have simultaneously bring their English language level up to a certain level, while also taking on the subject information and that does disadvantage them. [Lucky, quite a large number of students who are coming in who do have poor English language skills are scholarships students who are coming from government schools and these are high motivated students and have the intellectual ability and the motivation and the discipline to achieve, not only to raise their level of the English language but also simultaneously manage to perform at a high level, even though their English is slightly compromised, and they worked out their way of doing that and what they are doing is translating English into Arabic and back, some of the materials that we do with them is what they studied in their Arabic curriculum and they are able to transfer some of that knowledge across.]

English 02 /  
Expectations  
03E

In terms of my expectations in terms of the English language, I expect them to be able to understand me in lectures, I expect them to understand the material that I present on the slides, I expect them to understand the English and the material that I present in tutorials and also when it comes to the exam papers. That's what I require. I don't require them to have, for instance, fully grammatically correct sentences when they are answering the questions in chemistry. I require them to demonstrate an understanding of the material and they can do that without forming grammatically correct sentences, and even the spelling is incorrect as well, if the spelling is close enough to what it should be, I will still accept. So, they are my expectations.

Interviewer: do you explain the instructions to them or do you just give them the exam?

Faculty5: it depend, if you take a look at the front of one of our exam papers, you will see that the instructions are itemised on the front page, what they are supposed to do, these instructions are quite similar to past papers as well, if not the exact same. The students are given a couple of minutes to read those instructions in advance in the exam taking place.

Appendix 5: Sample Field Notes

School: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~  
 Date: 20 April

→ Teacher agreed that ~~workshop~~ is not good (prelim for test) listening

→ No pressure in the final exam → not good for university

(Memorization model of writing) → all agree SS should be active learners through CCT

→ not good procedure (all agree)

→ SS study only for exam (agree) translation should be included

Teacher 6 → tries to say that SS should not focus on the final exam

---

Problem: students' fear to blame on primary

→ another topic interference (agree)

→ cannot spell and syntactic error

Vocab → need. tea ESP (not page) review word system

TE: tries to say that they need to use sp. freely

---

Cont. Assessment → 30 marks for the project blame on soc. but should be on primary

Remedial class - because SS are weak → can on primary

descrip books, and syllabus all the time

without achievement → students don't pass and they move on (→ agree) subsequent papers

## Appendix 6: Sample Matrix

School Code: D

Theme 2: The English Language (improvements to better prepare students for university)

Code	Speaking (02E)	Vocabulary (03E)	ESP (03E)	Suitable courses (02E)
Teacher 1			<p>In the past, the streams had their own ESP classes, especially the science students. The English teacher used to teach them the scientific terms. Some of this was also taught in the literary section.</p> <p>We had two kinds of syllabus, one for the science and one for the literary.</p>	<p>It's fine, but we need to come up with a suitable method for those students, because we know many methods of teaching, but which is the suitable one for them? The Ministry are copying from the other countries, the methods, but they are not suitable for those students. It's suitable for Singaporean students. Those students, they want to learn, they have a desire to learn, but these, they don't have it (all agree) . it's different.</p>
Teacher 2	<p>We have difficulties teaching our students because as we said, their level is really low.</p>		<p>At teacher 3 – yes, we had a book that was called general science with them, it was for the scientific section, and some novels as well for the literary section.</p>	

			Now, we can add to the curriculum and include the topics for the science sections and for the literary sections. We could omit some modules and add extras. (generally there is no room for it in the curriculum)	
Teacher 3	To communicate with each other, using English.	Here we have students in the second year of secondary who don't know a, b, c. is this the secondary teacher's fault? We get the blame.	In Egypt it was the same.	
Teacher 4	To improve the skill of speaking because since it is not here in the exam, nobody pays much attention to it. But when they go to the university, they need to speak with the professor, with the students, especially those students who study outside Bahrain, in the USA or in the UK, they need to have minimum communication skills.			
Teacher 5		Also, the vocabulary they will have to use.	And it was a very good idea.	
Teacher 6				

## **Appendix 7: Information Sheet for Participants**

### **Information Sheet for Interested Participants**

#### **Project Title**

#### **On the Transition from Bahrain Secondary to Western Third-Level Learning at a Medical University in Bahrain; an Exploratory Study.**

This project is related to issues connected with transition from Bahraini national schools to a Western medical university. The purpose of this study is to explore factors that play a role in this transition by focusing on three areas of academic preparedness – that is, science background knowledge, the English language and school pedagogy. It is envisaged that the research design will follow a small scale study model and use quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Quantitative data will be collected through a questionnaire. Qualitative investigation will be carried out through the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. It is hoped that the outcomes of this project will increase our understanding of transition in the context of language and culture change.

