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**Professional Development (PD) at the Colleges of Technology in Oman:  
An Inquiry into English Language Centres' Staff Perceptions of their PD,  
PD Needs, Current PD Provision and PD Enhancement**

Submitted by

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
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## **Dedication**

To you  
Our late Father & Teacher  
His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said  
May Allah's mercy and forgiveness be upon your soul. Amen!

You will ALWAYS be remembered...

## Abstract

This study investigated the nature of professional development (PD) of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) lecturers at the Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman. The study aimed to explore how the staff of English Language Centres (ELCs), that is, both EFL lecturers and administrative staff, perceive PD and their PD needs. It also explores their views regarding the current PD provision and PD enhancement in the same context. There was a need for the issue to be further explored and understood since research regarding this issue has not yet been undertaken. Most of the conducted studies in Oman have focused on the pre-tertiary education (secondary schools) system but few have been conducted to investigate EFL lecturers' PD in the tertiary education context, and none have been conducted in the Omani technical education system.

The study utilised a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. Following empirical analysis of 81 questionnaires answered by participants from the ELC academic staff, 3 focus group interviews and 12 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 of the EFL academic staff and 6 members of the administrative staff.

The findings suggested that although participants hold different views of the professional development needed by EFL teachers, the lecturers here were likely to instantly recognise the PD practised in the ELCs as a model in which one or a group of administrative staff decides on the content to be delivered and the participants are largely passive recipients of this. They believe that a top-down approach like this can be seen as an imposition by administrators who focus on the skills that they (the administrators) think teachers need to upgrade. The nature of the current PD system seems to negatively affect the success of PD in the CoTs, which, as participants indicated, does not respond to teachers' individual needs. The results also indicated that participants of the current study classified their needs mainly into teacher-related needs, where pedagogical content knowledge needs were discussed, and student-related needs, where the lecturers expressed their desire to understand concerns related to their students and some of their students' psychological aspects. The perceived PD needs of the EFL lecturers included aspects of teaching skills and methods,

language improvement, and instruction in ESP.

The findings also revealed that teachers in ELCs had limited experience of PD practices in comparison to the other educational and private sectors. While they experienced some learning opportunities through participating in formal structured activities, such as training sessions, workshops, observations, and occasionally one- or two-day symposiums, these models are still unresponsive to the continuous demands of teachers to be professionally developed. Finally, the participants' multidimensional conception of PD enhancement at the CoTs was revealed. These dimensions were on a macro-level where they proposed a reform in which clear PD plans and strategies are applied. Within this macro-level, participants suggested that the reform should include, but not be limited to, applying micro-level approaches of alternative PD models for staff PD, offering effective PD opportunities, providing staff with ongoing support, exploring technology as a PD resource, and raising awareness of life-long career development.

The thesis concludes by presenting practical and theoretical implications for ELC administrators, PD coordinators, and lecturers. It emphasises the need to create PD opportunities that promote teachers' collaboration, and more systemic approaches that provide effective PD are necessary. Also, the academic and non-teaching staff members' voice should be considered when planning PD. In addition, PD course designers need to identify the suitable preparations required to best sustain and match the demands of teaching in such a technical context.

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## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
List of Figures .....	ix
List of Tables .....	x
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Nature of the problem .....	1
1.2. Rationale for the Study .....	3
1.3. Significance of the Study .....	6
1.4. Contribution to Knowledge .....	7
1.5. Research aims .....	9
1.6. Structure of the Thesis .....	9
<b>Chapter 2: Background and Context of the Study .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. Introduction .....	10
2.2. Sultanate of Oman: Overview .....	10
2.3. Education in Oman .....	11
2.4. Higher Education in Oman .....	13
2.5. Technical Colleges in Oman .....	14
2.5.1. Higher College of Technology .....	16
2.5.2. English Language Centre (ELC) .....	17
2.5.3. EFL Teachers in ELC .....	20
2.5.4. Students .....	21
2.5.5. Syllabus and Assessment .....	22
2.5.6. Professional Development at ELCs .....	23
<b>Chapter 3: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1. Introduction .....	26
3.2. Definition and construct of Teachers' Professional Development .....	26
3.3. The relationship between PD, teaching, and students' achievement .....	31
3.4. Development of the idea of PD .....	32
3.5. Teacher's role within the development process .....	35
3.6. Factors Affecting Teachers' PD Practices .....	37
3.6.1. Teachers' Career Stages .....	37
3.6.2. Motivational Factors .....	39
3.6.3. The Institutional Role .....	40
3.7. Professional Development Approaches .....	41
3.8. PD Models/ activities for EFL Teachers .....	44
3.8.1. Activities that develop teachers' skills .....	45
3.8.2. Activities that develop teachers' self-knowledge .....	48
3.9. Changes/Reforms in Teachers' Professional Development to achieve effective PD .....	51
3.10. Research on Teachers' PD: positioning the current study within the wider and local contexts .....	55
3.10.1. Understanding of PD .....	55
3.10.2. Identifying EFL Teachers' PD Needs .....	58
3.10.3. Current provision: PD Challenges from Teachers' Perspectives .....	62
3.10.4. PD enhancement: Innovation in PD .....	64
3.11. Summary and Research questions .....	67
<b>Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology .....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1. Introduction .....	69
4.2. Research framework/Paradigm .....	69
4.3. Methodology: case study .....	75

4.4. Research aims and questions.....	79
4.5. Data collection methods: sequential mixed-methods.....	80
4.5.1. Questionnaires.....	82
4.5.2. Interviews.....	87
4.6. Participants (sampling procedures) .....	93
4.7. Data collection process.....	96
4.7.1. <i>Piloting the instruments</i> .....	96
4.7.2. <i>Administering the instruments</i> .....	100
4.8. Role of the researcher .....	103
4.9. Rigour in research.....	105
4.9.1. <i>Quality of the questionnaire</i> .....	105
4.9.2. <i>Credibility and trustworthiness of interviews</i> .....	106
4.10. Data Analysis:.....	108
4.10.1. <i>Analysis of the questionnaire data</i> .....	109
4.10.2. <i>Analysis of the interview data</i> .....	109
4.11. Ethical dimensions .....	116
4.12. Limitations, potential difficulties and challenges .....	117
4.13. Summary of Chapter Four.....	120
<b>Chapter 5: Findings.....</b>	<b>121</b>
5.1. Introduction .....	121
5.2. Demographic information about the participants .....	123
5.3. Sources of Professional Development.....	125
5.3.1. <i>Management-directed PD</i> .....	125
5.3.2. <i>Self-directed Professional Development</i> .....	128
5.3.3. <i>Effectiveness of management directed and self-directed approaches to PD</i> 130	
5.4. Perceived Roles and Responsibilities in terms of PD .....	132
5.4.1. <i>AD staff's responsibilities</i> .....	133
5.4.2. <i>AC staff's responsibilities</i> .....	137
5.4.3. <i>The Need for Professional Development</i> .....	140
5.5. Academics' and Administrators' Views Regarding Areas of Staff Development.....	146
5.5.1. <i>Language-Related Professional Development Needs</i> .....	146
5.5.2. <i>Staff Pedagogical (Teaching-related) PD</i> .....	149
5.5.3. <i>PD to overcome staff challenges</i> .....	161
5.5.4. <i>Other PD related to the students</i> .....	169
5.5. Staff experiences of PD in the Colleges of Technology.....	170
5.6.1. <i>PD policies in the College</i> .....	171
5.6.2. <i>Staff involvement in decision-making regarding their professional development</i> 173	
5.6.3. <i>A comparison of the views of Administrative and Academic staff on the current PD provision in the ELC</i> .....	175
5.6.4. <i>Types of support provided for staff PD</i> .....	187
5.7. Factors for successful PD in the ELC .....	189
5.7.1. <i>Factors contributing to effective PD practices in the ELC</i> .....	190
5.7.2. <i>Facilitating factors for the ELC staff's PD</i> .....	198
5.8. Conclusion .....	209
<b>Chapter Six: Discussion .....</b>	<b>210</b>
6.1. Introduction .....	210
6.2. ELC staff understanding of professional development (PD).....	210
6.3. ELC staff perceptions of their PD needs .....	213
6.3.1. <i>Teacher-related needs</i> .....	214
6.3.2. <i>Student-related needs</i> .....	218
6.4. ELC staff perceptions of the current PD provision at the CTs .....	221
6.4.1. <i>Training is the dominant model of PD</i> .....	221
6.4.2. <i>Staff views on current PD provision</i> .....	222
6.4.3. <i>Limitation of teachers' involvement in decision-making</i> .....	225

6.5. ELC staff suggestions for PD enhancement at the Colleges of Technology in Oman .....	226
6.5.1. <i>Alternative PD models for staff PD</i> .....	227
6.5.2. <i>Effective PD opportunities</i> .....	228
6.5.3. <i>Provide staff with ongoing support</i> .....	233
6.6. Conclusion .....	234
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>236</b>
7.1. Introduction .....	236
7.2. Summary of the main findings .....	236
7.3. Main contributions and recommendations for practice .....	238
7.3.1. <i>Contribution to knowledge</i> .....	238
7.3.2. <i>The practical contribution</i> .....	240
7.3.3. <i>Contribution to research</i> .....	242
7.4. Study limitations and directions for future research .....	244
7.5. Reflection on this research experience .....	246
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>248</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>279</b>
8. Appendix 1: Questionnaire .....	279
9. Appendix 2: Interviews schedules .....	290
10. Appendix 3: Consent Form .....	295
11. Appendix 4: The permission request letter from the DGTE .....	297
12. Appendix5: Certificate of Ethical Research Approval .....	299
13. Appendix 6: Analysis of the questionnaire’s open-ended questions.....	300
14. <b>Appendix 7: Example of an interview transcript</b> .....	<b>303</b>



## List of Figures

<b>FIGURE 2.1.: THE POSITION OF THE COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN OMAN</b> .....	16
<b>FIGURE 2.2: THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF ELCS</b> .....	18
<b>FIGURE 3.1: HUBERMAN'S STAGES OF TEACHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT (JOERGER, 2010)</b> .....	38
<b>FIGURE 3.2: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING (BORG,2017,P166)</b> .....	53
<b>FIGURE 4.1: AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE IDEA OF A MULTI-METHOD DESIGN IN THIS STUDY</b> .....	77
<b>FIGURE 4.2: PROCESS OF COLLATING CODES INTO SUBTHEMES AND GATHERING SUB-THEMES TO FORM THEMES</b> .....	115
<b>FIGURE 5.1: PARTICIPANTS' YEARS OF EXPERIENCE</b> .....	124
<b>FIGURE 5.2: PARTICIPANTS' QUALIFICATIONS</b> .....	124
<b>FIGURE 5.3: EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT DIRECTED PD (N=81)</b> .....	130
<b>FIGURE 5.4: EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT DIRECTED PD (N=81)</b> .....	131

## List of Tables

TABLE 4.1.: NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH STAGE OF DATA COLLECTION	93
TABLE 4.2: PHASES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006 & 2013; CLARKE & BRAUN, 2013)	110
TABLE 4.3:- A SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW EXTRACT WITH INITIAL CODES AND MANUAL CATEGORIZATION	113
Table 5.1 The study's themes and sub-themes	122
Table 5.2: Symbols used to indicate the sources of citation	122
TABLE 5.3.: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	125
TABLE5.4. ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD (N =81)	126
TABLE 5.5.: ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD AS TRAINING (N =81)	127
TABLE 5.6.: ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD (N =81)	129
TABLE 5.7.: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PD	133
TABLE 5.8.: AC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD. (N:81)	138
TABLE 5.9:THE NEED FOR PD	140
TABLE 5.10.: ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD (N =81)	141
TABLE 5.11. ACADEMIC STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF PD (N =81)	144
TABLE 5.12. ACS AND ADS VIEWS REGARDING AREAS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENTS	146
TABLE 5.13: LANGUAGE-RELATED PD NEEDS (N=81)	147
TABLE 5.14. ASPECTS OF THE STAFF PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	149
TABLE 5.15. PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	150
TABLE 5.16. PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	151
TABLE 5.17. PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	152
TABLE 5.18. PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	153
TABLE 5.19: PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	154
TABLE 5.20: PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	157
TABLE 5.21.: STAFF PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	158
TABLE 5.22.: STAFF PEDAGOGICAL NEEDS	160
TABLE 5.23. PD TO HELP TEACHER OVERCOME CHALLENGES WITH STUDENT	162
TABLE 5.24. MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO LEARN ENGLISH	163
TABLE 5.25. DEALING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS	164
TABLE 5.26:- STUDENTS-RELATED PD NEEDS (N =81)	169
TABLE 5.27. STAFF PD EXPERIENCE	170
TABLE 5.28. PROVISION	173
TABLE 5.29: PD PROVISION	174
TABLE 5.30. PD PROVISION	187
TABLE 5.31: FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL PD	190
	x

TABLE 5.32. FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL PD	190
TABLE 5.33: FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD - PLANNING PD ACTIVITIES THAT REFLECT THE ACADEMICS' NEEDS	192
TABLE 5.34. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD – REDUCING ACADEMIC WORKLOAD & CHOOSING GOOD TIME FOR PD PRACTICES	193
TABLE 5.35. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD - IMPLEMENTING SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES DURING AND AFTER CONDUCTING THE PD ACTIVITIES	196
TABLE 5.36. FACILITATING FACTORS TO THE ELC STAFF PD	198
TABLE 5.37. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD	199
TABLE 5.38. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD - GIVING THE ACADEMICS CONTROL OVER THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROVIDED PD SESSIONS.	202
TABLE 5.39. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD - ENCOURAGING ACADEMICS' PARTICIPATION IN THE PD ACTIVITIES BY USING A REWARD SYSTEM	202
TABLE 5.40. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD – FACILITATING OF PD ACTIVITIES BY FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	205
TABLE 5.41. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD- REDUCING ACADEMICS' WORKLOAD TO ENHANCE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PD ACTIVITIES	206
TABLE 5.42. FACTORS TO ENHANCE PD - VARYING THE PD OPTIONS FOR THE ACADEMICS, SO THEY CAN CHOOSE WHAT BEST FITS THEIR NEEDS	209

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Nature of the problem

Throughout the world of education, understanding of English language teachers' professional development (PD) has gradually moved from traditional views, with the teacher as a passive participant who just follows the PD practices suggested by the higher authorities, to constructivist views, where teachers positively contribute in constructing PD that enables them to actively interact with learners in making meaning of information. To attain such an understanding, worldwide educational systems have undergone various reforms, which have required teachers in general, and specifically EFL teachers, to transform their knowledge into practice (Vangrieken et al., 2017). To achieve this transformation, educational policy makers and scholars proposed continuous PD opportunities for teachers to help them enhance their knowledge and develop their teaching skills (Borko, 2004) and thus, as Vangrieken et al. (2017) considered, significantly improve and enhance their educational institutes. As Bybee and Loucks-Hosley (2000) stated, to do so, teachers need to achieve high standards in the profession including but not limited to learning about and developing skills related to teaching and utilizing tools that are helpful in facilitating the acquisition of new content knowledge.

Professional development is needed because novice teachers, for example, are "faced with rapid change, demands for high standards and calls for improving quality" (Craft, 2000, p. 6). Thus, more than previously, they are required to improve and update their skills through professional development. Indeed, one vital and essential part of any teachers' career is to renew, refresh, and add to their knowledge and skills through professional development (Al-Issa, 2006). This is essential to enable them to cope with continuous changes in their field, to respond to their students' and institutions' changing needs and to answer the constant calls for quality improvement.

Although there is a significant body of research that explores such needs and that highlights the essential and indispensable role of professional

development in global and local educational settings, one of the controversial issues is regarding the best way to design PD to enable a teacher to be a critical factor in teaching rather than a superficial and limited element in the learning cycle (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

This growing demand for PD is applicable to Oman where new approaches are being adopted to ensure the quality of the education. English Language Teaching (ELT) in Omani schools, for instance, has been greatly influenced by the abovementioned PD transition (Al-Balushi, 2017). Like other educational contexts in the region (Middle East), graduate teachers are enrolled through pre-service training programs, which are usually attached to their tertiary studies, before starting their career. Highlighting the importance of teachers' PD, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Oman has paid attention to researching its teachers' professional development. A number of studies have been conducted to discuss the perceptions, attitudes, and needs to enhance MoE's teachers professionally, for example, Al Lamki (2009), Al Bedwawai (2002), and Al Balushi (2017). MoE also launched in 2014 its Specialized Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers. The centre offers many opportunities for training and development to schoolteachers from all regions of the sultanate.

In contrast to MoE teachers, the opportunities offered to their counterparts at the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Oman are rare and limited (Al Gatrifi, 2016; Al Afi, 2014). Though many studies have explored PD in the context of the Omani educational system, only a few have addressed the status of PD in Omani HEIs. Al Afi (2014) and Al Ghatrifi (2016) found that there is an absence of realistic and systematic PD plans and that few academics are involved in such plans. It is evident from those studies that staff's professional development is not much considered in the Omani HE context. Thus, more attention needs to be paid to the current situation. The technical education system is one such unexplored context.

The Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman are overseen by the Ministry of Manpower (MoMP). Although technical education is a wing of the Higher Education (HE) system in Oman, it differs from the other HEIs in terms of, for

instance, the infrastructure, the opportunities provided for learning and how are they relevant to the Omani job market, and the profiles of students and teachers at these colleges (a detailed explanation is provided in Chapter 2: Context of the Study). To the best of my knowledge, none of the studies to date has considered PD in the Colleges of Technology in general or specifically for the EFL lecturers in these colleges. I believe it is essential to raise the issue of staff PD at the CoTs in general and at the English Language Centres where EFL lecturers work, as PD has not previously been investigated in these contexts.

Accordingly, this study intends to investigate PD in the English Language Centres at the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) since the area of professional development of English lecturers in these institutes has not undergone a systematic and in-depth investigation. Al-Lamki (2009) believed that such an investigation highlights the exploration of the EFL teachers' professional development not only in the context of schools but also in the entire Omani educational system.

## **1.2. Rationale for the Study**

The rationale for this study can be related to aspects of the general field of PD, PD in the Omani technical education context, and for myself as a PD researcher and candidate.

Generally speaking, this study explores participants' views regarding PD and how it affected their ELT experience and ideologies. Such an exploration is necessary as while a large body of the literature has explored the transition in teachers' PD from situations where teachers are passive recipients to where they are initiators of their own PD, much of this research and theory has been directed toward the PD of teachers in the United States and Europe. This emphasis has given the literature of ELT a Western bias (Bertha & Bhatia, 2013). Therefore, this study attempts to contribute to correcting this imbalance in PD research through exploring PD in the Middle Eastern context. Such research is needed, as the Middle East plays a major role in connecting Asian nations and Western countries economically. In addition, it seeks to provide a

basis for further studies regarding PD within the field of ELT and to assess possible future alternatives. Heck (2004) suggested that a study such as this can inform policies affecting educational and institutional PD systems, and analyse possible consequences by comparing specific cases of PD policy-making. It is important to have an up-to-date understanding of the most recent research on PD in order to form a comprehensive picture of the daily processing practices of PD and how it could be related to the evolving international and intercultural ELT policies.

Regarding the context of the current study, professional development in higher education is an essential element of human resource development in Oman, as shown in this extract from a speech given by his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, Sultan of Oman, when he emphasised the importance of human resource development (HRD), including the PD of the academics in the Omani HE system. Hence, in the annual session of Majlis Oman (the Council of Oman) on November 11th, 2008; the Sultan stated:

“... we are sparing no effort and will continue to spare no effort in order to provide our human resources with all the help they will need to develop, hone and train. We will also provide educational opportunities for them in order that they may acquire useful knowledge, the required experience and the necessary technical skills that will be needed in the labour market and as are required by the sustainable development programmes in the various fields.”

(Ministry of Information, 2008, para. 3)

The vision of Higher College of Technology (HCT), as declared on its official website at the time of the study, reflected a similar view by stating that the college aims to provide “high quality teaching and learning to prepare and empower the Omani professionals of the future so that they can contribute to national socio-economic development” (College Vision and Mission, 2015). The findings of a small-scale study that was conducted in one of the Colleges of Technology in Oman indicated a belief, which seems to have become common, that such high quality education is best provided to students through English (Al-Bakri, 2013). Colleges of Technology, which provide a technical education, are the lowest level of HE in Oman, as students admitted to these

colleges achieve lower grades than students admitted to other HEIs, such as Sultan Qaboos University, CASs, and Schools of Nursing. Because of the students' level, academics need to double their efforts, vary their teaching strategies, and work harder to improve their students' language skills, for their achievements to be equivalent to those of their counterparts in the other HEIs.