#### **Reasons for Sending this Information Sheet to You**

To explore factors related to transition, I am hoping that you will join this research project. Therefore, I am sending you this information sheet and formal invitation to take part in the study, as an English teacher/science teacher/university student or FY faculty member participant. Here, I explain some further background to the study and also what participation will involve from you. If you have any queries about any of the information provided in this sheet, please get in direct contact with me at [amh217@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:amh217@exeter.ac.uk), tel. (+973) 39534967 before you return the *Consent Form* to discuss such concerns and queries. You may decline to participate in the study without giving reasons or incurring displeasure or penalty.

#### **Further Details of the Study**

An essential goal of this study is to understand factors that affect transition that take place in the context of language and culture change by exploring such basic questions as:

1. What are the perspectives on transition of:

- a) secondary teachers?
- b) students?
- c) university lecturers?

2. How do participants perceive the role of school practices, English education and science background knowledge in students' identity and agency change to move through the educational outcomes of the medical university?

Hence, you would be committing to participate in the study, specifically with regards to your subject area and pedagogical practices in your work place.

#### **What Will Participation Involve from You?**

The key tasks which would be asked of you as participant in this study are:

#### **For English Language Teachers:**

- complete a questionnaire
- take part in interview focus groups

**For Science Teachers:**

- take part in interview focus groups

**For Students:**

- take part in interview focus groups

**For University Lecturers:**

- take part in semi-structured interviews

All interview transcripts and the reports will be returned to the participants for verification.

**Benefits to you of Participating in this Study**

It is hoped that by participating in this study, your knowledge of and perspectives on the factors related to transition in your subject area will help to increase the understanding of transition. In addition, you will be able to draw on the findings of the study in order to inform your professional practice.

**Disadvantages of Participating in this Study**

The immediate disadvantage for you of participating in this study is the time commitment required to participate in the interviews and to fill in the questionnaire. The estimated interview time is 30-60 minutes and to complete the questionnaire about 20 min. Additionally, you do need to consider the impact of this time commitment on your normal work and duties. If you have any concerns about the time commitment involved, do contact me to discuss this further before you return your consent.

**Is There any Recompense for Participation?**

There is no financial recompense to you for participation in this study. The benefits and rewards will hopefully be seen in terms of your professional development and your enhanced understanding of educational transition.

**How to Withdraw from the Study?**

You can withdraw at any point from this study without giving a reason or incurring displeasure or penalty simply by e-mailing me at [amh217@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:amh217@exeter.ac.uk). At that point you will be asked whether or not you agree to the data you have provided through participation in the study being used, or whether you would prefer all your data to be deleted and removed from the study. If you opt for all your data to be removed, you will not be included in any of the findings provided in any of the study reports.

**Confidentiality of Data**

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

**Complaints or Comments**

If you decide to participate in this study, and you encounter difficulties, or would like to make a complaint, a comment or a suggestion for improvement, if you feel able to do so, you can contact me directly (see above for the contact details). If however, you felt it was more appropriate to speak to a third party, you can raise any concerns with Dr. Nasser Mansour at [N.Mansour@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:N.Mansour@exeter.ac.uk) who is the project supervisor.

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.



## Appendix 8: Questionnaire

### ***A questionnaire for the English Language Teachers – Ways of Teaching and Assessing English***

**School:** ..... المدرسة:

**Date:** ..... التاريخ:

Dear Teacher,

عزيزي المعلم،

The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the patterns of teaching and assessing English in secondary government schools. You are kindly requested to answer the questionnaire and return it to the researcher.

الغرض من هذه الاستبانة هو الكشف عن نماذج التدريس والتقييم في اللغة الانجليزية في المدارس الحكومية الثانوية. يرجى ملء الاستبانة و إعادتها للباحث.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation. Your personal data will be treated in strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in an anonymised form.

إن المعلومات التي ستقدمها ستستخدم لأغراض بحثية فقط، وستتم معالجة البيانات الشخصية وفقا لتشريعات حماية البيانات الحالية. ستعامل بياناتك الشخصية بسرية تامة ولن يتم الكشف عنها لأية أطراف ثالثة غير مصرح بها. وستنشر نتائج البحث في شكل مجهول المصدر.

Thank you for your help.

تقبلوا مني جزيل الشكر و التقدير

Aneta Hayes

أنيتا هيس

### **Section A**

القسم الأول:

Please, choose one answer and tick the appropriate box. الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة و وضع علامة في الخانة المناسبة

1. The highest qualification:

1. أعلى مؤهل:

a.  Language Diploma (e.g. TOEFL/ DELTA) دبلوم تدريس اللغة

b.  B.A major: العام التخصص الفرعي minor ..... بكالوريوس: العام التخصص الفرعي

please specify

يرجى التحديد

please specify

b.  M.A. major: العام التخصص الفرعي minor ..... ماجستير: العام التخصص الفرعي

please specify

يرجى التحديد

please

specify

c.  PhD major: العام التخصص الفرعي minor ..... الدكتوراه: العام التخصص الفرعي

please specify

يرجى التحديد

please

specify

d. Other – specify.....