These colleges, thus, need to consider the investment in developing their staff, including academics, and they play a distinctive role in responding to the government's call to develop their human resources. Carey and Frechtling (1997) considered that the professional development programmes like projects, teachers' resource centres, committees, or forums, contribute positively to the educational process because of their visible and significant influences, which lead to an increase in students' achievements. Yet these programs seem to be marginalized at the CoTs. The Colleges of Technology in Oman are governed by the MoMP, whose main duties are to provide the market with qualified national Omani and non-Omani labour to satisfy the continuous daily needs of human resources. The main focus of MoMP policies are therefore the students, and so little attention is given to developing staff needs, including at the ELC. This indicates that there is a lack of understanding of the importance of PD, and more attention should be given to the PD needs and perceptions of college staff, especially EFL lecturers, but currently, these are neglected. Indeed, the lack of PD can lead to negative consequences. Khan (2011) conducted a research study exploring the factors that motivate or discourage expatriate EFL lecturers in a public university in Oman, though the findings can also apply to Omani lecturers as well. She found that the "research participants indicated their need for professional development that would give them a sense of affiliation and belonging with other academics in the workplace" and it "was a common frustrating element in most participants' comments" (p.118). To prevent such neglect and marginalisation of the EFL lecturers' PD and to avoid similar negative results, I believe there is a need to shed the light on the perceptions the academic and administrative staff of these colleges have of PD and to have a clearer overview and understanding of how they view their PD needs as a first step for future enhancement of PD in this context. Accordingly, this research study



aims to extend the investigation of staff's professional development in HEIs in Oman in general and in the CoTs in particular, from different angles. I believe it is also of significance to conduct a study that could be of benefit to teachers, who have an influential role in our society. Teachers affect student achievement; so to improve student achievement, teachers' constant improvement and continuous learning are imperative (Al Mahrooqi et al., 2017). Based on that, it is clear that the teachers' development benefits both the teaching and learning processes and so, in the long term, will give valuable benefits to society at large.

The personal part of the rationale for this study derives from my teaching experience at the English Language Centre at the HCT and my desire to experience better PD practices. I was a faculty member at the Foundation programme (FP) at the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Oman. There were times when I was unable to make a difference to the students in the classroom due to their lack of competency. I was also overwhelmed by the multiple administrative tasks that we, the teachers, need to accomplish besides our academic duties of teaching and researching. I personally believe that there is always room for worthwhile research about teachers' ideas regarding their PD, particularly their PD needs, wants, attitudes, expectations, and motivations especially as there is very little known about the teachers' perspective of PD. Currently, PD is viewed as an institutional issue rather than an individual desire. I believe that teachers in general should set themselves personal goals with regard to their PD, make their voice heard; and fight for their rights to continue their professional development.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

This research is significant in that it explores the very concept of PD reports on EFL teachers' experiences that are mostly affected by the PD systems and policies but whose insights are not considered in language education policy planning. As the first interpretive study to explore the professional development of EFL lecturers in the Colleges of Technology in Oman, this study provides an opportunity for those lecturers to express their views towards their professional development in general and the PD provided in

their institution in particular. It offers them a chance to explain their PD needs and consider how they can be more relevant and constructive to their field and context. Darling et al. (1995) noted that effective professional development must first and foremost take into account teachers' needs, and Day (1999) emphasised that PD is likely to be unhelpful to teachers if it is "not based upon an understanding of the complexities of teachers' lives and conditions of work, nor upon an understanding of how teachers learn and why they change" (p. 204). I believe this study will contribute to a better understanding of the academics' views, challenges, conditions of work, and motives to develop professionally. Hopefully, it will provide a full picture of the situation, which may offer more constructive PD opportunities for them.

This study is also distinctive as it explores the views and the perceptions of both the academic and the administrative staff at the ELC in order to understand how each group views their PD needs or expectations. In particular, this research aims to shed some light on the psychological effects the current PD strategy could have on lecturers, which in turn, could have an impact on their teaching experiences, an area which has rarely been addressed in the literature. Revealing their different perceptions and ideas towards their PD, will, I believe, contribute to enhancing PD provision at the English Language Centre and, consequently, the CoTs in general by providing more effective insights into how to improve staff's PD experience. Enhanced staff PD will help improve the quality of teaching of the English language in these colleges in a way that satisfies the different stakeholders, whether teachers, students, management staff, or society in general, ensuring individuals and groups who are affected by policies and strategies like PDs have "direct involvement and power in policymaking" to reduce inequality in education (Tollefson, 2013, p.308).

#### **1.4. Contribution to Knowledge**

The current study makes several contributions to knowledge in both the PD academic research field and PD in the Omani HE context. Regarding the research field of PD, such research can be added to the recently conducted research regarding PD in general, and in particular, PD in the context of

tertiary education. It offers insights not only into those PD issues that affect almost all teachers, but also discusses important differences between the perspectives of the administrative staff and the academics and how the higher authorities could affect the PD process. It can be used as evidence for a future, wider investigation by higher authorities and by other researchers. They can devise clearer and more tailored ideas for effective PD programmes and for the future enhancement of the current applied policies with regard to PD.

The study's findings also can add to the body of knowledge, as it discusses new insights into the area of EFL teachers' professional development teaching at the HEIs in general and at the CoTs in particular.

It intends to establish the transition from the current recognized model of PD practised in the ELCs, where one or a group of experts decides on the content to be delivered, and the participants are largely passive recipients of this. Such a top-down approach is an imposition by administrators who focus on the skills that they (the administrators) think teachers need to upgrade. To achieve such a transition, teachers have to satisfy their continuous PD needs, including both the pedagogical content knowledge needs and the needs concerning their students' psychology, in addition to the aspects of teaching skills and methods, language improvement, and instruction in ESP. The study also aims to enhance the PD models that are non-responsive to the continuous demands of teachers to undergo professional development. Thus, it will discuss the participants' multidimensional conception, on both macro and micro level, of PD enhancement at the CoTs.

The thesis also will propose (1) practical and theoretical implications for ELC administrators, PD coordinators, and teachers to promote teachers' collaboration, and (2) more systemic approaches that provide effective PD. Such proposals will give both the academic and non-teaching staff members the opportunity for their views to be considered when planning PD. Providing teachers who teach English to students studying in different faculties with a voice about their PD experiences with academic subjects and acquisition of English will help in fill a gap in the literature on PD transition, in particular in

the Omani context. Through exploring how the PD strategies are implemented at the grass roots level by teachers, possible gaps between the intended PD policy aims and their actual outcomes can be identified. This could support policy makers in their future language policy planning as well.

### **1.5. Research aims**

The aim of this study is to investigate the professional development (PD) of tertiary EFL teachers at the Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman. The following specific aims will address the overall purpose:

- to explore perceptions of professional development held by the English Language Centre EFL lecturers and administrative staff
- to determine their perceived Professional Development needs
- to investigate how they view the current PD provision at their workplace context
- to explore staff insights into how PD can be improved in their context.

### **1.6. Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The current chapter describes the rationale, the significance of the study, and the research aims and questions while Chapter Two presents the contextual background of the research. Chapter Three reviews the relevant literature. Next, Chapter Four describes the research design: the paradigm adopted, the methodology used, the methods of data collection and analysis; it also includes issues such as the research quality, ethical considerations, and limitations. Chapter Five presents and describes the findings obtained to answer the study's research questions. After that, Chapter Six discusses and relates the findings to the literature. Chapter Seven draws conclusions from the findings and provides particular implications for policy and practice. The final chapter summarises what has been achieved in the study and how it has contributed to knowledge, and provides directions for future research based on the key themes included in the study.

## **Chapter 2: Background and Context of the Study**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents background information on the context in which this study was conducted. An overview of the Sultanate of Oman with a brief description of its demographical, political, and economic status is followed by an explanation of the development and main reforms in education at both pre-tertiary and tertiary levels. The aim here is to show how all these influenced HE in Oman in a way that leads to continuously developing ELT across the country. Also, as the Higher College of Technology is the context of the study and as it is considered as being representative of the other Colleges of Technology in Oman, the system of HCT and these colleges is described in detail. The description provides information about ELT in these colleges, including the ELT programmes, teachers, students, and syllabi, and the opportunities offered for teachers' professional development.

### **2.2. Sultanate of Oman: Overview**

Demographically, Oman lies on the south-eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a valued and strategic location at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, linking the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to the Indian Ocean. Muscat is the capital of Oman and its commercial centre. Islam is the main religion of the country yet there are places such as churches and temples for other ethnicities to perform their religious practices. Its population includes various ethnic groups, such as Arab, Asian, and African (e.g., Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Philippines, Sri-Lankan and Swahili). This indicates the many ethnicities that live in Oman. Arabic is the official language, but several languages are spoken by Omani and foreign inhabitants, such as English, Hindi, Urdu, Baluchi, and Swahili. The English language, however, is considered to be the "key element in the development of the country and its effective integration into the modern world" (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 263); thus, its status is moving from a foreign language to that of a second language all over the country (Al Riyami, 2016).

Politically, since 1970, Oman has been ruled by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who started the development from only three primary schools for boys, two small hospitals, and a few kilometres of surfaced roads. Currently, there are more than 1,250 schools providing free education, and over 230 hospitals and health centres offering free healthcare to all Omanis (MNE, 2010). Economically, Oman still substantially depends on the oil and gas revenues, which account for 80% of the country's budget, to build infrastructure and provide essential services for citizens (Goodliffe, 2013) though compared to other Gulf countries, Oman has low per capita oil reserves and revenues. The country has a heterogeneous and rapidly growing population due to economic progress and structural developments. Approximately 50.3% of Omanis are under 24 years old (Indexmundi, 2015). Oman has been relying considerably on expatriates to achieve the rapid construction of infrastructure and to work in different fields, such as oil (Harry, 2007). Therefore, the government has gone through essential changes in some policies and found the best strategies to recruit Omanis in the private sector. To do so, similar to the other Gulf countries, it has focused on reforming policies, such as economic diversification, education, training development, and Omanisation, and it has directly intervened in controlling the labour market.

### **2.3. Education in Oman**

Since 1970, his Majesty the Sultan of Oman has given priority to educational reform due to its importance in the development of almost all aspects of life in the country. His Majesty famously stated, "Let there be education even if it is under the shades of trees." On the basis of this, the MOHE "is constantly striving towards the higher education of high quality that meets the requirements of sustainable development" (MOHE, 2018).

Subsequently, many state and private schools, colleges, and universities have been established throughout Oman to take on the responsibility of raising well-educated effective members of society. Almost all students start their educational life at the age of 6 by joining the general education (GE) at schools; they then go on to spend a total of 12 years learning various subjects

to widen their general knowledge in different fields such as physics, mathematics and history. Learning the English language is compulsory, and it is taught by both qualified Omani teachers and expatriate teachers. Teachers at schools are provided with development courses and are supported professionally by the Ministry of Education (MOE) through either the supervision system or in-service training programs (Al Lamki, 2009). All of these will benefit from improvement of their teaching, consequently leading to better student achievements. Due to the MOE's belief in the importance of staff professional development, it has recently (2014) established the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers. Its main mission is to train and qualify teachers and educators to have high-level qualities and skills, so they attain self-confidence and be always self-motivated (MOE, 2018).

The students' proficiency in the English language differs, as some study in private schools where most of the subjects, if not all, are taught in the English language. However, the majority study in government-funded public schools where the medium of instruction is the Arabic language except in their English language lessons. According to the results of studies by Al-Issa (2005) and Al-Husseini (2006), Grade 12 students' English Language competency is below the required level for their tertiary education, which might be attributed to the quality of the English language materials used at schools, their limited exposure to the language, and the assessment system. This lack of competency might represent an obstacle in the students' tertiary education, as English is the medium of instruction at both the governmental and private HEIs in Oman. After school, many students choose or have the opportunity to continue their education by joining one of the higher education institutions in Oman. Students are allocated their places according to their secondary school grades and currently, in many cases, their preferences as well. In tertiary education, the English language is used as the medium of instruction in almost all specializations. In order for the students to succeed at their studies, improving their English language proficiency prior to their tertiary education is essential. Consequently, the majority of the students joining tertiary education are first placed on a general foundation program (GFP),

which is “a compulsory entrance qualification for Omani degree programs in which students have to achieve English language competency at a level equivalent to IELTS 5.0” (Oman Accreditation Council, 2007, p.4). Although English language courses form the bulk of the GFP, the Oman Accreditation Council identifies computing, mathematics, and general study skills as additional learning outcomes for the GFP (ibid.).

#### **2.4. Higher Education in Oman**

There are a number of governmental and private higher education institutions in Oman distributed all over the country in response to His Majesty’s orders. His Majesty emphasised:

"We paid great attention to our completion of the infrastructure in the areas of education and training, and so we completed the stages of the task to ensure that we prepare our children to participate in the construction and development of the country."

(MOHE, 2018)

In accordance with his Majesty’s vision to prepare the country’s steadily growing younger generations and equip them with the needed education in the different fields, the number of universities, colleges, and tertiary institutions has increased, and new institutions like Oman University have been established. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) controls the policies and economies of these HEIs, supervises how they run, and ensures that quality assurance guidelines are applied and their goals are accomplished. This applicable to both the HEIs that are directly under the jurisdiction of MOHE, such as the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CoAS), and to the other institutions that are not directly supervised by MoHE (e.g., Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), which is under the jurisdiction of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Council of Culture and Sciences, and CoTs, which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Manpower).



Generally, these higher education institutions are governed by an accreditation and licensing system, namely, the Oman Accreditation Council, which was first established in June 2001. In 2005, it offered the guide *Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (locally referred to as ROSQA), which identifies a number of elements or criteria and which has to be followed in order for the institutions to achieve accreditation (Oman Accreditation Council, 2006). These ROSQA guidelines were developed to become what is known as the 'Quality Plan' (QP), which focuses on various aspects of the HE quality assurance, such as teachers' PD. One of the 'Quality of Teaching' standards or requirements identified in the QP for any HEIs in Oman seeking accreditation is that "support and advice are provided for staff to improve teaching through procedures which include induction programmes for new staff, monitoring, supervision and appraisal, and opportunities for professional development" (Oman Accreditation Council, 2005, p.68). This indicates the importance of the teachers' PD in ensuring the teaching quality at these institutions.

## **2.5. Technical Colleges in Oman**

Technical colleges are one of the choices offered to students after finishing their secondary education, though they are not the first choice, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Colleges of Applied Sciences are at the top of the students' priorities, yet the competition is fierce, and only a small number of students are admitted to these institutions. Thus, those with lower grades usually join Colleges of Technology. There are seven Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman located in the cities of Muscat, Al-Mussana, Nizwa, Ibra, Ibri, Shinas, and Salalah. The Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Muscat is considered to be the main branch, and it represents the other six colleges system-wise. The regional Colleges of Technology were established in 1993 except for those in Shinas and Ibri, which were established in 2005 and 2008 respectively. As mentioned previously, the Ministry of Manpower in Oman is responsible for these colleges. The admissions system applied in the CoTs is the same as for other HEIs in Oman; students have to pass the GFP in order to move on to their

chosen specializations. Apart from the ELCs, each CoT has three academic departments; these offer programmes in engineering (e.g., electronic, mechanical, electrical and civil), information technology (e.g., web design, internet security) and business studies (e.g., accounting, human resources and management). In addition to these three departments, HCT has other academic departments offering programmes in applied sciences, pharmacy, photography, and fashion design. The language of instruction in all programmes is English.

The vision of the CoTs is to have a productive labour work force who, with their scientific, technical, and vocational capabilities, are able to take over important jobs from foreign experts and participate in various economic fields in the Sultanate (Ministry of ManPower, 2015). The programs of the Colleges of Technology implemented from September 2003 are the result of extensive research to ensure the suitability of the programs in terms of Oman's industry needs and global academic standards (ibid.). The management of CoTs is centralized. The Ministry of Manpower makes the important decisions with regard to, for example, the course content, teachers, finance, and students (Al Hussein, 2004). Thus, it can be said that the top-down system is the norm in this study context.

Prior to starting their studies in the technical colleges, Omani students need to complete a Basic Education programme, which is a unified system covering the first ten years of schooling. After that, they spend two years in the Post-Basic (secondary) programme (see Figure 2.1). During these twelve years, they study English as a foreign language (EFL), but are exposed to only about 45 minutes a day of formal English language instruction. On completion of their secondary education, they move to the Diploma Certificate of Secondary Education (DCSE) exams programme, by which it is decided who can apply to continue to tertiary education, as Figure 2.1. shows below:

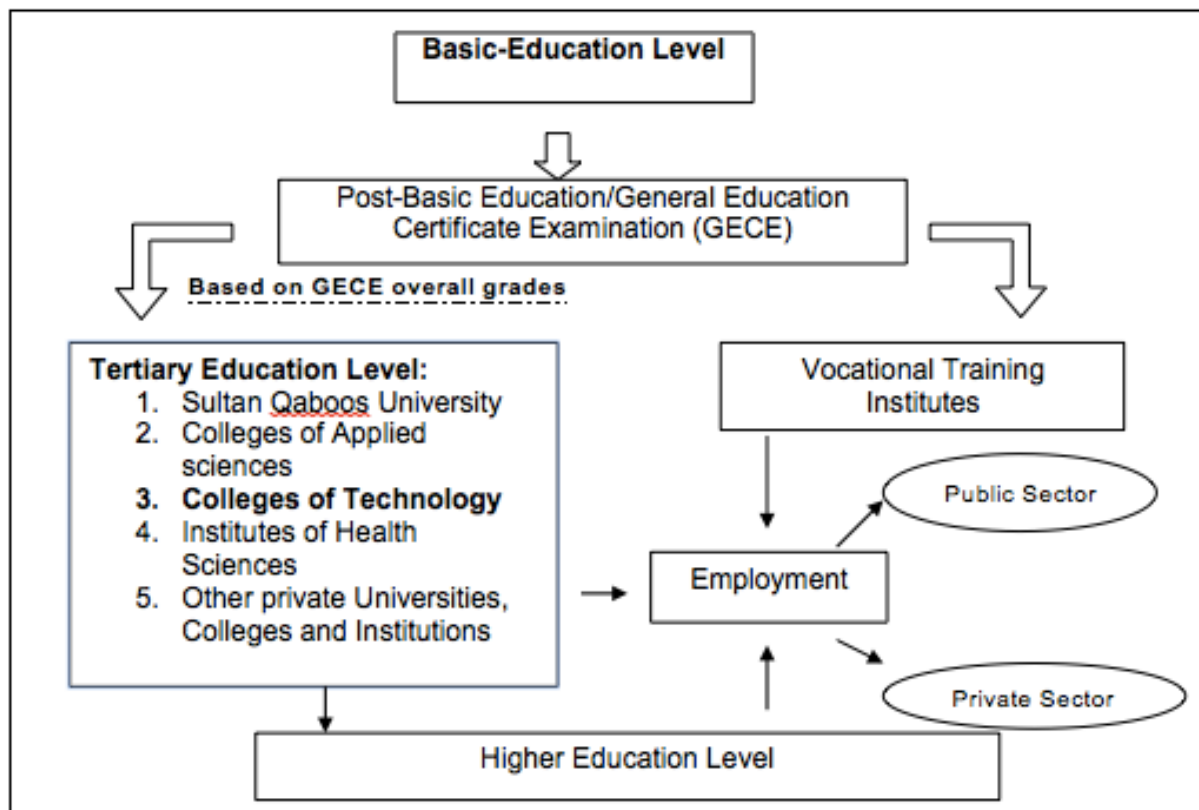


Figure 2.1.: *The position of the Colleges of Technology in the education system in Oman*

### 2.5.1. Higher College of Technology

The Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Muscat is the second largest higher education institution in Oman (the first is Sultan Qaboos University, which is the only government university in the Sultanate), catering for more than 12,000 students studying in various programs. Previously known as Oman Technical Industrial College before being renamed and upgraded in 2001, HCT was established in 1984 at the initiative of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to educate the citizens of Oman by implementing high quality programs in various fields. HCT aims to endow the Omani youth with the knowledge and skills required to face the challenges of the new era.