أخرى- يرجى التحديد

2. Experience (in years)

2. الخبرة (بالسنوات)

a. \_\_\_\_\_ 1-4      b. \_\_\_\_\_ 5-8      c. \_\_\_\_\_ 9-12      d. \_\_\_\_\_ more than 12

3. How many hours a week do you teach?      ما معدل ساعات التدريس في الأسبوع؟

a. \_\_\_\_\_ 20      b. \_\_\_\_\_ 15      c. \_\_\_\_\_ 10      d. \_\_\_\_\_ 5

4. I have obtained my highest degree from:      لقد حصلت على أعلى مؤهل تعليمي من:

a. \_\_\_\_\_ UK      b. \_\_\_\_\_ USA      c. \_\_\_\_\_ Bahrain      d. \_\_\_\_\_ Other – please specify  
.....

5. I am: Bahraini \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Bahraini \_\_\_\_\_

6. I am: below 20 years old \_\_\_\_\_ 21-30 years old \_\_\_\_\_ 31-40 years old \_\_\_\_\_ 41-50 years old \_\_\_\_\_  
51-60 years old \_\_\_\_\_ above 60 years old \_\_\_\_\_

7. I am: female \_\_\_\_\_ male \_\_\_\_\_

## Section B

When I assess my students writing:

عندما أقيم المهارات الكتابية لطلابي:

Question سؤال	Never أبداً	Very Rarely نادراً جداً	Sometimes بعض الأحيان	Often غالباً	Always دائماً
1. I follow one specific technique. أتبع أسلوب واحد محدد	1	2	3	4	5
2. I correct all my students' errors. أصح جميع أخطاء طلبتي	1	2	3	4	5
3. I just point out the error without the correction. أحدد الأخطاء لطلبتني مع مراعاة عدم ذكر التصحيح	1	2	3	4	5
4. I point out the error and give the correction. أحدد الأخطاء مع ذكر التصحيح	1	2	3	4	5
5. I mark the piece of writing without any comments. أصح مواضيع التعبير مع مراعاة عدم وضع أي ملاحظات.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I comment on the piece of writing without any marks. أكتب ملاحظاتي مع مراعاة عدم وضع علامات في أماكن تواجد الأخطاء.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I mark the piece of writing for content only. أصح المواضيع التعبيرية من خلال التركيز على المحتوى و الأفكار فقط.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I mark the piece of writing for language only. أصح المواضيع التعبيرية من خلال التركيز على القواعد اللغوية و الإملائية.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I mark the piece of writing for both content and language. أصح المواضيع التعبيرية من خلال التركيز على كل من المحتوى الفكري و اللغوي.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I point out the way in which a piece of writing is good or bad. أحدد للطلبة مستوى مواضيع التعبير سواء أكانت جيدة أم سيئة .	1	2	3	4	5
11. I pay special attention to style. أولي اهتماماً خاصاً للأسلوب المتبع	1	2	3	4	5
12. I ask the students to correct the writing of one another. أطلب من الطلبة أن يقوموا بتصحيح مواضيع التعبير لبعضهم البعض	1	2	3	4	5
13. I discuss errors with the students. أناقش الأخطاء مع الطلبة	1	2	3	4	5
14. I ask the students to read out or I read out good pieces of writing. أطلب من الطلبة أن يقرأوا/ أقرأ بعض النماذج الجيدة من المواضيع التعبيرية	1	2	3	4	5
15. I feel that I am short of time to correct students' writing in detail. أشعر بأنني لا أملك وقت كافي لتصحيح أخطاء الطلبة مع وضع التفاصيل	1	2	3	4	5

## Section C

When I teach writing, I concentrate on:

عندما أدرس الكتابة، أركز على:

Question	Never أبداً	Very Rarely نادرًا جدًا	Sometimes بعض الأحيان	Often غالبًا	Always دائمًا
1. Capitalisation	1	2	3	4	5
2. Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
3. Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
4. Appropriateness of Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
5. Technical terms	1	2	3	4	5
6. Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
7. The organisation of writing.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The development of ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The sequencing of ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The purpose of writing.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Writing process.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Writing product.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Style.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Both, the process and the product.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Writing strategies.	1	2	3	4	5

## Section D

When I teach reading, I concentrate on:

عندما أدرس مهارة القراءة أركز على:

Question	Never أبداً	Very Rarely نادرًا جدًا	Sometimes بعض الأحيان	Often غالبًا	Always دائمًا
السؤال					
1. General understanding of a text	1	2	3	4	5
2. Finding specific information	1	2	3	4	5
3. Identifying the main ideas	1	2	3	4	5
4. Summarizing	1	2	3	4	5
5. Interpreting visual information	1	2	3	4	5
6. Interpreting graphs, tables,... etc	1	2	3	4	5
7. Inferring meaning	1	2	3	4	5
8. Guessing the meaning of unknown words	1	2	3	4	5
9. Paraphrasing ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Selecting important information	1	2	3	4	5
11. Evaluating texts	1	2	3	4	5
12. Predicting	1	2	3	4	5
13. Recognizing different elements of a text	1	2	3	4	5
14. Reading speed	1	2	3	4	5

## Section E

When I assess my students reading:

عندما أقيم مهارة القراءة لدى طلابي:

Question السؤال	Never أبداً	Very Rarely نادرًا جدًا	Sometimes بعض الأحيان	Often غالبًا	Always دائمًا
1. I check students' abilities to provide word-for-word answers. أتحقق من قدرات الطلبة على كتابة إجابات مباشرة من نص القراءة.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I check students' abilities to recall specific information from the text. أتحقق من قدرات الطلبة على تذكر معلومات محددة من نص القراءة.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I check students' abilities to analyse information. أتحقق من قدرات الطلبة على تحليل المعلومات.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I check students' abilities to interpret meaning. أتحقق من قدرات الطلبة على تحليل/ تفسير المعاني.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I check students' abilities to evaluate the text. أتحقق من قدرات الطلبة على تقييم النص.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I use multiple choice questions. استخدم أسئلة الاختيار المتعدد	1	2	3	4	5
7. I use T/F/NG questions. استخدم أسئلة : صح/خطأ/ لا يوجد	1	2	3	4	5
8. I use open-ended questions. استخدم أسئلة مفتوحة	1	2	3	4	5

End of Questionnaire

نهاية الاستبانة

Thank you

شكراً

## Appendix 9: Focus Group Interview Questions (English Teachers)

School: ..... المدرسة:

Date: ..... التاريخ:

Dear Teacher,

عزيزي المعلم،

These interview questions have been designed for research purposes only and should not under any circumstances interfere with anyone's employment or professional assessment.

لقد تم تصميم أسئلة هذه المقابلة لأغراض بحثية فقط ، ولا يجب تحت أي ظرف من الظروف أن تتداخل مع عمل أي شخص أو تقييمه المهني.

In this interview, you will be asked a set of questions following the questionnaire you previously filled in. Please respond to every question honestly and openly.

في هذه المقابلة ، سوف يطلب منك الإجابة على مجموعة من الأسئلة بعد الانتهاء من ملء الاستبانة و الزيارة الصفية لبعض دروس اللغة الإنجليزية. يرجى الرد على كل سؤال بأمانة وصراحة.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation. Your personal data will be treated in strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in an anonymised form.

سوف تستخدم المعلومات التي تقدمها لأغراض بحثية فقط، وستتم معالجة البيانات الشخصية وفقاً لتشريعات حماية البيانات الحالية. ستعامل بياناتك الشخصية في سرية تامة ولن يتم الكشف عنها لأي طرف ثالث غير مصرح له. وستنشر نتائج البحث في شكل مجهول المصدر.

Thank you for your help.

شكراً لتعاونكم

Aneta Hayes

أنيتا هيس

1. *What in your opinion determines students' performance in English?*  
1. ما هي الأشياء التي تحدد مستوى أداء الطلاب في مادة اللغة الإنجليزية في رأيك؟
2. *What determines the way you assess students' writing?*  
2. ما الذي يحدد الطرق التي يتم من خلالها تقييم كتابة الطلاب؟
3. *What determines the way you teach writing?*  
3. ما الذي يحدد طرق تدريسك للكتابة؟
4. *What determines the way you teach reading?*  
4. ما الذي يحدد طرق تدريسك للقراءة؟
5. *What determines the way you assess reading?*  
5. ما الذي يحدد طرق تقييمك للقراءة؟
6. *What determines the way you teach grammar?*  
6. ما الذي يحدد طرق تدريسك للقواعد النحوية؟
7. *What determines the way you evaluate grammar?*  
7. ما الذي يحدد طرق تقييمك للقواعد النحوية؟
8. *Would you like to elaborate on the problems your students face with learning English in terms of:*  
هل تريد أن تناقش المشاكل التي يعاني منها طلابك في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، من حيث مهارة:  
أ. القراءة  
ب. الكتابة  
ج. القواعد النحوية

What solutions would you suggest?