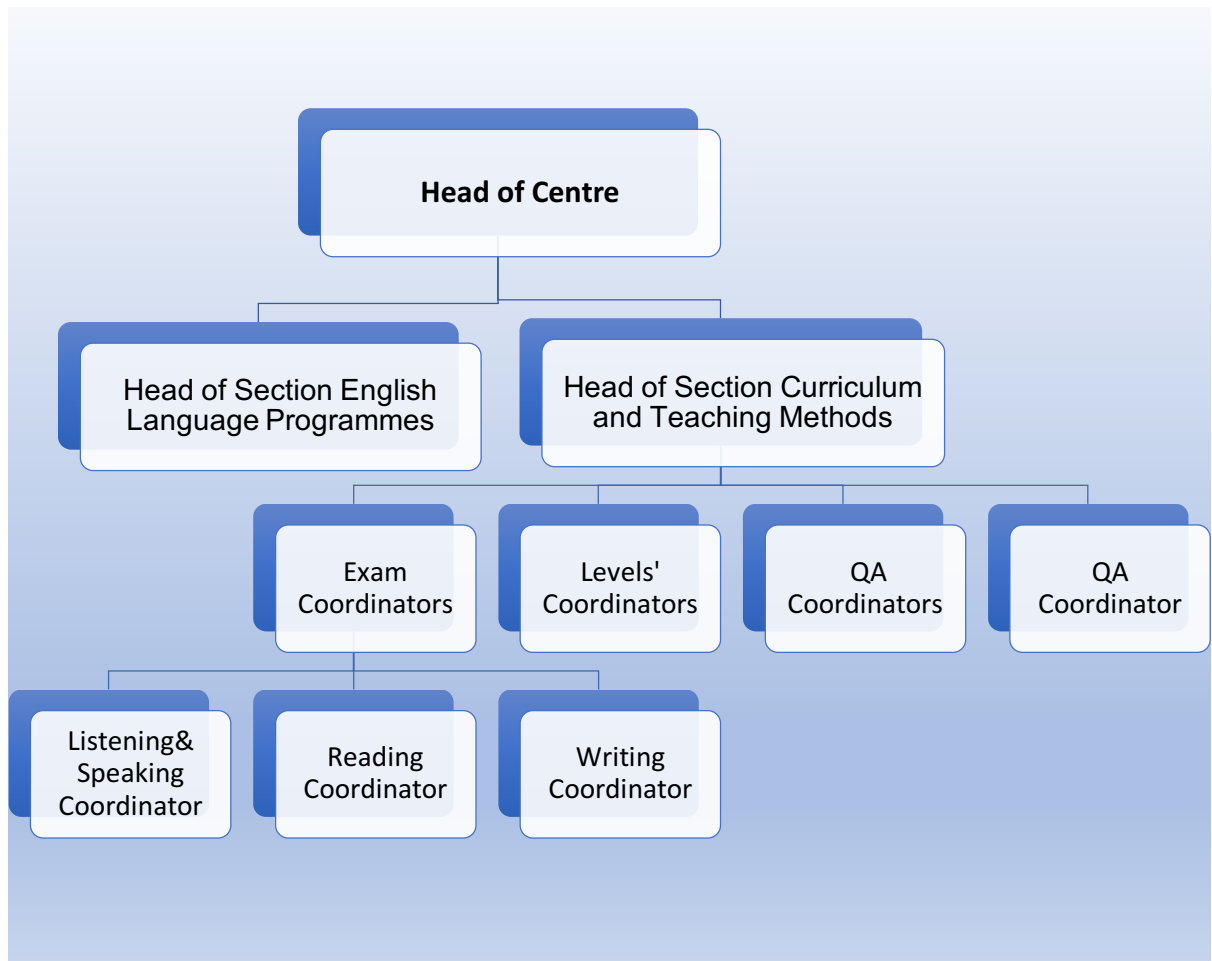
Like the other CoTs, HCT's programmes comprise four levels in addition to the Post-foundation program. A student could spend up to five semesters in the Foundation program before progressing to the Certificate level in a chosen specialization and then to the other three levels, namely, Diploma, Higher Diploma, and Bachelor of Technology (BTech). These four levels correspond

to the first four levels of the postsecondary education described in the Oman Qualification Framework (OQF). Students' progress from one level to another depends upon them meeting progressively demanding criteria at each level. This structure affords students the flexibility to exit the system after completing any level with a qualification enabling them to enter the job market.

The college has grown enormously from a student population of about 200 to the current size of around 14,000 students. Its facilities have expanded from three initial buildings to a total built-up area of more than 49,700 m<sup>2</sup>. The College has more than 975 staff in its various faculties and an annual intake of about 2,000 students into its Foundation program, besides transferred students in the upper levels (HCT, 2016). In addition to the academic departments, HCT has dedicated centres and administrative divisions like the Educational Technology Centre (ETC), Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Administrative and Financial Affairs.

### **2.5.2. English Language Centre (ELC)**

The ELC aims to provide students with a high level of proficiency in English in preparation for the linguistic demands of their future academic study and the labour market. Each of the ELCs in these colleges has an overall head of department and two heads of sections: the curriculum and teaching methods section and the English language programme section. In addition, there are coordinators for all four levels; these are teachers nominated by the Head of Centre (HOC) or Head of Sections (HOSs), see Figure 2.2-The administrative structure of ELCs.



**Figure 2.2: The administrative structure of ELCs.**

The coordinator's duties include monitoring the teaching and learning process through making sure that the outcomes for each syllabus are met, conducting level meetings with teachers and informing them about issues regarding the ELC administration, reviewing the supplementary materials used in each level, monitoring quizzes and written examinations, receiving students' complaints and appeals, and reviewing teachers' portfolios. There are also exam coordinators, who have the responsibility of writing and preparing the exams for all the levels based on the courses' expected outcomes. There are two exam coordinators for each tested skill, such as reading and writing, and another two for speaking and listening.

The ELC offers an IELTS-oriented, four-level foundation-year programme (FYP) for beginners and a post-foundation-year programme (Post-FYP) that offers ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses for students in the

professional line of study. After passing the FYP, students move to the Post-FYP degree programme.

The objectives of the FYP are to prepare students to perform better and succeed in their future academic disciplines. The FYP, therefore, could be seen merely as a springboard for the degree studies or a bridging course before students can start their 'real' studies (Al-Badwawi, 2011). The Foundation Year Programme (FYP) in the CoTs comprises an intensive English language study skills courses in addition to introductory IT and mathematics modules. These programmes are provided to serve students' needs, and due to the differences in students' levels of comprehension, the programmes are at various levels. The overarching aims of the FYP are raising the students' language proficiency to a level where they can commence professional studies in Post FYP/degree programmes that use English as the medium of instruction, and preparing students for higher education by equipping them with other necessary non-linguistic skills, such as computer literacy, numeracy, and study skills (Al-Jamoussi & Al-Badwawi, 2005). By achieving such aims, the intention is to "sustain the students' eagerness to start studying English for specific purposes according to each specialisation" they enrolled in (Ministry of Manpower, 2015). The materials used to teach these skills are textbooks, which are usually imported from other western countries, and some in-house materials designed by the centres' own teachers according to their students' levels and needs. Other materials like stories, videos, and books can be found in the self-access centres at these colleges to which students can go either with their teachers or by themselves to use these English language recourses to aid their language improvement.

The English Language Centres (ELCs) in the CoTs offer English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes in the form of three technical writing courses, namely, Technical Writing 1, Technical Writing 2, and Technical Communication, to fulfil the students' needs for writing skills in the various academic and future business-related disciplines. In the Post-FYP studies at the seven CoTs, in additions to these courses, students take modules in the

Engineering Studies, International Business Studies, Design, Pharmacy, Applied Sciences, Photography, and Information Technology departments. With the exception of Design and Photography, where the focus of assessment is on students producing artefacts, students' assessment in the above-mentioned modules is based on their technical writing skills in the form of reports, assignments, and exam papers. There are no set curricula for the lecturers to teach these courses in the Post-FYP. Therefore, students are usually taught using handouts copied from various English language and ESP teaching books. The selections are focused on aspects that are important for students and may satisfy their interests and needs. (reference) Written assignments are used as a tool for assessment in these courses. Students have to write two term papers with a total of 25% of the mark for the semester being allocated to these assignments. This is of course in addition to the writing that they have to do in the mid and final semester exams, which constitute 20% and 50% of the semester's result, respectively. The remaining 5% of the marks is allocated to attendance and class participation.

The HCT in general and each of its departments, like the ELC, try to carefully design and choose their courses in a way that would help their students to become well-qualified or better prepared candidates who can easily be hired and can contribute to both the public and private sectors of the nation.

### **2.5.3. EFL Teachers in ELC**

Teachers working at ELCs in the CoTs are from diverse cultural and distinct backgrounds including Omani and international teachers and include both females and males, Arabic speakers and non-Arabic speakers, and native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Their qualifications vary from holders of BA degrees, MA degrees and even PhDs. Their experiences also vary.

EFL teachers have a number of roles beyond simply teaching in the college. For example, they are expected to incorporate the centre's stated learning outcomes; this is the main and most important role, as these outcomes form the basis of the FYP and are what the rest of students' later studies are based

on. Teachers are thus expected to be able to prepare for and deliver their lessons adequately. Teachers are also expected to know how to evaluate their students continuously and to monitor their progress during and after the course. Additionally, as they work closely with the students, so the teachers are believed to know better what students need and what kind of curricula can fulfil these needs. Thus, teachers might also be involved in the development of materials at the ELCs, and in reviewing, designing or evaluating the programme curricula to meet their students' needs as well as international standards.

Teachers also have to be equipped with the technical skills needed to incorporate the available free access laboratories and smart-boards and to use technology in teaching. Additionally, the teachers' role in dealing with adult learners in the FYP is not limited to providing and transferring the required knowledge; they also need to support their students emotionally to help them cope with a new educational life in college. This might be represented by the academic advising sessions, which are scheduled into teachers' timetables, in which students can meet their teachers at certain regular hours. Being required to fill all these roles, teachers themselves, with the support of their institution, need to be updated with the latest developments in their fields and should keep abreast of research and professional practices (ROSQA, 2009). Therefore, time, effort, support, and money should be allotted to professionally develop these EFL teachers' skills so they can cope with all of these responsibilities.

#### **2.5.4. Students**

Prior to enrolment in the CoTs, students will have mostly studied with Arabic as the medium of instruction whereas all of CoTs courses are in English. Therefore, learners experience difficulties when moving to higher education because their level of competency in English is not necessarily adequate to start their academic studies (Al-Husseini, 2005; Al-Issa, 2006; Al Badwawi, 2011; Al-Riyami, 2016). Those students who join CoTs for a four-year Bachelor of Technology (BTech.) degree are high-school graduates from a variety of backgrounds and of mixed ability both in terms of their English



proficiency and their general academic performance. They are both male and female and are aged between 18 and 23. While they speak Arabic as their mother-tongue, they have usually had a minimum of nine years' academic exposure to the English language at their state school prior to enrolment in the university. Students take an English placement test, designed by the English Language Centres at the CoTs prior to joining the disciplinary study to determine their linguistic competence. Students who score 80% or above are exempted from enrolment in an FYP, which is an orientation programme that aims to strengthen students' English language skills in general (Al-Husseini, 2005), and advance directly to the Post-FYP where they study Technical Writing (TW) courses in addition to the content courses of their disciplines. Students who score less than 80% are enrolled in the FYP, and they are given another placement test at the end of the programme to assess their progress. Technical students have to complete the FYP before starting the Post Foundation-Year (Diploma, Higher Diploma, and Bachelor) streams of technological education.

### **2.5.5. Syllabus and Assessment**

The syllabus taught in the ELC is planned and designed to keep up with the latest developments in the field of technical education and to equip Omani nationals with up-to-date knowledge and education for a diverse national economy. In the FYP, the ELC offers intensive preparation in reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in English. This preparation occurs at four levels. Similar to other HE institutions in Oman, Colleges of Technology mainly utilize Anglo-Western materials in the FYP (HCT, 2015). They come in full packages including the class book, workbook, CDs, and teacher's guide. However, not everybody is given the whole package, and teachers mainly get the course books. Teachers' involvement in syllabus design is probably minimal, as these materials are used to teach a pre-designed syllabus that is prepared by experts at the ministry level, who as Giroux (1988) commented, "do the thinking while teachers are reduced to doing the implementing" (p.124). As Al Riyami (2016) claimed, this might mean, that "the teachers' views of curriculum, tests and teaching methods are delegitimized, neglected and

disregarded” (p.363). Thus, it can be argued that the teachers' involvement is restricted to implementing pre-designed packages of teaching materials (Al-Issa, 2009; Al-Riyami, 2016).

Assessment of English language at ELCs is mainly conducted through tests. It includes continuous assessment (CA) (20%) consisting of progress quizzes, a mid-term exam (MTE) (30%) and a level exit exam (LEE) (50%) (HCT, 2015). The tests have a variety of questions that require students to write answers ranging from short answers to short essays. In addition to English, students also study mathematics, study skills, and information technology to acquire the basic knowledge they need to follow up their disciplinary programmes effectively.

For the Post-FYP, ESP courses of Technical Writing I, Technical Writing II, Technical Communication, and Public Speaking are designed to prepare students for their study in Information Technology, Engineering and Business Studies academic departments. There are no set curricula for the lecturers to teach these courses in the Post-FYP. Therefore, students are usually taught using handouts copied from various English language-teaching books. The selections focus on aspects that are important for students and that may satisfy their interests and needs. Written assignments are used as a tool for assessment in the different disciplines.

#### **2.5.6. Professional Development at ELCs**

Following the directions of the Quality Assurance Plan (2009), the quality of teaching has to be assured in order to guarantee that the students at the HEIs are provided with the best possible education. Therefore, academic staff need to be well-equipped with the best available opportunities for professional development on a continual basis to ensure that they are up to date with the latest research findings and developments in their field to be applied in their classrooms. In the lecturer’s general performance evaluation form (QAU, 2014), staff are evaluated on the following criteria:

- The lecturer actively seeks to obtain relevant professional qualifications

that are designed to improve knowledge in the subject matter and teaching skills.

- The lecturer demonstrates a strong interest in participating in training events such as seminars, workshops, conferences, applied research, etc.
- The lecturer actively pursues to improve on the weaknesses identified in staff appraisal. (QAU,2014)

That illustrates the importance of professional development for each member of staff in the ELC. In addition, each of the college's departments needs to show evidence of their staff's participation in professional development during the academic year.

Academic staff at the ELCs are provided with various opportunities to participate in forms of professional development activities, such as departmental workshops, training sessions and educational seminars. Sometimes the English language teachers themselves try to fulfil their PD requirements at their own expense through attending professional development conferences such as the Sultan Qaboos University ELT annual conference and TESOL Arabia in the UAE, where topics vary to fit teachers' distinct needs and knowledge, and where they can exchange experiences while working collaboratively. Staff need permission and sometimes to find substitutions for their classes in order for them to attend.

In 2015, the ELC at the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Muscat organized an ELT Professional Development Symposium, which was titled 'Notions of Good Teaching in ELT Classrooms'. It served as a professional forum for the English language teachers at the HCT's ELC. It was a unique experience for the centre's teachers to address the issues related to their teaching and learning, exchange ideas, and work collaboratively for their and the centre's benefit (ELC, 2015). It was considered to be a step forward towards addressing the teachers' PD needs, yet as it was mainly planned by the ELC's management it was considered better than that of the Ministry's PD providers. The ELT symposium was planned twice, in 2015 and 2016, and

took the form of two days of sessions and workshops with one major theme. In 2015, it was restricted to the HCT academics, whereas in the second year, participation was expanded to include other HEIs in the Sultanate. Unfortunately, it has not been offered since.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning teachers' professional development in general, and English language teachers' PD in particular. It starts by defining the meaning of PD in ELT. I first identify how the meaning and the construct of PD (in general and for teachers particularly) are discussed in the literature. I also explain how PD and training differ from each other and discuss their significance in teachers' learning and growth. I then review how the idea of PD was developed in the literature and the teacher's role within the process of PD. This will consider how PD is effective for a teacher's early career, the importance and needs of PD practices for English language teachers, and the norm of PD activities (whether traditional or innovative techniques) for EFL teachers. First, the factors that affect teachers' PD are presented. Then the next part reviews PD approaches, models, and activities with a particular focus on the ones applied in the context of Omani HE in general and of technical education in particular. In the final part of this chapter, I review the local and international studies related to PD. Thus, this chapter establishes a rationale for the study since the present study is an example of these types of studies.

### **3.2. Definition and construct of Teachers' Professional Development**

Professional development (PD) is a broad notion that consists of a variety of developmental beliefs, processes, and activities. Indeed, PD has attracted increasing attention in recent years, as teachers have a need to improve their teaching skills and update their professional selves through PD to cope with the rapid global advances in knowledge and technology. PD also has become essential for English language teachers; their role of in the language classrooms has changed significantly, as the new approaches teachers are expected to use may affect their teaching styles drastically. Such changes can include beliefs, understandings, attitudes, knowledge, self-awareness, and teaching practices (Yurtsever, 2012).

In defining professional development, Mann (2005) distinguishes between the terms 'continuous professional development' (CPD) and 'professional development' by attributing CPD with a more personal image whereas PD has a more formal career-oriented image. Thus, aspects of ethics, morals, and values are incorporated into CPD (ibid.) but not into PD. Nonetheless, I believe such differences do not affect the overall meaning of PD, so the terms continuous professional development (CPD) and professional development (PD) can be used interchangeably, as they refer so closely to the same process. PD can be considered as a more general term for the development process, and continuity is one of its features, as it is continuous in nature.

The term 'professional development' is viewed differently by different writers. For example, Villegas-Reimers (2003) suggests that PD, in a broad sense, is the process by which teachers try to develop in their professional role. This development process can be in the form of formal experiences, such as mentoring and attending workshops and professional meetings, or in the form of informal practices, such as watching television documentaries in relation to the profession and reading professional publications (Ganser, 2000). Such variations in the forms of development are believed to allow teachers to choose the most convenient way to increase their professional knowledge or skills (ibid.).

Glathorn (1995) also argues that teachers' PD is "the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (p. 41). Glathorn's definition highlights the individual role a teacher can play in their PD, such as examining and reflecting on their own experiences. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995, p.1) define professional development as "deepening teachers' understanding about the teaching/learning process and the students they teach," which "must begin with pre-service education and continue throughout a teacher's career." For that Padwad (2008) metaphorically views PD as a never-ending journey for which teachers will consistently need to buy their tickets.

On the other hand, Borg (2015) emphasizes that teacher development draws on the teacher's motives and inner resources for enhancement and change.

He argues that it is “centered on personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and what influences the change process” (2015, p. 5). Thus, it can be said that teachers’ own internal motives are considered to be very important in the development process. Without them being aware and convinced of the importance or the need to develop some aspects professionally, their commitment and development cannot be guaranteed.

In a broader sense, Al-Busaidi and Tuzlukova (2014) and Loucks-Horsley et al. (2010) among others argue that PD extends to include not only job-related skills or knowledge but also teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, which tells us more about the construct of professional development. Unfortunately, in most of the Omani educational contexts, this is mostly restricted by the authorities to ‘in-service training’ and ‘staff development’ practices (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2014), which only offer teachers’ new ideas or information in particular areas of their work (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The effective professional development construct, according to Porter et al. (2000), has six dimensions of quality:

“the professional development is a reform rather than traditional type, is sustained over time, involves groups of teachers from the same school, provides opportunities for active learning, is coherent with other reforms and teachers’ activities, and is focused on specific content and teaching strategies”

(p. ES-10).

Quick et al. (2009) also found that key constructs for effective professional development include collaboration, time, modelling opportunities, safe environments, focus on content, and coherence with school goals and teachers’ needs.

An examination of the literature around such key constructs is needed for a context like the Omani technical education environment in order to better understand what constitutes effective professional development and so comprehend the use of coaching relationships as a means of professional development among English language lecturers. The professional development might be looked at through examining, for instance, the constructs of (a) the structure of professional development programs, (b) the

planning process for professional development, (c) the time, duration, and follow-up in professional development, (d) the coherence of professional development with school and district needs and goals, (e) collaboration within professional development, and (f) the evaluation of professional development (Franey, 2015, p. 3).

The literature maintains that the construct of professional development, where the term 'continuous professional development' (CPD) is favoured, should be linked with continuity (Mann, 2005). The continuity in language teachers' PD is necessary, as it is generally agreed that learning to teach is a lifelong process (Yurtsever, 2013). In other words, PD extends to the teachers' career-life as it is a life-long learning process. Yet, the traditional view of the development of professional skills as the process of accumulating knowledge and skills gained through practical experiences evolves continuously. It now incorporates, additionally, the progress of acquisition, and of moving from novice to competent and, finally, expert teacher (Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 2006).

Another element of the construct of PD is training. Training is one of the traditional models for teacher development based on a top-down approach, as it is usually planned through a higher authority. It comes in the form of in-service programs conducted by experts, who are usually outsiders (Cullen, 1997). Borg (2017) explains that "a training model of professional development assumes that teacher competence is improved through knowledge acquired via external input (for example, in the form of a lecture, workshop or seminar) which is then applied by teachers in the classroom" (p. 164). Thus, it is grounded on the sense that training will, eventually, lead to the teachers' PD. Thus, development and training do not mean the same thing; yet development can be a result of the training process. Training is loosely associated with the acquisition of basic principles and activities, which are focused on short-term immediate goals for the teachers' present responsibilities (Richards & Farrell, 2005). It also involves demonstrating their abilities to teach. Meanwhile, development is not focused on a particular job, instead it focuses on general growth towards longer-term goals. It is a way to



help teachers to understand their teaching and themselves as teachers (Richards & Farrell, 2005, Tillema & Imants, 1995). Thus, it can be suggested that training and development are sequential processes, yet sometimes one might see them as inclusive processes, as training's main aim is developing teachers, so implicitly it is a development process. The, same occurs with development; training can be an essential part of it.

In fact, the idea of training versus education has been highlighted in much of the literature since writers link the profession of teaching to professional development and training. For example, Dean (1991, p. 5) claims that one of the most widely accepted definitions of the term 'profession' is "an occupation which requires long training, involves theory as a background to practice, has its own code of behaviour and has a high degree of autonomy". Training and 'training rooms' are used widely for the conventional approaches of teachers' PD in general and EFL teachers' PD in particular (Borg, 2015). In TESOL, the teacher trainers' role is to familiarise language teachers, 'the trainees', with the available methodological choices and a set of concepts and terms that are considered as common currency for them (Mann, 2005).

As PD nowadays is seen from wider perspectives, teachers can use their own classrooms to develop professionally. It can be noticed that the nature of teachers' PD has changed and developed to be more like an open-ended choice. Indeed, over the past few years, the view of PD has changed, and it is now considered as "a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession" (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, p:12). This new paradigm of PD (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2001; Walling and Lewis, 2000) broadens the opportunities teachers might be given to develop themselves and broadens the aspects of development as well. For instance, Little (1993) sees PD as the engagement with materials, ideas, and colleagues in an intellectual, meaningful, purposeful, and emotional way inside or outside their teaching environment. So, the choice of PD processes differs from one teacher to another, which is more logical, as they can choose what works best for their conditions.