ما هي الحلول التي تقترحها؟

9. *Can you tell me about some of the most difficult problems you face when teaching English?*  
9. هل تستطيع إخباري عن أكثر المشاكل التي تواجهها عندما تدرس اللغة الإنجليزية؟
10. *What in your opinion would solve the problems English teachers face?*  
10. ما هو برأيك الشيء الذي يساعد على حل المشاكل التي يعاني منها مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية؟
11. *You are a qualified English teacher. How does your training apply to your current teaching situation?*  
11. أنت مدرس لغة إنجليزية مؤهل، كيف يمكنك الربط بين تدريبك و وضعك الحالي في التدريس؟
12. *Do you think you need more education and training?*  
12. هل تعتقد بأنك تحتاج إلى المزيد من التدريب و الدورات؟
13. *How do you feel about the reforms concerning the English curriculum and the changes in methods of teaching?*  
13. ما هو شعورك حيال التعديلات التي طرأت على مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية، و التغييرات التي طرأت على طرق التدريس؟
14. *How do you implement the curricular requirements and the new methods of teaching?*  
15. كيف تطبق متطلبات المناهج الجديدة و طرق تدريسها؟
16. *Are you involved in the curriculum development? Do you think you should? Why/ Why not?*  
16. هل تشارك في تطوير المناهج الدراسية؟ هل تعتقد أنه يجب إشراكك في هذه العملية؟ لماذا؟ لم لا؟
17. *Are you involved in making decisions considering assessment?*  
17. هل تشارك في اتخاذ قرارات تخص عملية التقييم؟
18. *What do you know about English language requirements at university level?*  
18. ماذا تعرف عن متطلبات اللغة الإنجليزية على مستوى المرحلة الجامعية؟
19. *What in your opinion should be done to respond to those requirements?*  
19. ما الذي ينبغي فعله في رأيك للاستجابة لتلك المتطلبات؟
20. *Are those needs considered in the design of the curriculum?*  
20. هل يتم النظر لتلك المتطلبات كعنصر أساسي عند تصميم المناهج الدراسية؟
21. *Do you have any other comments?*  
21. هل لديك تعليق آخر؟

## Appendix 10: Focus Group Interview Questions (Science Teachers)

Dear Teacher,

عزيزي المعلم،

These interview questions have been designed for research purposes only and should not under any circumstances interfere with anyone's employment or professional assessment.

لقد تم تصميم أسئلة هذه المقابلة لأغراض بحثية فقط ، ولا يجب تحت أي ظرف من الظروف أن تتداخل مع عمل أي شخص أو تقييمه المهني.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation. Your personal data will be treated in strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in an anonymised form.

سوف تستخدم المعلومات التي تقدمها لأغراض بحثية فقط، وستتم معالجة البيانات الشخصية وفقاً لتشريعات حماية البيانات الحالية. ستعامل بياناتك الشخصية في سرية تامة ولن يتم الكشف عنها لأي طرف ثالث غير مصرح له. وستنشر نتائج البحث في شكل مجهول المصدر.

Thank you for your help.

شكراً لتعاونكم

Aneta Hayes

أنيتا هيس

School: ..... المدرسة:

No of science teachers employed: ..... عدد مدرسي المواد العلمية:

### Background information (to be filled in by the teachers) (معلومات أساسية (يملأ من قبل المعلمين)

Nationality: ..... الجنسية:

Current Qualification: ..... المؤهل الحالي:

Gender: ..... الجنس:

Teaching Load (hours per week): ..... نصاب التدريس (ساعة/ اسبوع)

Which science(s) do you teach? ..... ما هي المادة العلمية التي تدرسها:

How long have you been working in this school? (in years) ..... عدد سنوات التدريس في المدرسة الحالية:

Teaching experience (in years) ..... عدد سنوات التدريس ككل (الخبرة)

### Interview Questions for Science Teachers

أسئلة المقابلة لمدرسي العلوم

1. The discussion with students at university has indicated that the science knowledge they gained in school helps them with learning at university. On the other hand, lecturers seem to think that some students lack the necessary knowledge to proceed in the FY.

1. إشارة الى المناقشة التي اجريت مع الطلاب في الجامعة اتضح أن المعلومات العلمية التي اكتسبوها في المدرسة ساعدتهم على التعلم في الجامعة. من ناحية أخرى، المحاضرين يتصورون أن بعض الطلاب تفتقر إلى المعرفة اللازمة للمضي قدماً في السنة التأسيسية.

a) What is your opinion? Do you think that school prepares students well for the university? (in terms of subject-knowledge and pedagogical approach)

(أ) ما هو رأيك؟ هل تعتقد أن المدرسة تعد الطلاب بشكل جيد للجامعة؟ (من حيث المعرفة بالمواد و النهج التربوي).

b) What is good/ bad about science teaching in terms of students' future careers at university?

(ب) ما هو جيد / سيئ في تدريس العلوم من حيث مستقبل الطلاب المهني في الجامعة؟

2. What guides teaching science in Bahraini schools?

2. ما الذي يحكم او يؤثر في تدريس العلوم في مدارس البحرين؟

a) What is the latest approach?

(أ) ما هو أحدث النهج او طريقة لتدريس العلوم؟

b) How much independent learning takes place in science?

(ب) كم هي نسبة التعلم المستقل او الذاتي التي تعطي للطالب في المواد العلمية؟

c) How much critical thinking/ scientific reasoning is involved in the current teaching? Is it assessed?

(ج) كم هي نسبة التفكير النقدي / تفكير المنطقي العلمي التي تشارك في طرق التدريس الحالية؟ و هل تقيم؟

d) Science education takes place in Arabic. At the same time, students have English equivalents of certain terms in their coursebooks. To what extent are they taught? How do you feel about teaching science in English in general?

(د) تدرس المواد العلمية باللغة العربية. في نفس الوقت، يوجد لدى الطلاب بعض المفردات المرادفة باللغة الإنجليزية في كتابهم المدرسي. إلى أي مدى يتم الاهتمام بتدريس هذه المفردات؟ ما هو شعورك حول تدريس العلوم باللغة الإنجليزية بشكل عام؟

e) Is teaching science integrated? Or are the sciences taught separately? How does this affect the students in terms of their application of science?

(ه) تدريس العلوم متكامل حيث لا تفصل مادة عن اخري؟ أم يتم تدريس العلوم كل مادة على حدة؟ كيف يؤثر ذلك على الطلاب من حيث تطبيقهم للعلوم؟

3. We accept only those students whose Tawjihiya is over 90%. Do you think it's a fair reflection of students' ability in science? How does this compare to other international qualifications?

3. نحن فقط نقبل طلاب التوجيهية بمعدلات أكثر من 90%. هل تعتقد انها انعكاس عادل لقدرة الطلاب في مجال العلوم؟ كيف مقارنة هذا مع المؤهلات الدولية الأخرى؟

4. Can you talk about pedagogies and programmes in Bahraini schools (in science and in general). How suitable are they for students who want to study at university?

4. هل يمكنك الحديث عن الأساليب التربوية والبرامج في المدارس البحرينية (في مجال المواد العلمية وبصفة عامة). ما مدى ملائمتها للطلاب الذين يرغبون في الدراسة في الجامعة؟

a) How do you prepare students for higher education?

(أ) كيف يتم إعداد الطلاب للتعليم العالي



b) What do you know about their needs at this third stage? How do you try to meet their needs?

ب) ماذا تعرف عن احتياجاتهم في هذه المرحلة التعليمية الثالثة؟ ما هي محاولتك لتلبية احتياجاتهم؟

c) How would you change, if at all, the programmes/ pedagogies in Bahrain to better prepare students for university?

ج) كيف تعتقد يمكن التغيير، في حال الرغبة في التغيير، البرامج التربوية في البحرين لإعداد الطلاب لافضل مستوى للإنخراط في الجامعات؟

5. What influences the way you teach science? Is it in line with your personal beliefs about teaching?

5. ما الذي يؤثر على طريقة تدريس العلوم؟ هل هو مولائم لمعتقداتك الشخصية في التدريس؟

a) Are there any things at the school/ cultural level that affect the way you teach?

أ) هل هناك أي أشياء على الصعيد المدرسي او الثقافي مما يؤثر على الطريقة تدريسك؟

6. What other aspects of Bahraini tradition/ culture can affect students ability to make a transition to a Western university?

6. ما الجوانب الأخرى من التقاليد / الثقافة البحرينية التي تؤثر على قدرة الطلاب في إحداث التحول إلى جامعة بثقافة غربية؟

## Appendix 11: Focus Group Interview Questions (Students – Round 1)

1. How do you feel about studying at the university now? How is it different from school? What's hard? What's easy?
2. Do you think your English class helped you with studying other subjects? Why/ Why not?
3. Can you think of anything specific that you learnt in the ELC that you later used for reading/ writing/ grammar/ medical terminology or any other activity in your other subjects? Describe please.
4. How do you feel about learning grammar, reading and writing now at university? Do you think it's important to improve it? What are your goals in improving those skills?
5. What was learning English like at school? Can you compare it to what is needed now at university?
6. Were the tasks at school, in terms of writing, similar to what you've done this semester? In what ways were they similar/ different?
  - In English
  - In Sciences
7. Do you do any reading in your content classes? [think about examinations, lecture preparation, extra reading] Do you find it hard? Easy? Is it the same to the tasks at school?
8. How about grammar? Is it important for your content classes?
9. When you think about the academic skills you need now to be a successful student, what are the most important? Think about language skills and your other subjects?
10. Were those skills practised in school? Do you think that the school prepared you well for studying at the university?

## Appendix 12: Focus Group Interview Questions (Students – Round 2)

### Additional questions for students

أسئلة إضافية للطلاب

1. We have already discussed the effects of schooling on your transition to university and you talked about science and language issues, as well as study skills, etc. This time I would like you to tell me about personal changes that you had to undergo in order to adapt to the university environment.

1. لقد سبق لنا التحدث عن آثار التعليم بالمدرسة على الانتقال لجامعة وتحدثت عن قضايا و مشكلات المواد العلمية واللغة، وكذلك مهارات الدراسية، الخ. هذه المرة أود منك أن تخبرني عن التغييرات الشخصية التي كان عليك أن تخضع لها من أجل التكيف مع البيئة الجامعية.

a) Could you talk about any socio-cultural [relating to social and cultural interaction] factors that made it easier/ more difficult for you at the university (for example: gender, communication with males, communication in English, family issues, approaching lecturers, participating in tutorials, etc).