However, another discourse in this regard is that teaching is conceived as having less to do with training and education and more to do with the teacher's personality (Moore, 2004, p. 5). Indeed, Moore seems to be saying that teaching is about personality rather than about PD. However, while a teacher's personality can help them motivate and empower their students (Alexander, 2017), not all teachers have the kind of personality required to achieve this. Is personality something that can be acquired? The teacher's PD includes personal development, as the personality traits of a teacher and their professional development influence one another.

### **3.3. The relationship between PD, teaching, and students' achievement**

Teachers' professional knowledge, skills, competence, and practice affect strongly their students' achievements, the learning environment in which they work, and even the overall pedagogical philosophy of their teaching community (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Borko, 2004; Verloop, 2003; Day, 1999). Richards (2005) concurs that providing teachers with opportunities for in-service training is essential for the long-term development of teachers in particular and the success of the programs in which they work in general. However, the effect of PD on these aspects will depend greatly on the degree of teachers' involvement in such programs, as teachers' views and motivations towards PD differ widely from person to person, depending on many factors, such as their background experiences and attitudes towards life-long learning, for example. However, teachers who lack opportunities to experience effective PD and who are not exposed to new changes in the field will not be able to improve their skills or knowledge, which can, in turn, have a negative effect on students' learning (Mizell, 2010).

Kim (2008) argues that professional development (PD) is crucial for achieving higher academic standards, improving instruction, raising students' achievement, and constructing authentic professional learning communities. Similarly, Al-Bidwai maintains that "improving EFL teachers' performance is very important because EFL teachers develop their opinions and beliefs about learning and teaching based on their own experience of language classrooms

and their knowledge of language theories and language-learning psychology” (2015, p. 972). Therefore, teachers are one of the priorities of education reforms because PD helps improve their teaching methods, which can have a positive effect on the students’ learning, and that is the ultimate educational goal (Underhill, 2004).

Another useful aspect of PD is that the teacher and the institution’s administrators advocating the need for time for PD can represent a good example for their students. Mizell (2010) states that teachers and administrators who regularly seek development of their knowledge and skills can be good models for their students, as they emphasize that learning is an essential and continuous process for everybody. Teachers can be considered powerful examples to their students when they try to see and do things differently using new methods (Head and Taylor, 1997). In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) summarises the need for PD by indicating that “those who are now teaching [are required to] adapt to constantly changing demands in order to prepare students to play their part in societies which seem to be evolving at a faster rate than ever before in human history” (OECD, 2011, p. 17). Subsequently, policy makers perceive PD as essential for improving the quality of teaching and learning at educational institutions worldwide (Muijs and Lindsay, 2008). In this regard, I agree with Hayes (2014), who believes that teachers’ professional development is critical in providing them with the means to cope with the growing demands placed upon them through external forces. It maintains their individual capacity to take charge of their own learning and to transform their educational practice in their classrooms. CPD is worth the commitment of money and time, as it eventually leads to higher levels of achievement for students.

### **3.4. Development of the idea of PD**

Hargreaves (2000) illustrated the development of the idea of PD by describing the four historical phases of PD progression:

- the pre-professional age

- the age of the autonomous professional
- the age of the collegial professional
- the post-professional or post-modern professional

These phases are not mutually exclusive, and I would not wish to view them in a simple linear time dimension, whereby one phase supersedes or replaces the insights provided by the other. Rather, each phase successively encapsulates the others, so that the last perspective takes account of the earlier ones, encapsulates them, and builds on the insights developed therein. These different phases are more accurately seen as complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of PD. The reality is that PD is always a social practice, and thus is influenced by cultural and institutional contexts. Therefore, our research focus should be directed towards not only the teachers but also the contexts in which they are likely to need to be professionally developed and then, through the PD process, to enhance the teaching activities and practices. The journey of the development of phases that underpin PD do not and will not stop at a certain point, as researchers have illustrated the need to draw on these stages to create effective PD strategies.

**The pre-professional age** represents the time when teachers were given a syllabus using textbooks and resources, and they subsequently taught on a trial and error basis (Hargreaves, 2000). Teachers were given no feedback on their performance, and they were given no opportunities to question the curriculum. They were passive receivers of instructions and knowledge, following a top-down system in which teachers' voices were almost never heard (*ibid.*). The sphere in the ELCs of CoTs in Oman is no exception to this phase, as the English syllabus is prepared by elites at the ministry level "who do the thinking while teachers are reduced to doing the implementing" (Giroux, 1988, p.124). The textbooks for all levels of the ELT programmes are decided by the ministry (OAAA, 2010). Thus, the students' and teachers' voices are not taken into consideration when the decisions are made (Al-Riyami, 2016).

**The age of the autonomous professional** is associated with the emergence of changes in curriculum and educational reform (Hargreaves, 2000). Teacher status and salaries were improved, and they were given the chance to choose their methods of teaching. However, although pre-service and in-service training was given much attention, they were based on the ideas presented by experts in the field, and little attention was given to the practical aspect (ibid.). Such a situation is current in the Omani schools, especially after the reform in 1998 where the syllabus was changed from the General system to the Basic Education system (see Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2009 among others).

**The age of the collegial professional** is associated with the movement towards school-based PD, in which much attention was given to collaborative work among colleagues (Hargreaves, 2000). It was based on the idea that teachers learn from each other, which, from a personal perspective, is the most affordable, flexible, and tension-free way of achieving PD. This is because it is based in the institution itself, so there is no need to travel, and teachers' time can be managed in a friendly atmosphere dealing with familiar people, for instance, their colleagues (Hargreaves, 2000). Hargreaves (2014, p. xvii) noted, for example, that "collaborative professional learning in professional communities is not the only valuable form of professional development, but it is, in general, the most effective one".

The last phase is **the post-professional or post-modern professional**, which is affected by two factors, namely, communication and economics (Hargreaves, 2000). In this phase, the digital revolution has overcome the obstacles of time and space, and educational policies have become more competitive in different countries. This phase is characterized by the use of different approaches and methods in education, which previously might have caused additional pressure on teachers' workloads.

Although these phases seem to follow a logical sequential order, this might not be the case everywhere, as many external or even internal factors may influence the nature of PD. One of these factors is the teacher's role throughout the development process.

### **3.5. Teacher's role within the development process**

The abovementioned phases suggest that the teacher's role in the PD development process has changed over time, moving from teachers being almost passive receivers of knowledge to being contributors in the development process. Yet the role of teachers is not limited to what is mentioned in these phases. Alternatively, the literature suggests that such a role is connected to the nature of PD itself since change in the nature of PD over time has expanded its aspects to become inclusive of many processes (Coldwell, 2017; Fraser et al., 2007; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). That is why, for this study, PD takes a very broad view consistent with Day's (1999) view of PD. Day gathers most of the PD elements in one broad statement indicating that PD

consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom.

(Day, 1999, p. 4)

Therefore, he believes that PD is a process by which, alone and with others, teachers extend, renew, and review their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching (Day, 1999). He elaborates that through PD, teachers "acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives" (Day, 1999, p. 4). In this description, PD practices are specified to include a combination of formal and informal activities that contribute to the review, enhancement, and renewal of teachers' thinking, practices, and commitment. Day (1999) explains that a variety of needs can drive these activities, such as professional and personal purposes, collective and individual, inquiry-based and technical needs. Accordingly, PD practices are not necessarily linked with the formality of workplace because many chances are out there for the teachers to facilitate their development, which, again, in some cases, moves beyond teachers' professional life and into the realm of their personal life. PD, thus, should respond to the teachers'

distinctive needs at the various phases of their career as a form of life-long learning.

The teachers' role extends from the development of individual teachers' skills and knowledge to include institutional aspects of PD. From the institutional perspective, professional development practices are not intended to help teachers improve their individual performance only, but also should benefit and help in the development of the educational institution (Richard, 2005). For instance, PD can involve collegiality (as Day 1999 defined it), which is one of the ways of building relationships among the staff, as they will be assisting each other in developing their teaching skills or approaches and contributing to the overall quality of the teaching of the institution (Joyce, 1991). Thus, subsequently, it helps in maintaining high standards of teaching and, correspondingly, learning, which will contribute eventually to the improvement and reputation of the institution as a whole. PD can also be achieved through teachers' engagement in educational research, which is currently one of the more popular means by which teachers can find out more about their concerns and interests in the field. As a result, the institution might discover that the findings of the teachers' research studies are beneficial and feasible, so it incorporates them into its development by implementing and familiarising the staff with their findings and suggestions. Besides, PD may also include curriculum initiatives, through which teachers can collaborate towards implementing changes or developments in the subjects or curricula to be taught (ibid.).

Teachers' roles change over time; currently, they increasingly "face moral, social, and emotional dilemmas, such as how to educate students from different cultures and different social backgrounds, how to proceed with deviant behavior of pupils" (Makovec, 2018, p. 35). The Omani teachers in the context of technical education are no exception. Thus, teachers' PD should also expand to include aspects such as cultural differences and discipline issues to help them do their job efficiently. Apart from these dilemmas, teachers should be aware of the many norms and values involved in their interaction and relationship with students (Beijaard et al., 2000)

Whatever the influence of teacher's role in the PD process, there are certain internal and external factors that affect the role of teachers within that process. The internal factors include those that influence a teacher's own perception of their role whereas external factors include the views and expectations of the role of the teacher, which arise within other stakeholders, such as pupils, parents, colleagues, school leaders, and the public (Makovec, 2018). Teachers' expectations determine the understanding of their own role, as the sense of efficiency in the work that teachers experience can also depend on how they see themselves as professionals (Ben-Peretz, Mendelsohn, and Kronb, 2003, p.278). In addition to the education experience, teachers' expectations are influenced by the context in which they are teaching (Makovec, 2018). For example, in a 2003 study, Ben-Peretz and colleagues found that teachers who teach pupils with lower abilities see their role differently from teachers who instruct pupils with higher abilities. I therefore discuss these factors in more detail in the next section.

### **3.6. Factors Affecting Teachers' PD Practices**

Generally speaking, teachers are expected to derive benefit from the skills and knowledge gained from the offered PD opportunities and then convey them to their classrooms; yet, some teachers may encounter various obstacles that prevent them from doing so. A number of different factors have been identified in the literature as affecting teachers' participation in PD practices, and these are explored in the following sections.

#### **3.6.1. Teachers' Career Stages**

Throughout their career, teachers' preferences, personality, experiences, needs, and interests change over time and differ from one teacher to another. Understanding these aspects is important in "framing the provision of future professional development opportunities for staff that support the innovative teaching culture the institution has sought to create" (Jennifer, 2016, p. 113). The literature includes extensive research on how professional development needs change over the course of a teacher's career. For example, Huberman documented and reviewed the literature relating to teachers' career cycles to



ascertain how the stages and phases relate to the classic studies of adult development and socialization (Huberman 1999, 1993, 1989). In his research about schoolteachers in Germany, who may have more of a 'career path' than many/most EFL teachers, he proposed a career stage model for teachers' professional work (Huberman, 1989) which divides the teachers' career development into the five different stages, as can be seen in Figure 3.1.

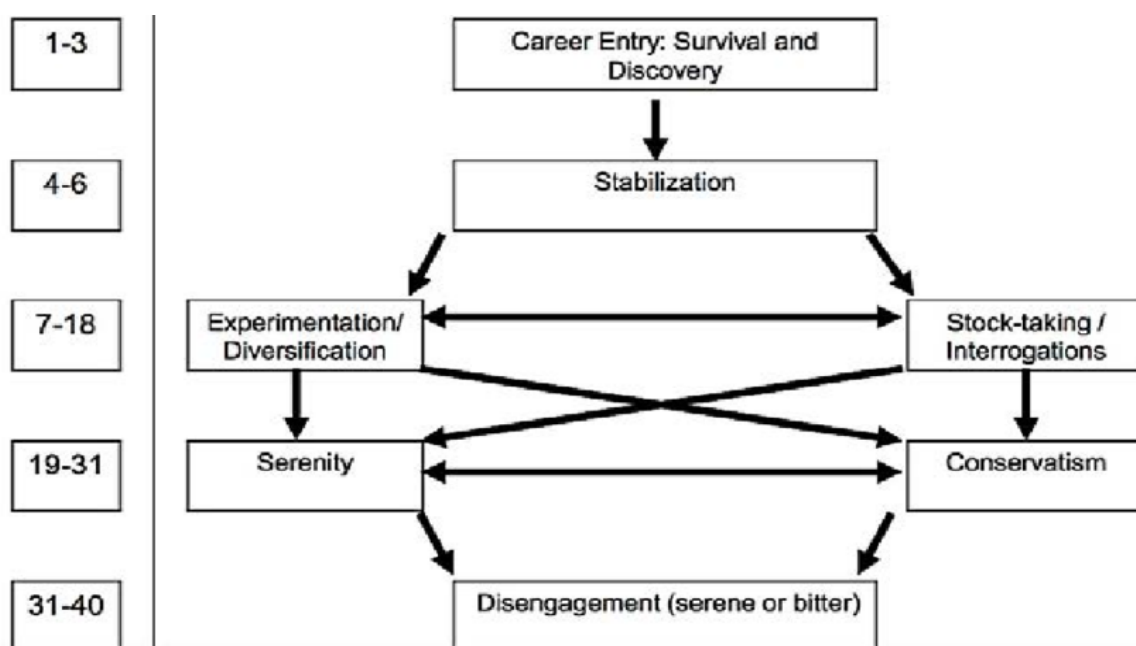


Figure 3.1: Huberman's Stages of Teacher Career Development (Huberman, 1989)

The first stage is the career entry phase where the teacher tries to survive their first classroom experiences. This phase is usually followed by the stabilization stage, where the teacher starts feeling more comfortable with his or her profession as he/she is now no longer a beginner. Interestingly, in this period, there is a theme of 'independence' and 'emancipation' or 'liberation' from the role of student-teacher and a feeling more of security and of belonging to a professional guild, as well as of personal commitment (Wites, 1999, p. 34). In the diversification and change stage, the teacher becomes more active and creative professionally having mastered their classrooms and materials, and their students' needs. The next stage borrows characteristics from the 'mid-life crisis', which is the 'stocktaking at mid-career' stage, where the teacher starts doubting their position and their role as a teacher. These stages are followed by the affective distance and conservatism stages where the distance between the teacher's and the students' generation starts

dissolving. In the final phase, namely, the disengagement phase, the teacher starts their behavioural and cognitive withdrawal from the work of teaching (ibid.). Noticeably, in this classification, Huberman gives a historical perspective to life-cycle research, and presents general trends in the literature, particularly in regard to the phases individuals traverse in their career cycles.

Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) summarise the teachers’ development stages into *novice*, *competent*, and *expert*. Each stage has its own characteristics and needs, which affect teachers’ attitudes and choices when it comes to developing their educational role. That provides a logical justification for some teachers’ resistance to attending their institutions’ planned PD. Thus, PD providers should be aware of these distinctive stages of the teachers’ career life to offer a variety of PD options that serve the different stages and suit teachers’ needs or interests.

### **3.6.2. Motivational Factors**

Nasser and Shabti’s (2010) research examined teachers’ satisfaction with their PD programs. They identify a range of factors (for example, teachers’ background and the characteristics of the PD programs) that affect teachers’ satisfactions widely, including teachers’ motivation. They (2010) indicate that insights into the relationship between these factors and participants’ satisfaction will help in tailoring and matching the PD programs according to the teachers’ needs (Shui-Che et al., 2005; Early, 2005). However, participants’ background was found to be less significant in affecting teachers’ satisfaction with their PD. Components of the program should meet participants’ expectations and needs in order for them to feel satisfied (Nasser & Shabti, 2010). Examples of these components are the PD program objectives and the educational level it targets. Thus, PD providers need to know how to use such factors to guarantee teachers’ satisfaction with the provided PD programs.

According to Deci (1995), “Self-motivation is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behaviour, and lasting change” (p. 9). Thus, teachers’

motivation needs to be taken into consideration to encourage their creativity and their acceptance of ongoing changes. It is not easy to classify or observe motivation, yet it can be felt through people's actions, such as its contribution to better teaching, and it can be also linked to the students' results (Ozcan, 1996). Understanding the motivational factors affecting teachers' PD is important to understand, encourage, facilitate, and support teachers in improving their professionalism (Hildebrant & Eom, 2011). Motivating teachers can be done through 'internal' or 'external' incentives (ibid.). To exemplify, a form of internal incentives can be the rewards and the recognition by their leaders, and external incentives could be a form of economic rewards. Although Hess (2009) states that "teaching is a less attractive profession for those who want to be recognized and rewarded on the basis of their accomplishments and hard work" (p. 130), financial motivation is also seen as viable in teacher motivation (Hildebrant & Eom, 2011; Oliver & Peker, 2004; Kelley & Kimball, 2001; Ozcan, 1996). Kelley and Kimball (2001) identified money as a strong attractor to teachers' PD, yet that may be minimized by strengthening other motivators.

Hildebrant and Eom (2011) found in their study about the motivational factors affecting teachers' professionalism that enhanced teaching motivation increases teachers' desires for professional development. Previous studies support this view and emphasize that enhancing the teaching profession and improving practices work well as motivators (Oliver & Peker, 2004). Another motivational factor that emerged as a result of this study (Hildebrant & Eom, 2011) is collaborative opportunities, which are considered to be an integral part of teacher professional development (Grant & Murray, 1999).

### **3.6.3. The Institutional Role**

The role of institutions can vary significantly when it comes to their teachers' PD, as they can encourage PD or discourage it, in many cases unconsciously. For instance, institutions may think that they are supporting their staff's PD by providing teachers with mandatory workshops, which are often delivered by external trainers. However, while having the teachers attend a number of CPD sessions may satisfy the management's wishes, in

many cases, much of the PD provided is not beneficial to the teachers (Borg, 2015) but rather is perceived as irrelevant to their needs. It is certainly true that PD, despite its intent, does not always lead to improvement (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Fullan (2007, p.757) argues that external approaches to instructional improvement are rarely “powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school”. Thus, there is no guarantee of the effectiveness and applicability of the content of the external resources of PD, as the needs differ from one context to another. Lee (2005) states that this problem occurs when the PD programs’ administrators emphasise the latest ‘hot’ topics rather than trying to individualize and personalize their staff’s professional development plans. Teachers’ needs should be recognized by their institutions to make them more dynamic, stimulate them to improve their skills, and help them to develop or change their personal approaches (Eksi & Aydin, 2012; Evans, 1988). Therefore, to be effective and practical, PD programs should respond to the individual teachers’ needs.

In addition, a culture of support needs to be established in order for PD to be successful and attract teachers’ attention and interest (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). To build such a culture in any educational system, it is important to develop norms of openness, trust, and collegiality among staff members and specify a time for members’ enquiries as well as their learning and development opportunities in the relevant context (Lieberman, 1994). Rethinking leadership’s functions and redefining them to include teachers by creating networks and collaboration and supporting them will affect the success of PD practices (ibid.).

### **3.7. Professional Development Approaches**

Professional development as an approach or a system integrates most of the PD elements leading to one broad perspective of PD. This includes the interconnection between the PD goals, the context, participants’ characteristics, the techniques to be implemented, the PD assessment, the determination of the needed support, and the benefits of PD (Villegas-

Reimers, 2003). Over time, the providers of these experiences have used different approaches of PD.

In the field of teachers' PD, there are many different approaches to improving teaching and learning. On the one hand, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) describe three approaches of PD that co-exist to justify the various improvement ideas used. They call the first of these 'knowledge-for-practice'. This approach assumes that the formal theory and knowledge generated by university-based researchers is one of the essential resources for teachers to improve their practices. This approach can be used to explain the foundation of the conventional forms of PD activities in which teachers are treated like passive receivers of knowledge generated by the experts in the field. The second approach is named knowledge-in-practice (ibid.). This approach assumes that the practice itself forms a vital resource of knowledge. 'Practical knowledge' is perceived to be essential knowledge for teaching. An example of such an approach can be the 'team teaching activity', where teachers use their knowledge generated by previous practical experiences to produce an ideal lesson for their students. The third one is knowledge-of-practice (ibid.). In this approach, knowledge is not divided into formal and practical knowledge; instead, the emphasis is on the importance of 'reflection' as a critical resource for teachers' teaching knowledge. By reflecting on their own practices, teachers have the opportunity to discover or learn more about the successful teaching practices and what works best for them and their students through the process of inquiry.