أ) هل يمكنك التحدث عن أي العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية [المتعلقة بالتفاعل الاجتماعي والثقافي] التي جعلته من السهل / الصعب لك في الجامعة (على سبيل المثال: بين الجنسين، والتواصل مع الذكور، والاتصال في اللغة الإنجليزية، والمشاكل الأسرية، و الاستفسار من المحاضرين ، والمشاركة في الدروس، الخ).

b) What aspects of Bahraini culture play a role in making a transition to a university like this one?

ب) ما هي جوانب الثقافة البحرينية التي تلعب دوراً بارزاً في الانتقال إلى جامعة مثل هذه؟

2. Do you feel you have undergone any major changes in identity/ agency [any intentional changes in your ways regarding dealing with things] in order to be able to study at this university?

2. هل تشعر أنك خضعت لأي تغييرات رئيسية في الهوية [أي تغييرات متعمدة في طرقك بشأن التعامل مع الأشياء] من أجل أن تكون قادرة على الدراسة في هذه الجامعة؟

a) Were they personal changes or do you think they can be related to your cultural framework?

أ) وهل هي تغييرات شخصية أو تعتقد أنها يمكن أن تكون متعلقة بإطارك الثقافي؟

b) Do you feel that being a Bahraini has pre-disposed you as to how you view/ approach things? Has it changed? Was it difficult to change?

ب) هل تشعر كونك بحريني ويؤثر و يشكل طريقة تفكيرك في كيفية النظر/التعامل مع الامور مسبقاً ؟ هل تغيرت طريقة تفكيرك؟ هل من الصعب أن تتغير؟

3. Think about your attitude towards things before coming to the university and compare it with the way you view things now. (within the context of learning/ and broader worldview)

3. التفكير في موقفك تجاه الأشياء قبل وصولك إلى الجامعة ومقارنتها مع طريقة عرض الأمور الآن. (في سياق التعلم / والنظرة الأوسع للعالم)