On other hand, Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) suggest three approaches to organizing ideas about PD. They try to emphasize the idea that teacher development is not restricted purely to knowledge and skills but involves understanding them with regard to both the teachers themselves and the context of their work. The first of these frameworks is *teacher development as knowledge and skill development*, which is one of the most widespread and popular approaches regarding teachers' professional development (ibid.). In some cases, it is considered the only method of PD since it is widely held that acquiring knowledge or skills is the way to produce more effective teaching;

which again springs from the traditional view of teachers' professional development. PD based on this approach is traditionally imposed on teachers, as it is usually planned using a top-down approach. Thus, teachers' participation and commitment, or even the transfer of their PD knowledge and skills to their classrooms, cannot be guaranteed. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) point out that in this approach, teachers are not viewed as people who can and should develop themselves but as people who need further training and development. This view can be linked to the pre-professional historical phase of PD (Hargreaves, 2000) and 'the knowledge-for-practice' approach where teachers are treated as passive receivers of knowledge and chances for subjectivity are rare. However, Muijs et al. (2014) found there was growing dissatisfaction in the ELT field internationally with this type of PD, which Borg (2015) calls 'training-transmission'. This model was criticized for not having a positive effect on the teaching and learning experiences (Choi & Andon 2014; Kubanyiova, 2012), and thus, it does not meet its main purpose, which is changing towards development. From a personal perspective, such an approach could work better for those at the pre-service stage or for college students preparing to join the educational field, as they will need to depend on such basic knowledge when they first start their teaching journey. Yet, this is not the case for experienced teachers who, I believe, would appreciate more tangible approaches to development.

The second approach is teachers' development as *self-understanding*, which aims at providing opportunities for teachers to develop the understanding, personal qualities, and commitments needed for their profession. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) state that "teachers at different points in their life cycle have characteristically different orientations to change and improvement as well as different needs in terms of professional development" (1992, p. 8). Unlike the first approach, which may result in teachers depending mainly on others to provide them with the needed PD, teachers here are offered a chance to take charge of their own development and learning (Borg, 2015).

The last approach is *teachers' development as ecological change*, which may be seen as providing a suitable and convenient work environment for continuous improvement, and opportunities to teach well rather than simply survive (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992). Context is considered essential when it comes to the teachers' development efforts, as it can make it or break it, or can itself be a focus for teacher development. Providing teachers with the encouragement, time, and financial support necessary for the development process to happen in the first place, and to succeed eventually.

### **3.8. PD Models/ activities for EFL Teachers**

PD models are more specific; they present/describe the planned opportunities and processes provided for the teachers to develop professionally from the beginning of their professional life (Coldwell, 2017; Fraser et al., 2007; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Ingvarson, 1998). These processes represent a wide range of both formal and informal learning experiences. Traditionally, EFL teachers' PD comes in the form of formal activities, such as attending courses organised by local and international educational institutions, conferences, seminars, collaborative learning among members of a work team, or workshops (Borg, 2015; Richard & Farrell, 2005). However, some informal processes of PD can also be incorporated into the development of the teacher's professional role; these might constitute observations of other works, colleagues' discussions of work, independent reading and research, or different forms of peer learning activities (Mizell, 2010).

Various types of PD can support teachers' development at the various stages of their career. Their choices can vary according to teachers' own interests, the time available, and in many cases, the financial support, as well. PD areas of knowledge can be divided into two categories: skills, which involves how to do things, and self-knowledge, which is the bigger area of self-awareness and the development of understanding and beliefs (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). PD activities are what the teachers do in order to develop those two types of professional knowledge. To illustrate, for skills, there are activities such as reading, and attending workshops and conferences, for example, while for self-knowledge or developing teachers' understanding of what 'being a

teacher' is and how they are a teacher, there are activities such as reflection, action research, and so on. These sorts of PD activities help teachers reflect on their own work and expand their knowledge and skills through using the available resources. They also encourage the sharing of ideas with other teachers and the participation in workshops and courses relevant to their field (Breen, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2005). A brief summary of these conventional and popular PD activities will be explained in this section. Some popular examples of the PD activities that develop the teacher's skills are discussed below.

### **3.8.1. Activities that develop teachers' skills**

#### **3.8.1.1. Workshops**

A workshop can be described as a short-term intensive learning activity designed for the purpose of obtaining specific knowledge or skills (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Many authors have identified workshops as one of the beneficial PD activities (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Al-Lamki, 2009) for language teachers. Input from experts can be provided in these workshops, which can help teachers in learning many skills about language teaching. Workshops encourage and motivate teachers to develop collegiality, as in many activities, they will need to work together to accomplish the intended tasks. Workshops considered to be flexible in organization usually do not restrict teachers to a particular location and can be done in short sessions, so they are not time consuming (Richards & Farrell, 2005). However, in a study investigating the types of professional development provided for teachers, over 90 percent of those teachers reported taking part in professional development workshops, yet most stated that they were not worthwhile or useful or even practical for them (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). It was found that most development happened in a workshop-style model and that workshops have little to no impact on teachers' practice or students' learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Workshops can be one of the successful ways of bringing professionals from various areas and teaching institutions all together in one place. Yet, they are mostly conducted by experts, usually outsiders from distinctive contexts or teaching environments, who are trying to



transfer their experiences or knowledge to their audience. However, what was applicable for the expert might not be feasible for their audience. Another point that could affect the practicality of the workshops' outcomes is the shortage of time. It was evident that there was rarely sufficient time for discussion, exchanging experiences, or even sometimes completing the workshop's task. Subsequently, the above study's findings were not surprising; indeed, views have changed regarding the use of workshops in PD, and other development techniques have been established.

#### **3.8.1.2. Team teaching (and other collaboration)**

Team teaching is defined as the activity in which two or more teachers take the responsibility for teaching a class. It involves a cycle of team planning, teaching, and, finally, a follow up stage (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Though teachers usually cooperate as equals, sometimes such an activity requires some elements of coaching, for example, when a member of the teaching team has more experience than the others. It can be seen as an accessible and flexible task, as it can be organized by any of the team's members. Its activities make it more accessible to any educational institution, and it is effective in developing the teachers' teaching skills. Both teachers on the team try to bring up their successful strategies or approaches and show their strengths to the other. These exchangeable skills will lead to the professional development of the teachers and a more successful learning experience for their students. Such a developmental task can be seen as fruitful and productive because it is a summary of the teachers' trials and successful experiences. Another of this task's positive aspects is its practicality since the 'classroom' is the place where the final outcomes of such a task are presented. The teachers and the students benefit directly from its usefulness.

Another similar collaborative model is 'lesson study' where a team of teachers co-plan a lesson focusing on a unit of study using outside resources and sustainable conversations. Their focus is on the students' learning and the improvement in certain skills or knowledge by the completion of the specified unit of study (ibid.). The model is characterised by the collective experiences of the team of teachers in forming the lesson, which is highly beneficial, and

the observer's feedback after the lesson for further future improvement. It is, I believe, a chance to improve the teachers' classroom practice through gaining ideas, alternatives, experiences, and feedback from other teachers and observers; while it can be time and effort consuming, one would argue that it is worth trying, as it will foster the development of new approaches and content.

These kinds of 'cooperative development' which, according to Edge (2002), is where colleagues work with one another to develop as a person who teaches in their own way. It encourages self-development through the creation of a supportive atmosphere of colleagues who allow and are responsible for creating a space for other teachers to articulate or verbalize their thoughts, concerns, and problems (Johnson, 2009). These roles, 'speakers' and 'understanders', are exchangeable between them.

### **3.8.1.3. Coaching, Mentoring, and Peer Observation**

Mentoring is considered to be an open-ended process that identifies and responds to the needs of the individual, unlike coaching, which focuses mainly on the performance of a particular task (Starcevich, 2009). However, coaching, mentoring, and peer observation all aim to provide teachers with opportunities to develop new approaches to teaching based on the experience of other teachers and their observations of their classroom instructions (Levin & Rock, 2003).

Experienced teachers play an essential role in coaching and mentoring, as they can help other teachers through supporting or exchanging experiences to achieve more effective approaches to teaching, as well as providing them with explanations and examples of new concepts in the field (ibid.). Peer coaching has been given a variety of names throughout the literature, such as peer supervision, cognitive coaching, learning-centred supervision, and peer mentoring (Pellicer & Anderson, 1995). Vidmar (2006) used the term 'reflective' peer coaching to indicate a formative model that aims mainly at promoting collaboration and self-assessment to improve teaching and, ultimately, learning. Besides, peer observation helps in widening teachers'

knowledge beyond their own classrooms, as they are exposed to new techniques and to atmospheres different from their own. Experienced and novice teachers exchanging peer observation is beneficial for both parties because the former can offer actions, and the latter can exchange alternative innovation in the field (Rodríguez and McKay, 2010). Thus, peer observation is not restricted to experienced teachers. I believe that even novice teachers can assist experienced ones; although their practical knowledge is limited, having freshly graduated, new teachers can introduce new ideas, as they are aware of the most recent approaches in the field. Peer observation is characterized by its flexible nature, as teachers can choose their focus themselves, and fit it to their needs and benefits, while the exclusion of evaluation also allows for a more friendly and relaxing atmosphere (ibid.). This model is distinct from the others due to its features, as it is based on creating a non-threatening relationship through collaboration between peers sharing accomplishments and frustrations and reflecting on each other's work with no hidden evaluation purposes (Vidmar, 2006). Thus, the program of peer coaching is seen as a safe learning environment since it is non-evaluative, and teachers can experiment with new instructional techniques while reflecting deeply on the quality and impact of their actions and instructional decisions (Johnson, 2009).

Amy (2003) has devised a procedure to gain the most from these PD methods, for instance, specifying a time for participant teachers to process their observations and obtain feedback from each other to make such practices more trusted and beneficial for teachers' own practices. In order for the objectives to be met, teachers should be allowed reasonable access to one another because collaborative work is needed for these activities. Amy adds that goal setting and focused planning are significant and essential for observation and mentoring to be successful.

### **3.8.2. Activities that develop teachers' self-knowledge**

The following subsections explore several examples of widely known PD activities to develop teacher's self-knowledge:

### 3.8.2.1. Action research

Action research (AR) is considered one of the influential PD activities for language teachers (Borg, 2009). In this model of PD teachers' own classrooms are considered as a legitimate site for their PD where they can carefully examine their own practices through the medium of research (Johnson, 2009). It is defined as a self-motivated or self-generated informed and systematic inquiry conducted by classroom practitioners wanting to improve their work as professional educators (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004, p. 9). The definition emphasizes the self-initiated nature of the action research because for research to begin, the teacher should first have the desire to undertake it. Since the topic, setting, and parameters of AR are under the teacher's control or power, the whole issue of AR springs from personal meaning and motivation (Atay, 2008). It is also identified as "a disciplined inquiry done by a teacher with the intent that the research will inform and change his or her practices in the future" (Ferrance, 2000, p. 1), which indicates clearly the development aspect of PD. The teachers can conduct such an examination individually or collaboratively. Thus, it can be said that when teachers are in a more collaborative atmosphere, they take charge of developing themselves through exchanging knowledge, trying new ideas, and reflecting on their work. Burns (1999) similarly discusses that, for EFL teachers, collaborative action research is contemplated as a mechanism in which they can "link their investigative work to that of other colleagues and explore in what ways such collaborative processes can make an impact upon whole-school changes and priorities" (p. 1).

To illustrate, language teachers' research engagement is considered as a productive form of PD and as a way to improve their professional practices and empirical accounts of their practices (Borg, 2010). Borg adds, stressing its value, that "research engagement has the potential to be a powerful transformative force in the work and professional development of language teachers" (ibid.). Research conducted by teachers can help lead a teacher towards new paths of classroom and pedagogy practice and may also assist in raising the teacher's work status and confidence (Francis, Hirsch, &

Rowland, 1994). In addition, teachers, whether experienced or beginners, can make changes in the plan, delivery, and analyses of their instruction as part of their AR (Farrell, 2008). AR has a flexible nature, as it can be undertaken individually or collaboratively by heterogeneous or homogeneous groups, depending on the aims of the research (Ferrance, 2000). Thus, it is a productive task since the teachers themselves, driven by their inner motivation, engage in research study to find out more and to change or improve aspects of their profession. Accordingly, like almost all of the PD models, action research supports the development not only of the individual teachers but of the institution as a whole.

### **3.8.2.2. Reflection**

Reflection is defined as “an active, intellectual thinking for monitoring one's own learning activity and process, and a continuous internal activity of exploring oneself for new learning” (Mede, 2010, p.3888). Learners consolidate and enrich their thinking throughout this internal task (Kim & Lee, 2002). Indeed, reflection is of importance for teachers throughout their career. Facing new incidents, challenges, and information can help teachers to act differently when they are well supported (Tsui, 2003). As an example of reflection, Rodríguez and McKay (2010) suggest three ways to help teachers reflect on their practices: reflective teaching, study circles, and reflective writings and emphasize the importance of the supportive environment in gaining reflecting experience. Orem (2001) lists several benefits for English language teachers of using reflective writing. First, it is a flexible process, as they are the ones who decide on the place, time, and effort for each project. Second, administrating reflective writing as PD is also often an easy process in terms of logistics and funding. Third, it helps in reducing the feeling of isolation that is usually associated with ESL instructors, particularly in large institutions.

Reflective activity is not restricted to an individual's internal exploration, but it can involve social aspects as well, such as learner-learner interaction, which is often referred to as ‘collaborative reflection’ (Mede, 2010). Freeman (1989) found that individuals need to collaborate with each other to generate some

forms of reforms in the teacher's decision-making based on their awareness, knowledge, attitude, and skills. Whatever the case, either the individual's reflection or the collaborative one, teachers develop their teaching skills and knowledge.

These professional development models can have a very strong influence on the improvements of the teachers' practices and on their institutions. This is because most of them are not imposed on teachers, but rather spring from teachers' internal desire to learn, develop their practices, and overcome the obstacles they might face. Besides, some techniques are flexible in nature such as reflection or peer observation since they do not require particular settings or even financial support; teachers can meet whenever it is convenient and suitable for them. The environment in which teachers work is another factor in the success of these models, as teachers need to be able to deal with their colleagues in a friendly and stress-free atmosphere.

### **3.9. Changes/Reforms in Teachers' Professional Development to achieve effective PD**

Professional development, like many other life aspects, changes over time to cope with the rapid changes in the world in general and societies in particular. To illustrate, as globalization spreads, it also becomes one example of the emerging trends in the educational field, as the increase in communication, mobility, and trade affects most areas of life across the globe (Collinson et al., 2009). Such a trend will have an effect on the attitudes and behaviour of the students, in the first place, and in many cases, will affect the teachers as well. Currently, "sophisticated forms of teaching are needed to develop student competencies such as deep mastery of challenging content, critical thinking, complex problem-solving, effective communication and collaboration, and self-direction" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In turn, effective PD is required to help teachers to learn to cope with these changes and refine the pedagogies needed to teach these skills. Thus, teachers and academics who continue using the conventional and basic ways of teaching may face challenges and find such an environment unfamiliar. PD here is an essential

process to assist educators in their mission and help them manage such challenges and the evolving changes surrounding them.

These changes have been associated with the new social geography of postmodernity where “the boundaries between institutions are dissolving” causing “a blurring of roles and borders” (Nyarigoti, 2013, p. 101). The distance between the administration and teachers has been reduced, and the need for the transparency between them is essential especially when it comes to maintaining quality in teaching and the development of their professional role.

In language teaching, traditionally, EFL teachers are treated in their PD processes as ‘knowledge consumers’ rather than producers. This can be illustrated in some of the PD workshops in which they are exposed to new ideas, techniques, and advice and subsequently expected to transfer them to their real world classroom environments (Borg, 2015). Implementing externally generated knowledge in EFL teachers’ classrooms will not be practical in all cases, as each class has its own unique nature, so what is applicable to one classroom is not necessarily applicable to another. Subsequently, PD has also been given a renewed focus and so has become a recurring theme, as a result of the emergence of new directions to develop professionally, such as the teacher-led initiative forms of PD. Changes are not restricted to teachers’ roles only but occur in the types of PD teachers’ activities as well. They have become more like ‘performance-centred’ or ‘problem centred’ rather than ‘a subject-oriented’ learning process (Terehoff, 2002, p. 69). In light of that, Borg (2017) highlights that, nowadays, teachers’ professional learning can be realized through a wide range of strategies as the figure below shows:



Figure 3.2.: contemporary approaches to professional learning (Borg, 2017, p:166)

Some of these contemporary strategies are familiar; in peer observation, for instance, teachers support one another through ‘friendly’ lesson observations followed by supportive and constructive discussions of the findings (Cosh, 1999) while in reading groups (Fenton-Smith & Stillwell, 2011), teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss a text (e.g., a research paper or professional article) that is of relevance to their work. In teacher research, teachers conduct research to study their own context in different ways (Borg, 2017). There are other less familiar strategies; ‘curriculum study’, for example, involves teachers working together to deepen their knowledge of the subject matter they teach (Loucks-Horsley et.al, 2010). Hargreaves (1997) indicated that changes in their PD lead to a change in the teachers’ professional role from “autonomous professional” to “collegial professional”, depending on “consultation, collaborative planning and other kinds of joint work with colleagues” (p. 95). Indeed, teachers might find collegiality more beneficial and produce rapid changes, which is more effective especially for those who are overwhelmed with heavy duties and loads.

However, not all PD practices are of equal importance; thus, a key consideration is how to judge PD’s quality and effectiveness. Mizell (2010) explains that effective PD is supposed to help teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to overcome their students’ learning difficulties and challenges. Thoughtful planning and careful implementation are important for



effective PD, taking into account teachers' feedback as a final step to make sure it addresses their learning needs.

Teachers' role is to put their new knowledge or skills into practice to improve their performance. A number of authors and studies have identified the characteristics of effective PD (e.g., Richards & Farrell, 2005; Gulamhussein 2013). Villegas-Reimers (2003) summarises these characteristics and explains that for a PD program to be successful, teachers need to play an active role in choosing aims and activities for themselves and to emphasize their continuous and concrete training. Additionally, demonstration and directed trials followed by feedback are significant in teachers' PD. Importance should be given to self-instruction in various training opportunities, and there is a need for ongoing support and assistance to be available on request. Villegas-Reimers adds that for effective PD, teachers participating in the PD programs need to work collaboratively with the administrators in planning for in-service activities. Indeed, teachers' involvement is a key element, as Dzubay (2001) argues that teachers' professional growth results are more tangible when they are involved in constructing their career goals and collaborating with each other. In contrast, when teachers are forced to participate in PD, it might lead to ineffective and counter-productive results, which does little to enhance their individual motivation (ibid.). Accordingly, providing teachers with a variety of choices and minimizing the higher authorities' control over them will help best in promoting teachers' professional growth. A study conducted in 2017 summarized all the above and found that effective professional development incorporates the following seven shared features (Darling-Hammond, et al. 2017):

- is content focused
- incorporates active learning
- supports collaboration
- uses models of effective practice
- provides coaching and expert support
- offers feedback and reflection
- is of sustained duration

### **3.10. Research on Teachers' PD: positioning the current study within the wider and local contexts**

This section attempts to position the current study within the wider context of research on PD in general and in the Omani context in particular. Therefore, it offers a review and discussion of the literature about, for example, English language teachers' understanding of PD, how they perceive their PD needs, and their views on how to enhance the current PD provision. I review a number of studies that have been conducted in a variety of contexts and that investigate teachers' PD, specifically that of EFL teachers. Of particular interest are studies that have been conducted in the Omani HE context.

#### **3.10.1. Understanding of PD**

A significant body of research investigating EFL teachers' understanding of PD was conducted globally and locally. Internationally, PD was limited by researchers like Little (1993), who focused on activities to prepare staff members and improve their performance, whereas in the contemporary literature, PD has been perceived as extending beyond discrete activities, such as workshops, local and national conferences, college courses, special institutes and centres, into a newer, more complex and broad-based concept. For example, Vangrieken et al. (2017) perceive it as a significant way to improve teachers' quality, and thus enhance students' learning. Borg (2015, p. 5) also suggests that PD is centred on the teachers' "personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and what influences the change process". Despite such a variation in conceptualising PD, scholars to some extent agree that PD enables teachers to adapt to the daily changing needs of their career life, as their initial teacher preparation programmes are not sufficient to cover all of these needs (see, for instance, Vangrieken et al., 2017; Vries et al., 2013; Day & Sachs, 2004).

With regard to the local literature, for Omani EFL teachers, generally speaking most of the research has been conducted at Omani schools and very few studies have been conducted in the higher education context (Al Afi, 2014). The perception and understanding of PD is no exception. The teachers'

understanding of PD has received little attention, as researchers, in both the Omani schools and the higher education contexts, have mostly considered the relationship between the teachers' PD beliefs, their attitudes, and their PD practices. A number of the studies reviewed here were conducted in the Omani context and are relevant to this research (for example, Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Habsi, 2009; Al-Harrasi, 2005; Al-Hinai, 2002).

For the context of Omani schools, a study investigating English language schoolteachers' perceptions and practices with regard to their continuous professional development (CPD) was done by Al-Lamki (2009). What was interesting in this study is that policy makers' views and plans were also explored in order to compare them with those held by the teachers. According to Al-Lamki, the crucial aim of his exploratory study was to gain and develop a clearer picture of the suggestions that his findings may offer for the overall view of the relationship between teachers' PD perceptions and practices and how such a relationship could be connected to educational innovation. An interesting result of the study is that it revealed the level of incompatibility between the CPD applied system and the teachers' beliefs and practices, which, in Al-Lamki's view, may lead to a hindrance or frustration and a lack of self-confidence among teachers. The mismatches were exemplified between the CPD needs of institutions and teachers, and the decision regarding the kind of CPD activities, and teachers' attitudes towards the required training. Thus, he suggests that, in an era of reform, such as the situation in Oman, teachers' beliefs in their CPD should be taken into account, as they have a crucial role in forming and shaping their continuous professional development practices (Al-Lamki, 2009). Al-Lamki's study also emphasizes the importance of transparency between the policy makers' intended goals and the teachers' hoped-for aims with regard to their PD. The findings of Al Lamki's study are highly relevant to this current study since my research context is also Oman, though at a college rather than a school level. From a personal perspective, investigating the perceptions of both the teachers and policymakers is of significance for all educational institutions at any level, as it establishes a connection or communication between both parties. That is why I found it

useful to explore and compare the teachers' views of what type of PD is being offered to them and what the ELC administrative members claim to offer for staff development, as each of them could see PD from different perspectives.

For the Omani HE context and prior to 2009, the scope of the research on PD has rarely investigated the teachers' understanding of PD. For example, in 2014, Al Auffi examined statistically the current perceptions of the improvement in the quality of teaching through the PD of academics in the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs) in Oman. The findings of his study indicate the lack of "a clear PD policy at national and institutional levels and absence of a particular authority/unit concerning PD issues in Omani HEIs" (P: 259). His study also indicated the absence of any realistic and systematic PD plans and of academics' involvement in the PD plans in the CASs (ibid.). In the same context, Al Ghatrifi (2016) conducted a case study investigating the professional development of EFL teachers in the CASs in Oman as well. He found that though the colleges' management were very supportive of a wide range of models, the academics were provided with very limited opportunities that were partially irrelevant to their needs or preferences. The study also revealed that there was "little evidence of the widely found continuous professional development activities, such as training, professional learning communities, mentoring, reflection and online learning" (Al Ghatrifi, 2016, p. 4). Al-Ghatrifi (2016) also explains that his study participants' understanding of professional development is linked to aspects of development of teaching skills, adaptation to change, and professional development as a self-development process.

These studies, similar to other studies that were conducted in the Omani HE context, have indicated that there is a consensus about the lack of any shared understanding of a PD strand among the Omani EFL lecturers (see Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014). In addition, most of these studies were limited to exploring the views of a small number of participants on only one type of existing PD activities let alone the fact that none of these or similar studies have discussed such an understanding in the technical education context.

Based on this, I believe that this study may explore whether such multiple

understandings are present among teachers in the Omani technical college context or not, and if not, then why such a shared understanding was unobtainable. Of course, understanding the literature's conceptualization of PD implies the awareness of how the teachers' PD needs were identified in the literature, which I now turn to discuss.

### **3.10.2. Identifying EFL Teachers' PD Needs**

EFL teachers' PD needs have been discussed and investigated in many studies (e.g., Al-Obaidli, 2009; Beale, 2003; OECD, 2009; Waites, 1999; Al Auffi, 2014). Most of these studies agree that EFL teachers' PD needs evolve over time. There are various types of needs discussed in both the international and the local literature.

Internationally, for instance, Waites (1999) found that "both teachers and trainers/administrators have a lack of imagination and perception of the breadth of what may constitute professional development" (p. 467). In fact, for researchers to widen knowledge of their fields, they need exposure to different contexts and to read a range of studies (OECD, 2009). As an essential foundation, the EFL teachers conveyed their need for sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge in the four language skills of writing, reading, speaking and listening (Al-Obaidli, 2009). The need for resources, practical ideas, and strategies used in the classroom was the most expressed concern among one of the study's participants (Beale, 2003). Teachers also conveyed their need to develop their skills in the fields of computing, curriculum designing, literacy, and teaching mixed ability classes (Beale, 2003; AL-Obaidli, 2009). Developing teaching strategies, particularly for mixed ability classes, is essential to meet the needs of students and to be assured that they receive the best possible teaching (ibid.). Teachers also revealed that they need training in learning material design to provide their students with a variety of useful learning materials (Al-Obaidli, 2009), which will help them to formulate learner-centred activities and to fulfil their learners' needs and requirements. Teachers added "ICT teaching skills" and "student discipline and behaviour" as important skills they needed to develop (OECD, 2009, p, 60). Many studies viewed dealing with special needs students who

have learning disabilities as an issue that needs special attention when developing teachers professionally (Beale, 2003; OECD, 2009; Al-Obaidli, 2009). However, the integration programme applied by many countries currently, even in Oman, may cause frustration for the teachers if they are not prepared professionally to teach students with special learning needs, as it requires more effort, skill, and patience than dealing with other students.

Teachers of adult learners added to the above-mentioned areas the requirement to learn how to teach adult learners, improving leadership and management skills and awareness of the policy of language programs. They also expressed their need for PD in preparing their students for the workplace and in avoiding racism in their classrooms. Thus, they voiced their need for more creative and interactive approaches and techniques for teaching the English language (Beale, 2003). However, that was not the case in the school context, as it was found that school management and administration were the areas that least needed PD (OECD, 2009). Noticeably, teachers showed more interest in the practical field but less interest in research and theories relevant to TESOL (Beale, 2003). Regarding the PD approaches to be used, hands-on activities were the most favourable option, while sharing ideas with other teachers' participants received less interest in Beal's (2003) study; that might be attributed to the teacher nature, as teachers prefer and trust more formal settings instead of informal discussions. In contrast, networking with colleagues received much more attention in the school setting (OECD, 2009). The preferred PD approaches cannot be generalized, as they differ from one setting to another depending on many factors, as teachers' experiences, personalities, or even their culture can influence such decisions as well. These needs are crucial, as I believe they are fundamental for any language teacher at the present time. Thus, these needs should be taken into consideration by any institution's administrators and by the PD providers who look forward to their development.

Another study was carried out by Raza (2010) within the region of Arab Gulf countries, which share with the Sultanate similar HE contextual features, specifically in a higher educational institution in the UAE, which is similar to

the current study's context. Raza's study explores teachers' perceptions, experiences, choices, and suggestions for improving CPD. The findings suggested that the teachers showed an interest in CPD and valued it as a life-long professional progression that can lead to beneficial changes in their profession. The results also revealed preferences towards participating in workshops or activities that provided chances for collaboration and dialogue as well as skills development. Teachers stated that there are areas of concern, such as the need to pursue formal higher education, their students' evaluating them, and the need to provide evidence of their CPD participation, which sometimes put pressure on them, as these points are indicated in their appraisal forms. Thus, according to Raza, the establishment of teacher learning communities, in which mutual understanding can be experienced and better chances for professional development can be found, is preferable. I would consider such a study as highly relevant to mine, as we share almost the same context, which is tertiary level, and we are both investigating EFL teachers' PD; however, my study focuses precisely on the teachers' PD needs, though I believe that teachers in my context would share the same concerns and might have the same PD beliefs, which are worth exploring since the provision of such information would assist in the establishment of a sufficient PD system for the EFL teachers working in the ELC.

In the Omani context, some researchers have investigated the EFL teachers in the contexts of both schools and of higher education. In the Omani higher educational context, Al Afi (2014) recently conducted a study targeting academics teaching at the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs). The focus of the study was examining the academics' participation in the PD programs conducted at their colleges and their views of the current PD for the purpose of improving the quality of the teaching. The study also highlighted the sample's PD needs, the factors to improve PD, and the barriers to effective PD related to the improvement of the teaching quality. The study revealed that the PD need academics rated highest in relation to the quality of teaching was developing 'student-centred' skills like problem-solving skills and critical thinking (see Al Afi, 2014). The study also demonstrated the unsatisfactory level of participation in the PD programmes offered by the HE institutions in

addition to the fact that, as the findings indicated, in the available PD programmes, there is a shortage related to teaching quality enhancement, and a lack of encouragement to participate in these programs (ibid.). Such findings were supported by various studies in Oman, for example, Al-Balushi (2017), Al-Ghatrifi (2016), and Al-Riyami (2016). One of the factors that the above-mentioned studies' findings can be attributed to is the absence of a particular unit or authority that takes care of the PD issues in the higher educational institutions in Oman and the lack of a clear PD policy at the national and institutional level (see Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2009). There is an urgent need for such policies to be given attention due to the importance of PD to guarantee the quality of the teaching (Al-Lamki, 2009). There is also a need to design a realistic and systematic PD plan in the HE institutions. The lack of such a PD plan was attributed to many factors including the lack of academics' participation in planning PD and a disconnection between the PD and the academics' PD needs (Al Aafi, 2014).

Another need that was discussed in the Omani local literature is the need to allocate resources and facilities appropriately and to assess the practicality and productivity of the PD programmes applied (for example, Al-balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Riyami, 2016; Al-Auffi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009). Al-Aufi (2014) believes that such issues need to be taken into account by all the HEI authorities in general to overcome any obstacles that might hinder the academics' development process especially when it comes to enhancing the teaching quality and subsequently providing a more effective learning environment, as it is the main objective for any accredited institution. The significant findings of these studies are closely related to the current study especially those related to the PD barriers or facilitators for academics would incorporate significantly and have implications for both policy and practice in enhancing PD either at the governmental level or the institutional or even the individual levels.

All in all, these needs suggest that I need to shed light on how the literature discusses the current PD provision, especially in the Omani tertiary education context. I will then move to review how the literature presents the teachers'



suggestions to enhance the current provision.

### **3.10.3. Current provision: PD Challenges from Teachers' Perspectives**

Regarding the current PD provision, a number of international and local studies have also focused on the barriers and challenges EFL teachers might face when they seek PD. Language learning, limited resources, mandated curriculum pacing, classroom management issues, and time constraints were among the factors identified as examples of PD barriers (see, for example, Buczynski & Hansen; 2010, Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Riyami, 2016 among others). Various views about the administrators and the top-down policy used at the institutions were also indicated (see Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014, Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Obaidli, 2009). For instance, a study by Al-Obaidli (2009) focused on the professional development needs of female English teachers at Qatari schools; the teachers expressed their concerns about particular aspects. For example, they complained about their increased workloads, which did not give them enough time to seek PD or even practise some of its norms. They also commented on the lack of support and the conflicts they experienced between their roles as professionals and their private lives. Similarly, Day et al. (2006, p. 123) found in a study of teacher effectiveness in England that “teachers’ heavy workload and lack of time and financial constraints were important inhibitors in their pursuit of professional development”.

Other studies revealed institutions’ lack of systematic PD plans and any clear transparent policy, which can be perceived as barriers for practical and satisfactory PD at these institutions (Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009). From a personal perspective, policy makers need to build a transparent relationship between them and their teachers especially regarding their PD so as not to waste their time, effort, and money in irrelevant PD practices that have nothing to do with their teachers’ real life needs. Another option can be to provide teachers with various PD opportunities to choose from according to their requirements and interests. I totally agree with Waites (1999), who believes that teachers need “more liberal professional development offerings from which to choose in order to match their changing needs” (p. 465).

Teachers usually feel less empowered by the decisions made by their institutions regarding the CPD agenda, and they request that alternative means of professional development and that sufficient funding and time be made available for them to pursue their PD needs (Raza, 2010).

Additionally, in some studies, teachers explained that their decreased participation in PD activities was attributed to the conflict between the timings of their activities and their work schedules. Teachers preferred to undertake PD sessions during their working days rather than at the weekend and preferred them to be located either in their workplace or in a venue close to it, instead of travelling longer distances. Thus, their needs were not only centred on the PD activities, but in addition, they needed more support from their workplace to encourage their participation, and from the administrators and policy makers of institutions to ensure that they obtain the best opportunities that are effective to fulfil their needs (Beale, 2003; OECD, 2009). According to White (1998), if the space in which to develop teachers' professional skills and judgments is not provided, their teaching will be reduced to the level of craft, which will not provide a sound basis for quality in English language education (p. 5).

The teachers are also frequently confronted with the dilemma that they do not possess sufficient knowledge of the specialist subject, and there is therefore a knowledge gap between them and their students, who may be more knowledgeable regarding the subject specialism (Campion, 2016; Spack 1988). Omani ESP teachers in the CoT are no exception. These Omani teachers are General English graduates in that their formal TESOL training was mainly concerned with General English (Al-Riyami, 2016). However, they are required to teach ESP to particular specialism students, meaning they have less subject knowledge than their students, despite the fact that they have significant experience in teaching and are familiar with the academic texts and/or the skills involved (Wu & Badger, 2009). AlBadwawi (2011) reports that ESP courses are considered a 'bridge' or 'carrier' to the subject study, which negatively affects the role of the ESP teachers. Furthermore, students have reported confusion in matching what is taught by ESP teachers

with what is requested by subject teachers. Such discrepancies could be overcome by regular collaboration between linguists and subject specialists. Furthermore, language teachers can play a role in assisting students to acquire a specific level of literacy through integrating authentic academic writing tasks in writing courses (Braine, 1988 & Johns, 1988). Hence, this need must be addressed. Al Riyami (2016) also reports several attempts to reform the process followed in teaching English at the CoTs but indicates concern that one of the main obstacles is that faculties are separated by specialization, which hinders cooperation between the English and the discipline faculty and perhaps even within the disciplines. I believe that strategies to mitigate such obstacles have to be a priority to enhance the effect of PD and its reform.

#### **3.10.4. PD enhancement: Innovation in PD**

Many researchers around the world have questioned the effectiveness of CPD in delivering the desired changes. For instance, Olson et al. (2002) highlight that in the US, there are no national data that link CPD participation to changes in both teaching practices and students' achievement (cited in Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). In the same line of argument, Meiers and Ingvarson (2005) argue that there is a lack of research on the links between teachers' PD and improvements in students' learning: "Questions are always being raised regarding the effectiveness of all forms of CPD and with such questions and concerns have come an increased demand for demonstrable results" (Al-Balushi, 2017, p.47) . Funding agencies, policy makers, the general public, and legislators all want to know if PD programmes and initiatives are making a significant difference (Guskey, 1994), and if they are, what evidence there is to show that they are effective.

Thus, promoting innovation in PD was one of the controversial topics that the literature debated as a method of PD enhancement. An interesting innovative approach in the CPD field, for example, was applied in the School of Foreign Languages at the Hacettepe University in Ankara. The application started in 2012 by changing the 'Teacher Training Unit' to 'Continuous Professional and Personal Development Unit' (CPDU) as a reflection of the new CPD approach

(Yılmaz, 2015). CPD was seen as a dynamic process involving teachers rather than merely training sessions. The unit conducted a needs analysis in an attempt to meet the teachers' needs through the offered CPD. However, the main obstacle that hindered the successful implementation of the CPD programme planned by the CPDU was teachers' resistance. This CPDU decided ( Knight 2009, p. 508) that "rather than blame teachers and ask, 'Why do teachers resist?' perhaps those of us who lead change should ask, 'What can we do to makes it easier for teachers.'" Thus, the Core, Mantle, Crust (CMC) model was devised by the CPDU to deal with the problem of teachers' resistance, and it was applied in the school in the 2014-2015 academic year.

Though the model was designed in a top down system requiring all the instructors' participation, it also provided an opportunity for the bottom up process to be used, as the instructors selected the activities based on their development goals and needs. The model consists of three types of activities: the Core activities that are related to the ELT methodology, the Mantle activities that are related to the educational sciences, and the Crust activities, that are related to personal development (Yılmaz, 2015). Due to the importance given to the 'personal development' aspect, as it is considered one of the cornerstones of PD (Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001), the 'Crust' activities were established in the CMC model. It is hoped that it will eventually contribute to the overall success of the institution's PD programme. In addition, this CMC model was found to be beneficial, as it offers flexible and customized PD plans for each instructor to choose from according to his or her needs and goals.

In the Omani context, new PD enhancements have been implemented to promote the professional development field. Studies have been conducted to develop a better understanding of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' beliefs in relation to PD (see, for example, Al-Lamki, 2009). Al-Khayari (2011) also illustrates one of the innovative forms of the PD used most frequently in schools, which is the Teacher Development Group (TDG). He indicates that it offers a good alternative to PD in which teachers gather on a weekly basis to discuss professional issues related to their

experiences, either within the school or outside it. His study investigated the impact of TDG on the EFL schoolteachers' practices and experiences. The members of the TDG perceived these gatherings as a beneficial opportunity to exchange knowledge and share experiences and advice. They found the cooperative experience very helpful and supportive when intending to achieve shared goals. They also found that an atmosphere in which they felt supported and connected with others was of significance. Thus, as Al-Kiaryi states, "Spelling out feelings, worries and frustrations with supportive friends may help teachers relax and in turn impact their teaching in an indirect way" (p. 62). Such a study indicates the current importance of collegiality for more effective PD in the language-teaching context. Exploring the ELC teachers' opinion of developing professionally through collegiality may open new directions for the teacher and the centre as a whole, as they can help and support each other's development in more flexible and affordable ways.

Another example of such new innovative approaches to PD is the Omani English teachers' experience of an online opportunity for CPD. There is a lack of literature on the value of the online PD courses for English teachers, so it was a useful opportunity to fill that gap. Besides, such an opportunity can form a good experience for the teachers' of this study's context, namely, the ELC. The project was delivered in the form of three online CPD modules for a period of nine months and was intended to reach as many English language teachers as possible, especially those in remote areas, to give them the opportunity to develop professionally (Rich et al., 2014). The teachers were divided into groups of 20 supported by e-moderators to help in organizing the online learning experience. On the one hand, the online modules gave teachers a chance to become autonomous learners trying to understand, functioning as a learner without a teacher explaining the modules' content for them. On the other hand, out of such experiences, teachers could develop collaboration skills and value the collaborative interaction experience they had as one of the resources to develop professionally as learners through exchanging knowledge and experiences among each other. This innovative PD experience was successful since, from the teachers' perspectives, it generated meaningful opportunities for English teachers, who were also

largely motivated and enthusiastic about the online learning experience they had. Teachers found it a very fruitful experience, and the Ministry of Education received many requests from teachers who had and those who had not experienced it to be enrolled in such programs at the first opportunity. Yet, such an experience might not be transferable to others in a different context, as there should always be an adjustment of all its elements to fit the intended group. In this experience, as the teachers and e-moderators were from different countries, they found it challenging to bridge the gap between them not only technologically and geographically but also in the teaching and learning culture.

### **3.11. Summary and Research questions**

This chapter started by conceptualising the key terms used in this study and presenting their role in teachers' professional learning and growth. It began by defining the meaning of PD in ELT. It first identified how the meaning and construct of PD were discussed in the literature. The chapter then moved to discuss how the idea of PD and the teacher's role within the process of PD were developed in the literature. The factors that affect teachers' PD were then presented while the following part reviewed the PD approaches, models, and activities with particular focus on the ones that applied to the Omani HE context in general and the technical education context in particular. The final part of this chapter explored in detail the local and international studies related to PD.

In brief, reviewing the preceding studies widened my knowledge of the PD of English language teachers as they demonstrated what had already been discussed in the reviewed literature. In focusing on the EFL teachers' PD needs in the CoTs, I believe this research will contribute to the knowledge we have in this field. The chapter indicated the lack of research in many EFL contexts, including the Omani context, where CPD is still largely built on the premise of knowledge consumption and knowledge transmission. In order to investigate the aspects of such a gap, the research will address the following research questions that guide the design of the study:

**RQ1: What is the ELC staff's understanding of professional development (PD)?**

**RQ2: What are the ELC staff's perceptions of their PD needs?**

**RQ3: What are the ELC staff's perceptions of the current PD provision at the college?**

**RQ4: What are the ELC staff's suggestions for PD enhancement at the CTs?**

It is hoped that answering the research questions may help to understand the textual and contextual factors that assist or hamper the progress of PD. It is also anticipated that such an understanding may guide PD policy makers and teachers to reflect on the preparations required to best sustain and develop students' negotiation of learning to match the demands of academic and work contexts and to motivate students to take seriously the need to enhance their learning. As the researcher, I also hope that answers to these questions will provide high quality data on the importance of PD, which could then be used in designing more effective PD tasks. In general, the issues presented throughout this chapter, the factors, the arguments, and the limitations identified in some of the research studies on CPD underpin the rationale for this study and inform its methodology. The latter is the focus of the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the research design and methodology of the present study. I begin by explaining how the interpretivist paradigm was adopted as the philosophical aspect underpinning this study. This section, thus, discusses the ontological and epistemological aspects. This is followed by a discussion of how and why I adopted a mixed-methods research design to collect data. Specifically, I adopted a case study design for this research, where the case was the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Oman, and the participants within this context were the English language lecturers and administrative staff of the English Language Centre (ELC) in HCT. The design drew on surveys about the English language lecturers' perceptions and experiences with professional development (PD) in the ELC. This was combined with interviews with participants to identify in detail their understanding of PD, aspects of their PD needs, their views with regard to the current PD provision in the ELC, and how they think PD can be enhanced. Thus, in this part, I discuss what a 'case study design' is and why I chose it. I then present this study's aims and research questions. After that, I give a discussion and justification of the choice of the research context with the difficulties I encountered, the phases of data collection, and the applied research methods accompanied by information about the participants in each phase. This also includes a description of the process of constructing and piloting the data collection instruments followed by an examination of the quality (i.e., validity, reliability, and trustworthiness) of the gathered data. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations and the expected limitations of the study.