## Appendix 13: Individual Interviews Questions (Lecturers )

### Interview Schedule

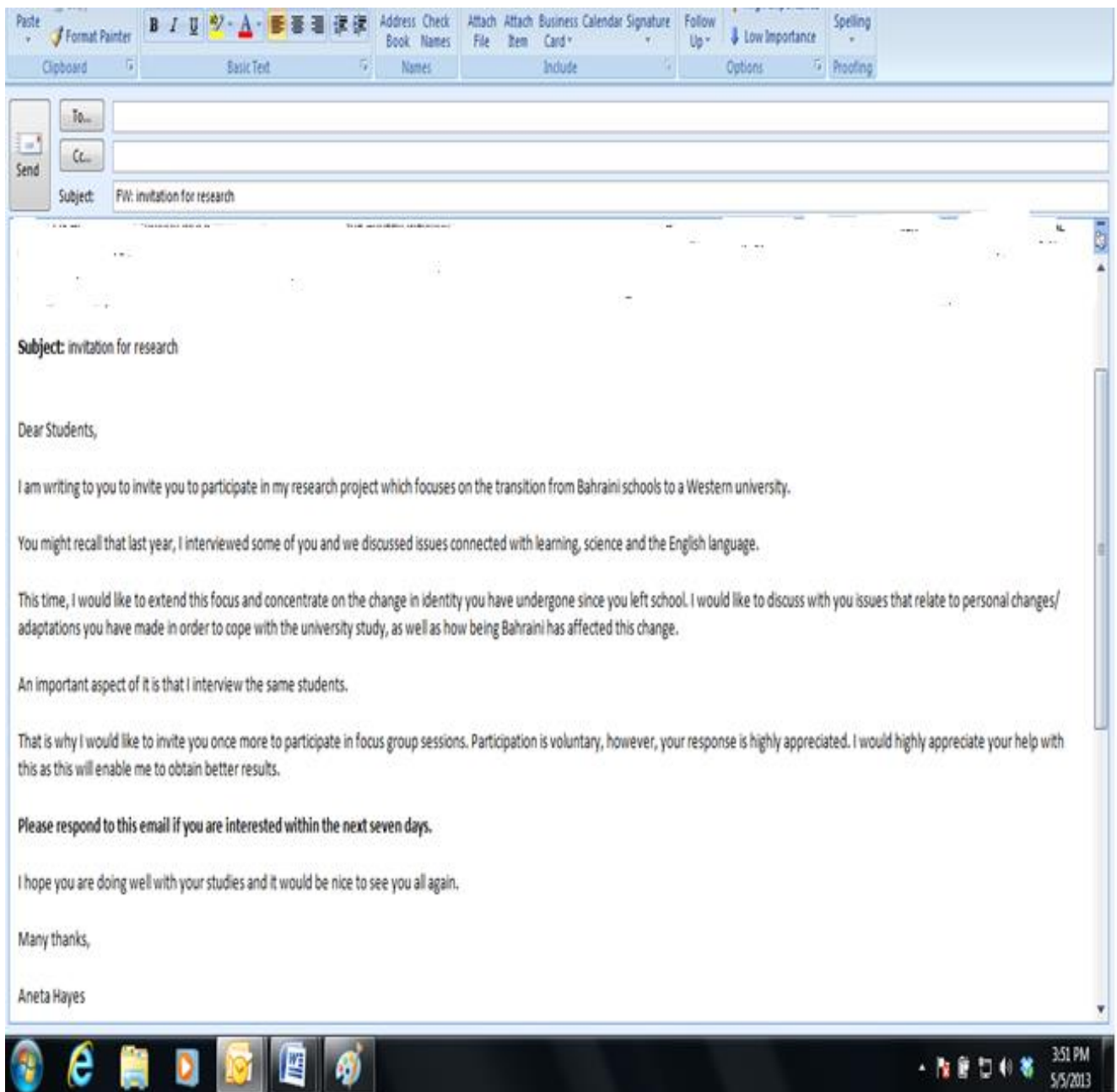
#### Faculty Members at University

**Date:** .....

**Name:** .....

1. What in your view are the biggest problems with learning FY students face?
2. What are your expectations in terms of the English language? Do you verify the correctness of language in your classes? For example, do you mark it on examination papers?
3. In terms of reading and writing, what type of tasks are required in your content classes? What are the specific demands of those tasks? What is evaluated?
4. Are good reading and writing skills important for your subjects? In what ways?
5. What are your expectations in terms of other skills students should develop to achieve success in your subjects?
6. Are those skills verified in formal assessment? Are they included in the examination questions?
7. What do you think about the quality of students writing/ reading? What do you think about the quality of their assignments? What are the strengths/ weaknesses? Why do they fail?
8. Do you feel responsible for developing students' academic skills required in your courses? Do you provide any guidance to students? Or do you think the ELC instructors should do it? And if so, how can they better prepare students for task in your content classes?
9. Is there anything I did not ask and you'd like to add?

## Appendix 14: Email of Invitation (2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Interviews with Students)



## Appendix 15: Copy of Ethical Approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



Graduate School of Education

### Certificate of ethical research approval

#### STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS

You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

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

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

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

Your name: Aneta Hayes

Your student no: 600052426

Return address for this certificate: Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland – Medical University of Bahrain, P.O. Box 15503, Adiliya, Kingdom of Bahrain

Degree/Programme of Study: PhD Education (Distance Learning)

Project Supervisor(s): Prof. William Richardson

Your email address: amh217@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: (+973) 395 349 67

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

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

Signed:.....*Aneta Hayes*.....date: 16 Dec 2010

*NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your*

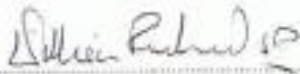
Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

No exceptional factors that could raise ethical issues are involved in the project.

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

This project has been approved for the period: 1.2.2011 until: 31.5.2012

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):  date: 19.1.2011

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.*

GSE unique approval reference: 

Signed:  date: 24/11/2011  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

Appendix 16: Copy of Permission from Ministry of Education

Kingdom of Bahrain  
Ministry of Education  
Secretariat General of the Higher  
Education Council  
Scientific Research Directorate



مملكة البحرين  
وزارة التربية والتعليم  
الأمانة العامة لمجلس التعليم العالي  
إدارة البحث العلمي

التاريخ : 13 مارس 2011 م

الرقم : 12 / 2 / ت م ب

حضرة الفاضلة Aneta Hayes المحترمة

تحية طيبة وبعد .....

الموضوع

الموافقة على تطبيق أدوات بحث بوزارة التربية والتعليم ومدارسها

بالإشارة إلى طلبكم المقدم بتاريخ 6 / 2 / 2011 م بشأن تطبيق أدوات البحث:

تسهيل الانتقال من التعليم الثانوي بمملكة البحرين إلى التعليم الجامعي الغربي: دراسة  
استطلاعية

يسرني إعلامكم بموافقة الإدارة / الإدارات المعنية على تطبيق أدوات البحث وفق

التعليمات والشروط التالية:

1. الالتزام عند التطبيق بأداة / أدوات البحث التي تمت الموافقة عليها دون إضافة أو حذف .
2. المحافظة على المعلومات التي يحصل عليها وعدم استخدامها إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي.
3. تزويد إدارة البحث العلمي بنسخة من البحث بعد الانتهاء منه .

مع تمنياتنا لكم بالتوفيق

التوقيع

د. معصومة عبد الصاحب



## Appendix 17: Copy of Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

This project is an independent academic study and I commit myself to participating in the study.

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project and will be published in an anonymised form.

The researcher takes the full responsibility for the confidentiality of data and the research design.

All information I give will be treated as confidential

The researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....

(Signature of participant )

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher: (+973) 395 349 67

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Aneta Hayes, tel. (+973) 395 349 67 or [amh217@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:amh217@exeter.ac.uk) – researcher

OR

Dr. Nasser Mansour , [N.Mansour@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:N.Mansour@exeter.ac.uk) – project supervisor

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

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