### 4.2. Research framework/Paradigm

A research paradigm is "the net that contains their, as researchers, epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). Thus, it is concerned with 1) the nature of reality (ontology), i.e., When is something real? (Creswell, 2007), What is the nature of reality? and What can be known about it? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); 2) the nature of



knowledge (epistemology), i.e., what we know and how we know it (Crotty, 1998), to inform the relationship between the known and the knower (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); and 3) the approaches employed to explore this reality (methodology). Bryman (2016), among others, believes that a research paradigm functions as the umbrella for practising research, as it guides the design of the different procedures to be conducted while carrying out research. Such guidance is essential in determining all the research stages starting with its underlying philosophical stance, through the choice of tools, participants, and methods, and then to the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It also helps the researcher to decide on the suitable research design that best addresses the aims of the study (Scotland, 2012) and helps researchers define the sequence, progression, and development of the research project (Crotty, 1998).

The distinctions between the different paradigms are mainly represented in the varying assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology), and knowledge (epistemology). These differences are then expressed through the specific choices of methodology and of data collection methods (Crotty, 1998). Several researchers, including Weber (2004), Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Creswell (2013) argue that though there are some differences between the paradigms, such dissimilarities have little effect on how well researchers handle or conduct their research, and do not mean that there is a total dissimilarity between these paradigms. Alternatively, as they indicated, these approaches may still overlap in some themes and, indeed, may overlap more at the methodological and methods level than at the ontological level. Thus, it is essential for the researchers to understand the meaning and the assumptions of the different research paradigms in order to determine an appropriate methodological approach that harmonizes with the researcher's study objectives or questions (Bryman, 2016). Thus, adopting the appropriate research paradigm is crucial for a successful research study (ibid.).

Adopting an appropriate paradigm, that is, understanding the meaning and types of research paradigms and their assumptions, is essential, and so, to understand the phenomenon of the ELC's staff experience of PD in HCT, in

the present study, I chose to employ the interpretivist paradigm as the underlying research paradigm. As an interpretive researcher, I had the aim "of exploring the perspectives and shared meanings of people and to develop insights into (observed) situations" (Wellington, 2003, p.16). Thus, I worked as an observer who aims to construct a human reality (ibid.), as both the observational skills and the ability to extract the correct information are important for interpretive researchers (Bhattacharjee, 2012). At first, I, as the researcher, had preconceptions that the study allows for the co-existence of the interpretive paradigm and the critical paradigm. However, after discussing this philosophical issue with other researchers and supervisors, I understood that this research investigation is a purely interpretive research enterprise, but it has an embedded critical element.

There were a number of features that made this project interpretivist. For example, my research assumptions were consistent and compatible with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of interpretivism. Ontologically, on the one hand, I aimed to explore the subjective reality and staff's multiple perceptions of professional development practices in the English Language Centre at the Higher College of Technology. Regarding reality, in the current study, it is subjective, as it is not out there to be captured or studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9), as positivists believe. Indeed, it is not merely objective and cannot be captured or separated from the participants' understandings. My role as the researcher is to interpret this reality of PD practices in ELCs by conducting this research study. Interpretivists view reality in social sciences as "subjective" and "multiple" because it varies from one person to another (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 2009; Scotland, 2012). Researchers argue that reality is not objective and does not exist independently in the world but that people construct it through their interaction with the aspects of the surrounding world (Thomas, 2013).

On the other hand, the focus in this study (as a piece of interpretive research) was on the individual and on their experience of PD, bearing in mind that their experience is shaped by the context (Bryman, 2016; Pring, 2005; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Hammersley (2012, p. 22) says that "interpretivists

cannot understand why people do what they do, or why particular institutions exist and operate in characteristic ways, without grasping how those involved interpret and make sense of their world". This process is, of course, in contrast to the positivist view of reality as an object that exists independently and which can be investigated through observation (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 2009; Scotland, 2012). Thus, in this study, there is neither an object out there to be captured nor any realities which are observable, but instead, there are social phenomena and relationships that need deeper investigation so they can be understood and interpreted.

Epistemologically, as the researcher, I did not seek to discover "absolute knowledge about an objective reality" (Scotland, 2012, p. 10). Such knowledge is usually grasped through studying a phenomenon that exists independently in the world without interacting with it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 2009; Creswell, 2011), which was not the case for this study. I was not deductively looking to approve or reject a hypothesis or attempting to find causal relationships. Such roles are about objectivism, as positivists claim (Ormston et al., 2014). Instead, my aim was to have a minimum effect on the investigated phenomenon. In line with the designated interpretivist nature of the study, it seemed appropriate to adopt a social constructivist epistemology. The participants of this study had shaped their views of PD practices and of the status and importance of PD in ELC through their interaction with each other, their surrounding environment, their experience of PD, and their educational and social lives (Ormston et al., 2014). According to Creswell (2013), knowledge is constructed within a social context when participants construct their views of a certain phenomenon by personally interacting with their own environment and with each other. For interpretivists, the epistemological stance is revealed in the belief that humans gain knowledge of real world phenomena through understanding their different social patterns (Walsham, 2006). Knowledge here is perceived as a human product, one that is culturally and socially constructed (Prawat & Floden, 1994). This understanding is achieved when people participate in their social world. Therefore, their knowledge is personal and leads to constructive learning through their consciousness of the subjective meanings (Cohen et al., 2007).

Thomas (2013) explains that interpretivists' main interest is to use their knowledge and experience, through participating in the research situation, to understand how people form ideas about their interactions with each other and with their surroundings to establish their world. Therefore, I have used my knowledge and experience as a researcher and a teacher of the English language to interpret what can be known about the PD process in the context of Omani technological education. It is about a 'sense-making' process rather than a hypothesis-testing process. Accordingly, and through the use of such a social constructivist epistemology, meanings can be seen as multiple and varied, whereby I, as the researcher, can then seek the complexity of the various participants' views rather than simply narrowing meanings into a few ideas or categories (Creswell, 2013).

Methodologically, I adopted the interpretivist paradigm, as I did not aim to integrate diverse methodologies that depend mainly on evidence and quantity and which lead to the use of quantitative methods, such as control trials and questionnaires, as positivists do. Though positivists argue that applying such a method and using such techniques can demonstrate the idea that results should be generalizable from the investigation of a representative sample to the whole population (Cohen *et al.* 2011), yet my questionnaires did not aim for the generalisation of results. Generalizability of the interpretations or findings to all participants cannot be done, as some realities differ among different people (Rolfe, 2006). Although interpretive research tends to rely heavily on qualitative data, quantitative data may add more precision and offer a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Bhattacharjee (2012) argues that interpretive research should attempt to gather both quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the phenomenon of interest. The combined use of both sets of data, often called a mixed-methods design, may lead to unique insights and is highly valued in the scientific community (*ibid.*).

Within the scope of this stage of my study, it was better to conduct the questionnaire as a piece of quantitative research in which I attempted to answer the research questions that I had established. I used the questionnaire approach in this study, as it is regarded as an appropriate

method by which a researcher can survey 'abstract notions' (in this study, teachers' perceptions of PD and their views with regard to their PD needs and experiences), which cannot be observed directly (Wagner, 2010). This meant that, as a researcher, I had the chance to operationalize such abstract notions and measure them to gain information regarding the participants' awareness, knowledge, perceptions, attitude, etc. (ibid.).

Besides that, the use of questionnaires made it possible to identify the research areas that required the application of a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon at hand since the use of surveys was insufficient to provide such an understanding (Bryman, 2016). Hence, my next step was applying interviewing methods and working within the interpretive paradigm; my aim was to understand the participants' multiple interpretations and constructions of knowledge. In comparison with questionnaires, interviews are more powerful in obtaining narrative data and would allow me as a researcher to investigate people's insights in greater depth (Kvale, 1996; 2003). They would also enable the research participants to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p.96)

All in all, to make my position clear, I decided to follow Robson (2002) and Ho (2006), who argue that although interviewing is a powerful instrument for obtaining insights into the interviewees' perceptions, it can go hand in hand with other methods, "providing in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs" (Ho, 2006 p. 11). Consequently, though it depends on the research questions, I would argue that employing more than one data collection tool can help in gaining richer data as well as validating the research findings.

Finally, I considered employing the interpretivist rather than the critical or pragmatist paradigm though the latter is more often associated with mixed-methods studies. In fact, although the critical and pragmatist paradigms are legitimate approaches, they still would not have been suitable to fulfil the aims of this study either epistemologically or ontologically. The essence of a pragmatist or critical ontology is action and change, which makes it

appropriate as “a basis for research approaches intervening into the world and not merely observing the world” (Guldkuhl, 2012, p.136). For the critical approach, although it might seem to be another adequate choice besides interpretivism, it could not fulfil the major aims of the study. Critical theory seeks to uncover the hidden agendas and power relations that perpetuate inequality in society and that need to be revealed and understood to bring about social justice (Habermas, 1988). Reflecting on these two theories, and before embarking on this study, I made sure that the focus of my study was not viewed as a social justice issue, but as a socially constructed educational phenomenon that would benefit from the insights of an interpretive enquiry to better understand how context shapes outcomes. However, like Al-Hinai’s (2018) study, a critical element concerning the raising of awareness was implemented in this study. During the interviews, critical issues were raised to elicit opinions on them. For instance, possible negative outcomes regarding the neglect of the teachers’ voice and their desire to participate in their PD planning were raised to achieve the element of justice. This, therefore, makes this study an interpretive study with a critical element.

To understand the participants' perspectives of the PD practices in the CoT, this study applied a case study methodology. Examples of interpretative methodologies include case studies, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ethnography (Creswell, 2009; Cohen et al., 2011). In the following section (4.3), I will introduce the case study approach, discuss its main features and limitations, and explain how this stance was adopted as the underlying research methodology in the current study.

### **4.3. Methodology: case study**

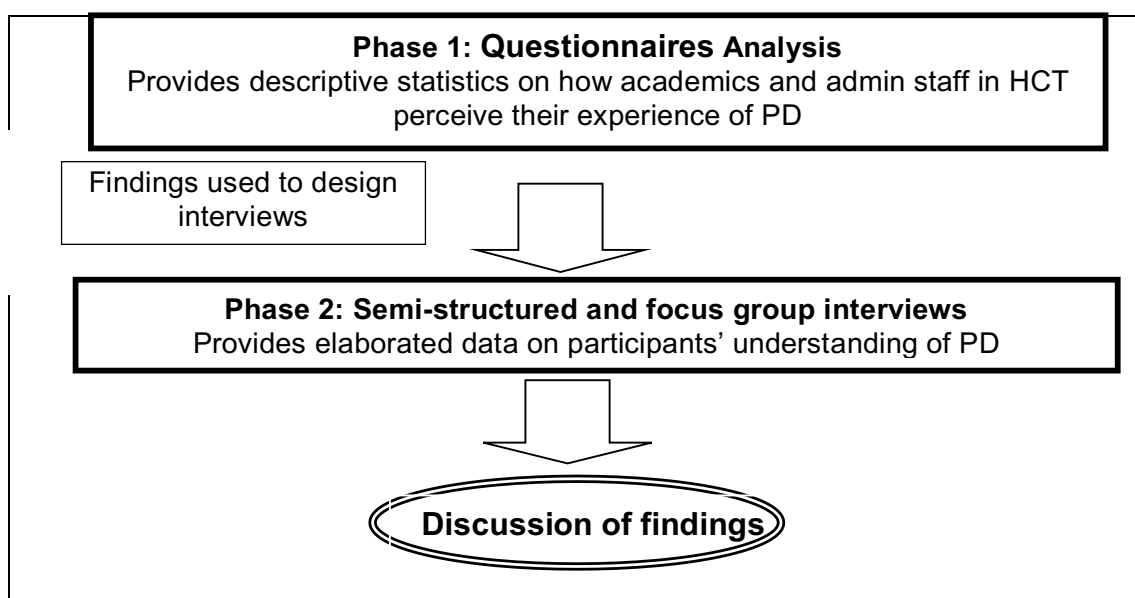
I adopted a case study approach to conduct this research study. Generally, case studies are known as a form of methodology for conducting social research (Yin, 2014) within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm (Stake, 1995). They look at individuals’ or a group of participants’ perceptions of a “contemporary” (Yin, 2014, p. 13) phenomenon within a tangible context (Yin, 2014; Scotland, 2012). According to Creswell (2013), the case study methodology explores a real life or multiple system(s), case(s), or

organisation(s) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection comprising multiple sources of information. It aims to understand what is distinctive about a case, whether it be a person, a classroom, an institution, a programme, a policy, a process, or a system (Simons, 2009). A variety of data may be collected to help deepen understanding of the case, and in qualitative studies, this commonly includes interview, observation, and document analysis (Scotland, 2012). For data analysis, no exact method of data analysis is associated with the case study methodology, as the researcher is guided by the focus of the case study and the research question(s) (Petty, Thomson, & Stewa, 2012).

This study is a single case study research, as it explores the phenomenon of PD practices in a single site that is representative of several sites. Yin (2014) differentiates between two types of case study designs, namely, single-case designs and multiple-case designs. In the single-case design, a phenomenon is investigated in a typical representative organisation among many different organizations to capture the circumstances and conditions surrounding the investigated phenomenon. A multiple-case study is frequently associated with several experiments or case studies to replicate the results across these multiple cases. To this end, I selected the English Language Centre in Higher College of Technology as a typical context. It is also categorised as a single-case design as, though I did not aim to replicate similar results or conduct several case studies and then compare their results with each other (Yin, 2014), I aimed to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of PD practices in a representative case from the context of CoTs (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

Such case study researches usually involve collecting quantitative and qualitative data that are relatively complete on their own, and then combining them to form the essential components of one research programme (Yin, 2014). Similarly, the current study's methodology is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Creswell (2013) believes that the application of such a research design is preferable when the researcher is trying to

understand the problem under investigation from the participants' perspective. In my research, I followed an exploratory sequential research design, as I gathered data through questionnaires and then conducted semi-structured and focus group interviews to help explain and elaborate on the results reached through analysing the questionnaire data (see Figure 4.1.). The relationship between the data sets in my case study was one not of corroboration nor of compensation but of exploration. Such a sequence would offer a deeper scope and understanding of the phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2003; Mertens, 2010).



**Figure 4.1: An illustration of the idea of a multi-method design in this study**

Such a design did not incorporate mixing data collection and analysis throughout the different stages of compiling data (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003); instead, the data were used together in the data interpretation stage.

In addition, this research study combined components of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the broad purposes of increasing the depth and breadth of understanding (Johnson, 2007, p. 123). Using quantitative research methods provides a measurement orientation that allows the involvement of many participants and the collection of closed-ended information such as that originating from performance, behaviour, or attitude instruments (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research methods, on the other hand, produce more detailed information about the case under study by



gathering open-ended information using methods such as interviews, for example (ibid.). Combining both tools in one research design should result in a more powerful design and subsequently more evidence, results, or findings (Connelly, 2009). In addition, as Creswell and Garrett (2008) note, it will probably lead to a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Within this research study, questionnaires were used as an 'information-gathering' tool. Although these data collection methods provided both quantitative and qualitative data, yet with the emphasis on the latter, they still belong to the interpretivist paradigmatic stance. Questionnaires can also provide information regarding people's understandings/views even though they might be looking at the number of people expressing the same views, so they provide quantitative data but are still relevant to an interpretivist approach. This means that it is not necessary to associate quantitative data with the positivist approach, as it is also used in interpretive studies. This enabled me to talk about the results descriptively. Although the data were looking at the number of people expressing the same views, yet they still provided me with information regarding people's understandings/views of PD and that makes them more interpretive. Then, the qualitative methods of semi-structured and focus group interviews were applied to further investigate the participants' views and understanding of their PD practices, how they interacted/reacted to the provided opportunities, and their PD expectations and needs. Such issues can be better and more easily studied when qualitative methods follow the quantitative part with the emphasis on the former over the latter.

Although there are some disadvantages to utilizing a case study research, yet the appropriateness of the case study methodology in answering this study's research questions outweighs any limitations associated with this type of research approach. When conducting case studies, the researcher is recommended to take six steps (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Since step one - defining the research questions - has already been completed, the following sections will focus upon selecting the cases and determining the data-

gathering techniques (step two), preparing to collect the data (step three), and collecting the data (step four). Step five involves evaluating and analysing the data, and formulating and writing the report is the final step. Applying the case study methodology in the current study involved the use of three methods to collect data, namely, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. I shall describe the application of these three methods below (see Section 4.5.). Nevertheless, considering the importance of reminding the reader of this research's aims and questions, these will be outlined before the sampling and data collection and analysis procedures are described. The following section (Section 4.4.) discusses in detail the research aims and questions.

#### **4.4. Research aims and questions**

The nature of this study's aims also determined its research design. Niglas (2009) explains that the choice of the research design depends mainly on the complexity and nature of the research question. The main focus of this study is to identify and explore the English Language Centre staff's professional development (PD) at one of the tertiary education level wings in Oman, more specifically at the Colleges of Technology. One of the current study purposes is to examine the available PD policy and practice provided for the EFL teachers teaching at the Colleges of Technology in Oman and discover how teachers and administrators view the PD on offer.

This study aims mainly to gain a deep understanding of EFL teachers' and administrative staff's perceptions of their PD needs at Colleges of Technology in Oman through exploring how the EFL staff at the Colleges of Technology view PD and what their views are of their PD needs and identifying what sort of content, skills, knowledge, practices, and models of PD best fit their duty requirements and work effectively for them and their classrooms in this context. This research also aims to investigate the participants' PD experience in the Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman focusing on three main areas: lecturers' needs, current provision, and suggestions for improvements. Thus, it aims to answer four main questions:

1. What are the ELC staff's perceptions of professional development (PD)?
2. What are the ELC staff's perceptions of their PD needs?
3. What are the ELC staff's views of the current PD provision in the CoTs in general and the ELC in particular?
4. In the opinion of the ELC staff, how could PD provision in the ELC and CoTs be improved?

Finding answers to these questions makes the purpose of this study exploratory, as it explores a phenomenon through the views of participants and interprets their views. I aimed to collect mainly descriptive data from a larger population through questionnaires and then use that to design the questions for an in-depth exploration through interviews. I analysed the surveys for numbers and percentages, using descriptive statistics. I did not aim to look at/for causal relationships or evidence to devise hypotheses. Rather, I aimed to explore and identify the EFL teachers' PD expectations and needs based on their current roles, which are mainly improving the CoT students' proficiency in the English language and preparing them for their English-medium courses in their subject areas. Another of this study's objectives is to identify what sort of content, skills, knowledge, practices, and models of PD best fit the teachers' duty requirements and work effectively for them, their classrooms, and the context in which they are teaching. Investigating teachers' perceptions with regard to the PD programs will help in identifying sources to enhance them and encourage teachers' participation or commitment to such programs.

#### **4.5. Data collection methods: sequential mixed-methods**

This research study "allows for different methods to coexist" (Alexander, 2006, p.212), though it is aligned with the interpretive qualitative paradigm in which the qualitative tradition dominates the data collection and analysis process. This two-phased multi-methods design utilised a variety of sources and methods of data collection and analysis involving a sequence of quantitative (questionnaire) then qualitative (interview) methods. This sequence of questionnaires and follow-up interviews is considered by some

researchers to be one of the most responsive methods for studying the target needs of any particular group of workers (for example, Lund, 2012; Hutchinson & Waters, 1996; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In the first phase, a questionnaire, which yields predominantly quantitative data, was used to examine EFL teachers' views on PD at the Colleges of Technology. The questionnaire was designed to obtain approximate answers to the four main research questions: (1) What do teachers think PD is/understand by PD? (2) What is the current provision of PD in the CoTs in Oman? (3) What are the expectations and needs of the teachers with regard to PD? and (4) What factors can enhance PD practices and encourage staff participation? The questionnaire data were analysed and then used to design the questions of the semi-structured and focus-groups interviews. Both types of interviews were chosen to enable me to focus on the points that further address these research questions and to further explore what the ELC staff think of the way in which PD should be offered. This was scheduled to answer the fourth research question regarding how to improve the PD provision in the Omani CoTs.

Deciding on the methods to be utilised in the two phases of my research study was mainly guided by various considerations, such as the nature of the problem being investigated, the research aims and research questions, the context of the study, the timing of the study in relation to the academic calendar of the ELC, and the call for an expanded use of qualitative techniques in technical education (see, for example, Lund, 2012; Al-Husseini, 2014; Al-Ryiami, 2016). Though the individual and focus group discussions with the participants might have given them the time to consider the issues to be discussed and to express this thinking elaborately, yet there was a need to adopt a survey approach before conducting the interviews. Such a need is attributed to the necessity to obtain multiple practitioners' opinions before engaging representative groups of them in interactive discussions with the researcher to get to their ideas, perceptions, and thoughts about practices of PD in the CoTs. Brown (2014) stresses the importance of using mixed-methods research; he states that "researchers who can do both quantitative and qualitative research will have considerable advantages over those

researchers who can do only one or the other” (p. 5). In such studies, it is vital to frame data collection, analysis, and reporting within the social and historical contexts of the participants (Shannon-Baker, 2015). This was applicable to this research study, as the experience of my participants and their voice guided the entire research process. Niglas (2009) believes that combining qualitative and quantitative methods can generate benefits for the practice of educational research, as these methods complement each other in a way that facilitates carrying out the investigation as will be seen later in the findings chapter (Chapter 5). Thus, for data collection purposes, the methods of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviewing were applied.

The quantitative results helped guide the content of the questions to be asked in the interviews, which represent the qualitative investigation. In addition, the questionnaire process helped to identify the participants for the interviews. The combination of these methods yielded data that would address the interests of a wide range of data users in the field. Mixing quantitative and qualitative methods allowed me not to limit myself to certain methods, but rather to apply the methods that would be able to answer the study’s research questions and at the same time ensure that these methods complemented each other. Questionnaires and interviews are considered the most common kinds of instruments in the areas of social inquiry (Borg, 2006a; Blaxter, Tight, & Hughes, 2001; Nunan, 1992) and in the evaluation of PD in particular (Craft, 2000). Each of these research methods has advantages and limitations and these will be discussed in the next sections.

#### **4.5.1. Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are generally a quantitative method used for collecting numerical data. Fink (2006) defines them as "information collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behaviour" (p. 1). The questionnaire is the data collection method most frequently used in studies related to PD in the Omani context, for example, Al-Balushi (2017), Al-Ghatrifi (2016), Al-Aufi (2014), and Al-Lamki (2009) among others. In this research, the questionnaire

was used to collect data to enhance the study's feasibility within the constraints of the time and resources available and due to its suitability to provide the information sought with minimum expense (Robson, 2002).

Questionnaires, as a data collection method, have both advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, questionnaires are considered efficient in terms of effort, cost, and time, as they allow a large amount of data to be collected from a large number of people within a relatively short period of time in comparison with other instruments (Cohen et al., 2011; Dörnyei, 2003; Fowler, 2001). Furthermore, the researcher does not have to travel to contact the respondents but can send and receive the questionnaires through electronic mail. In addition, using questionnaires helps reduce or eliminate the tension of direct interaction between the researcher and the applicants; this is beneficial, as such contact may affect the generated data (Burns, 2000). This was applicable to this study, as using questionnaires to collect data from the teachers without my presence or my direct interaction with them helped them complete the survey in a relaxed atmosphere with a feeling of security, as their answers are confidential. Al-Husseini (2005) found that interviewees in the Developing countries are more reluctant to answer questions criticising government plans or about ministry policy unless they are assured a certain level of confidentiality. Therefore, as neither the colleges' teachers nor I can make any change to this existing situation, I believe I was right to guarantee my participants such a level of confidentiality.

Nevertheless, questionnaires have certain drawbacks. Some of these are linked to the procedures applied to administer the questionnaire. For example, long questionnaires may make respondents tired or bored, which may have a negative impact on the quality of their answers (Dörnyei, 2003). In the current study, to avoid this effect, I designed the questionnaire to be a reasonable length and to take not more than fifteen minutes to complete. I kept the layout of the questionnaire simple by dividing it into sections rather than having a whole set of questions in sequence, using a simple Likert scale in all sections. Respondents were asked to read the statement, read the responses, make a

mark, and move on to the next question (Dillman et al., 1999 as cited in Cohen et al., 2011).

Other limitations are associated with the type of data questionnaires produce. For instance, questionnaires are inclined to simplicity and straightforwardness for the purpose of clarity to the respondents, since the respondents may have difficulty in understanding the vocabulary used in the questionnaire, and the researcher might not necessarily be available to clarify or explain (Bryman, 2012). Ease of completion might be one of the solutions to overcome such an expected problem, yet that could unfortunately limit the depth of the inquiry (Dömyei, 2003). Consequently, in the case of the current study, special attention was paid to the wording of the questionnaire statements. They were reviewed several times, and the questionnaire itself was shown to a number of administrative and academic staff from similar contexts, who were familiar with the teachers in the context of the study, to check that the language and vocabulary of the questionnaire would not pose any difficulty or raise sensitive issues for the teachers. Moreover, the teachers' overall understanding of the questionnaire was checked throughout the pilot stage, as will be shown in Section 4.7. Additionally, open-ended questions were included in the last part of some of the questionnaire's sections in which academics were asked if there were any other PD needs they wanted to add. They were also asked to what extent the available PD provision meets their needs. They provided useful information for exploration and explanation (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2013).

#### **4.5.1.1. Design of the questionnaire**

The development of the questionnaire followed the suggestions given by Devellis (1991) regarding the general collection of item pools and their classification under categories, expert review of items, and selection of the final items. Items in the questionnaire were generated from various sources through reviewing the relevant literature. Thus, this study benefited from the literature discussed in Chapter 3, especially studies related to the EFL teachers' PD (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Gattrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014, Khan, 2010, Al-Lamki, 2009)

The questionnaire consisted of 83 items rated across three-point scale and five-point likert scales using different values depending on the needed piece of information. The questionnaire items were organised into four main areas: perceptions of PD, PD needs, current PD provision, and factors to improve PD. Thus, the questionnaire was used to obtain information that covered some aspects related to the four research questions (e.g., understanding of PD, nature of the current PD provision and the support provided, PD needs, and PD enhancement). However, more detailed accounts of respondents' perceptions of the four areas under investigation were gained through the interviews rather than the questionnaire.

In this study, a self-constructed closed-ended questionnaire was employed (see Appendix 1). The quantitative data gained from the statistical analysis of the questionnaire served as a starting point to show the general tendencies of the participants regarding PD. It also provided some background information about the study population and indicated who might be willing to participate in the second phase of the study. Most importantly, it helped in the formulation of the interview questions used in the second phase. In this proposed study, the questionnaire was employed to collect data from the academic staff. It was an appropriate research instrument in a context like the current study, which has a relatively large number of teacher participants ( $n= 81$ ).

The final version of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) included an introduction giving the academics a brief summary of the overall purpose of the study and the questionnaire. There was also a reminder for them of their right to withdraw from the study and assurance about the confidentiality of the study. That was followed by eliciting the academics' demographical information such as gender, experience, qualifications, etc. Then, the questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part elicited the EFL lecturers' perceptions and knowledge of professional development. The second part consisted of the items related to the exploration of the EFL academics' specific PD needs and their preferred PD practices. The third section of the questionnaire explored the academics' views and impressions of the PD policy and the providers of PD activities. The last part investigated the staff's opinions of the factors that



can enhance PD and encourage academics to participate more in PD events. In some of these sections, participants were encouraged to add additional comments, if they wanted to. At the end, they were also asked to provide their contact details if they were interested or would be willing to participate in the interviewing stage.

The questionnaire was written in English, as the teachers' language level was expected to be adequate, so they could state their opinions in English. In addition, writing the questionnaire in English helped save the time that would otherwise have been needed for translation. To avoid any misinterpretations or mistranslations, a researcher should avoid translating the questionnaire statements, as "it is difficult to get a translation that reflects the exact meaning of the text in cross-language research" (Esposito, 2001, p. 573). However, I believe that I needed to make sure that the participants felt comfortable using English. Accordingly, the piloting stage of the questionnaire provided a good opportunity to confirm this.

Regarding the type of response used in the questionnaire, there are usually six categories of questions, which represent the basic formats: fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, comment-on, list, Likert scales, and rank (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). In this study, the comment-on and Likert scale formats were used in the design of the questionnaire, as they best helped in obtaining the information needed to answer the research questions. Therefore, participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with certain statements presented and to rate each item on a 3-point Likert scale. I found that the 3-point Likert scale was easier for the participants and sufficiently precise to fulfil this study's aims especially as it was demonstrated that "both reliability and validity are independent of the number of scale points used for Likert-type items" (Jacoby & Mattel, 1971, p. 498). Five-point Likert scales are more commonly used, but they take longer to complete, and it has been queried if they are the best default choice for researchers (Dolnicar et al., 2011). However, five-likert scale was used for two of the questionnaire's sections that is to say 'PD practices' and 'PD enhancement' (Appendix1). A five-point scale was used as it shows strength of effectiveness of the practices

and the importance of the enhancements on the other latter section. The Likert scale was chosen because it is generally beneficial and practical to get participants' views and opinions or judgments especially about almost any aspect of language learning (Brown and Rodgers, 2002). The comment-on format, which was attached to the Likert scale questionnaire in the form of open-ended questions, was a good chance for the teachers to add their comments on any of the points listed in the questionnaire, which provided me with an additional source of information.

I subsequently reviewed the items and discussed them with my supervisors. The draft questionnaire then underwent a content validity check through a process of validation conducted by a Head of the ELC in one of the other seven technical colleges, who was familiar with the teachers, and by two experienced university English language instructors. It was also reviewed by a PhD student from the same context and a trainee teacher who was experienced in the field of staff professional development. During this process, they reviewed and revised the questionnaire items, debated item-category placement, refined some items, and eliminated others (see Section 4.8. for further details about rigour in research).

#### **4.5.2. Interviews**

Two types of interviews were conducted with the teachers: focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. Craft (2000) states that like questionnaires, interviews can be used to research PD. My aim in conducting interviews was to elicit the participants' thoughts and motives with regard to their experiences of PD in the context of CoTs. Punch (2014) writes that researchers may employ interviews as a tool to follow up individual participants' ideas and to dig deeply into them by investigating feelings and motives. I interviewed the participants first in the form of focus groups to follow up the online questionnaire data, and second in the form of individual semi-structured interviews to further explore their feelings and attitudes towards the current PD provision and their suggestions for enhancement.

#### 4.5.2.1. Focus group

I conducted three focus group interviews to follow up further issues regarding the participants' beliefs and experiences of PD and to fulfil this study's intentions and purposes. The initial lists of the focus group interview questions were based on the literature review and were related to the study's research questions and the context described in the second chapter of this study. They were also based on the queries that emerged out of the questionnaire's results. I had slightly modified the questions after the piloting stage (see Section 4.7. for further details about interviews administration).

Focus groups are "group discussions organized to explore a specific set of issues such as people's views and experiences" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 103). In this method, the group is 'focused' in the sense that it engages the participants in a kind of collective activity in which "participants present their own views and experiences, but they also hear from other people ... they listen, reflect on what is said, and in the light of this consider their own standpoint further" (Ritchie, 2014, p.212). In the current study, the main aim of the focus groups was to encourage debate about a specific set of issues that had arisen from the previously distributed questionnaire, the literature, and the study's research questions. The focus group is a data collection instrument where the researcher carefully plans an interview with a small group of participants who share a similar context. It usually aims to gather attitudes, feelings, or ideas on a particular topic through the interaction between the group members in a friendly, atmosphere (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011). Focus groups differ from individual interviews in the sense that "the participants rather than the researcher's agenda predominate" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 376), as the data generated are mostly a result of the interaction between the group's members with as little interference from the researcher as possible. Thus, participants in focus groups either support each other's views about the discussed topic or will often argue with each other and challenge each other's views, which enriches the discussed ideas and topic generally (Howell, 2013).

Focus group discussions feature several advantages and disadvantages that

could contribute to or hinder the depth and richness of the data collected. For instance, focus group interviews are flexible, as the researcher can explore unanticipated, interesting issues that arise throughout the discussion (Cohen et al., 2011). It can be considered as a cost and time effective data collection method, as the researcher can gather efficient data from several people at the same time (Cohen et al., 2011). Besides, focus groups present a more real-life natural atmosphere than that of individual interviews due to the influence of the participants. The researcher's management of the focus group is key for that to happen. Such focus groups allow their participants to be exposed to others' ideas or responses, which paves the way for further comments (Patton, 2002), and in some cases, they lead to changes in the participants' original thoughts or responses (Krueger, 1994). This means that the data generated by these groups are considered to have an enhanced quality since their participants are always checking and balancing each other's ideas and points (Patton, 2002). On the other hand, focus group interviews may entail some limitations as well. A number of researchers have pointed out potential problems with focus group interviews. Patton (2002) explains how the limited time for each group member to present his or her views can be an issue. Also, contributions may be unbalanced for reasons of shyness (Krueger, 1994), or the belief that one's view is a minority opinion, which could limit involvement (Patton, 2002). Despite these limitations, its advantages and strengths make it one of the most appropriate ways to gather data on people's perceptions within a social context.

#### **4.5.2.2. Semi-structured interviews**

The individual interview is the most prominent research method in qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007; Kvale, 2009; Punch & Oancea, 2014). It generally takes the form of purposeful conversations that involve a researcher asking a set of questions to get answers from the study's participants (Robson, 2002) regarding their perspectives or experiences of the world, for example. Kvale (2009 p. 1) states that the aim of interviews is usually to "understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of people experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations". Such

uses of the semi-structured interviews serve the purpose of and are in line with my research aims and objectives to understand staff's perceptions of PD and their experiences and expectations of staff PD in the ELC. Types of individual interviews differ in "the scopes and degrees of structure in the interview and the extent of the depth the interview tries to go" (Punch, 2014). Thus, a researcher can choose between three types of interviews: (1) structured, which have predetermined questions with fixed wording, usually in a pre-set order; (2) semi-structured, which also have predetermined questions, but their order is changed depending on the researcher's view of what appears to be prioritized most; and (3) unstructured, where the interviewer has a general subject to investigate, and allows the conversation progress within this general area (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011). Regarding studies on PD, interviews are sometimes used in combination with questionnaires (see, for example, Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Auffi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009).

In this study, I implemented interviews as a main research method for different reasons. For example, since there was interaction between me the researcher and the interviewees, there was a chance for knowledge to be socially constructed rather than transmitted (Kvale, 2007), and this is in line with the epistemological stance that informs this study. In addition, interviews allowed me, as the researcher, to explore the participants' views and perceptions and how they constructed their reality and made meaning of their experiences (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The choice of semi-structured interviews also helped in exploring the issues under investigation while allowing for more elaboration of unexpected or new phenomena rather than being restricted to the stated questions (Opdenakker, 2006). Additionally, semi-structured interviews stimulated the respondents to express their views easily and confidently, which not only resulted in richer data (Kvale, 2007) but also gave the participants a voice to make their viewpoints heard, which could eventually empower them (Wellington, 2015). This also led to a holistic understanding of the teachers' views, behaviours, and emotions with regard to their PD experiences. Most importantly, the semi-structured interviews revealed not only the participants' common views but also the views that were

not shared by the majority for different reasons, for example, sensitivity to the higher authorities' reaction.

Two groups of participants were interviewed: the English Language Centre's EFL teachers and its administrators. Teachers were interviewed to seek explanations, elaborations, and justifications of the questionnaires' findings regarding their perceptions of the four areas of this study (see Section 4.4) and to gain more in-depth information about their PD experiences in general. A number of the administrative staff were also involved in this study, for example, the ELC Head of Centre and his two assistants, the Head of Section for Curriculum and Teaching Methods and the Head of Section for English Language Programmes. They were also asked about their views of PD, the Centre's PD needs, the PD program or system currently in place, and what needed to be improved with regard to PD. The initial lists of interview questions were based on the literature review related to the study's research questions and the context described in Chapter 2 of this study. They were also based on the queries that emerged out of the questionnaire's results. I had slightly modified the questions after the piloting stage (see Section 4.7. for further details about administration of the interviews).

#### **4.5.2.3. Design of the interview schedules**

Interviews were conducted with the participants to give them an opportunity to clarify further some issues that had arisen from the questionnaires and to talk more freely about their PD beliefs and experiences. Creating an interview schedule (see Appendix 2 for focus group schedule and Appendix 3 for individual interviews schedule) was the first step in both the focus group and semi-structured interviews process (Wellington, 2000; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The schedule would serve as a guide for me, the interviewer, to ask and modify my listed questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It enabled me to think about "difficulties that might be encountered and how I could overcome them" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 59). The design was based on Robson's recommendation that the interview schedule should include an introductory comment about the topic of the interview, a list of key questions, a set of associated prompts and probes, and closing comments (Robson, 2002).

Thus, I ordered the topics and sub-topics I expected would be raised in the interview in this sequence (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Therefore, I developed my interview schedules with introductory comments followed by a number of key questions which could help me to answer my sub research questions; each question had its follow up prompts and probes. For example, the interviews included a general question for teachers to describe their experience with the current PD system applied in the HCT's ELC. This helped in breaking the ice and encouraged the participants to elaborate on their views. The key questions were organized according to the themes that would be discussed in the interview. The aim, as Wellington (2006) suggests, was "to start with one single, key question to act as a trigger for the rest of the interview" (p. 75). Another aim for these key questions was to help me remember the themes and use them spontaneously with no need to refer back to the schedule itself explicitly (Newton, 2010). The interview schedule was used as a guide for the questioning order, yet there was room for flexibility in asking the questions. Probes and prompts were used to facilitate the flow of the conversations and to get as much information as possible from the teachers. At the end of the interview schedule, the teachers were not restricted to the interview questions only but were offered the opportunity to express any further views or concerns freely.

However, as Marshal and While (1994) acknowledge, unique challenges can arise, and errors are commonly made when constructing questions for ESL subjects. In my research, I faced this issue of formulating questions while constructing my schedule. I wanted the questions to be clear and easy to answer because English was not the native language of all my interviewees. To overcome the issue of simplifying the questions, I considered my subjects' cultural and linguistic abilities through two steps. The first step was through further explaining the questions that would arise during the interview or replacing difficult words in the questions with simple ones. Then, after constructing the schedule, I contacted the interviewees to identify a convenient place to conduct the interviews. Seeking a neutral interview location, as argued by Elwood and Martin (2000, p. 653), encouraged me to "make observations that generate richer data that cannot be gleaned from the

interview content alone". It also helped my interviewees to feel comfortable, and therefore, they revealed more detailed information (ibid.).

#### 4.6. Participants (sampling procedures)

The main sampling approach employed for the three research methods was purposive sampling, where the participants were identified according to specific criteria and characteristics (Dörnyei, 2007; Ritchie et al., 2014). The aim was to ensure that the sample is as diverse as possible to be able to identify a full range of perceptions and behaviours that are associated with issues on PD. Creswell (2007) argues that it is important for the qualitative researcher to approach individuals who have experienced the investigated phenomenon and therefore can share their lived experiences and perspectives with the researcher. The selection of participants for this research thus evolved directly from my daily work with lecturers at HCT. It was within the context of what Austin (2009) has termed “collegial conversations” that I was able to establish trusting, caring relationships which served as an opening for my approaching staff members to ascertain whether they would be willing to engage later in in-depth interviews regarding my research topic. The majority of the participants seemed to welcome the opportunity to examine issues related to their PD practices more deeply.

Stages		1	2			3
Instruments		Questionnaire	Focus groups interviews			Semi-structured interviews
			1	2	3	
Participants	Academic staff	81	4	6	6	6
	Administrative staff	-	-			6

Table 4.1: Number of participants for each stage of data collection

As can be seen from the above table, in the first phase, the questionnaire was distributed among all the ELC academic staff to survey their perceptions of professional development and get information about the participants' knowledge, awareness, attitudes and beliefs. These participants were asked whether they like to participate in the FGs interviewing stage. Only sixteen of



them indicated their willingness to participate in the focus groups discussion by providing their contact information in the last part of the questionnaire (see appendix 1). Thus, I considered them as a sub-set of the previous group. It was noticeable that some of the participants were reluctant to speak about some of the research categories such as the current provision and the PD enhancement in front of their colleagues; therefore, semi-structured interviews were planned after the FGs discussion for six of those who choose to carry on with this investigation. For the administrative staff, semi-structured interviews were conducted with them as it was not easy to get all of them together and to set them free to express their views since that might not be the case if they were accompanied together with their bosses. Six of the administrative were contacted from the various sections in the English Language Center and they showed willingness and gave consent to participate.

Accordingly, there were two groups of participants in the three phases of the study, namely, questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and focus group. The first group, which was also the largest, comprised 81 EFL teachers who taught language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) and research skills to the foundation year students in HCT. They were, in addition to the Omani teachers, of various nationalities, such as British, American, Canadian, South African, Indian, and Arabs. Most of them held MAs in education and had experience in teaching and researching English between one and thirty years. The second group comprised the Head of the English Language Centre in HCT, his assistants, Heads of Sections for Curriculum and Teaching Methods, the Quality Assurance Coordinator, the Post-foundation Coordinator, a course coordinator, and an exam coordinator. This was to obtain information on the departmental and ministerial policies of the teachers' PD since these policies determine the progress of the current PD system. Investigating these two groups' views helped in understanding the conceptions of PD held by EFL teachers working in the context of higher educational institutions, more specifically, the technical colleges, explore their PD needs and expectations, the factors that might affect their PD engagement, and their administration views of their staff's PD.

In order to select the questionnaire sample, I administered the questionnaire to 140 teachers. These teachers were identified with the support of the Head of Centre, and they gave their consent to participate at this stage. Only 81 teachers filled in the surveys. For the interviews, teachers who indicated their agreement and willingness to participate in the interviewing stage were able to choose the most convenient way for them, that is, either to be interviewed individually or in the form of focus-group interviews. Dealing with the Centre's management was in a form of one-to-one interviews since they were in a more formal atmosphere

The study took place in HCT (see Section 2.3.1.1 for a general description of HCT). HCT is typical of the other colleges, as the profiles of the students and teachers in HCT had similar characteristics, and this ensured the optimal conditions for the success of the study. Students are allocated to the seven Colleges of Technology electronically through the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) based on their grades in the General Certificate Examination (GCE), which means that students at all colleges have approximately similar grades when they are enrolled in these colleges. Like the other CoTs, HCT caters for students studying in various programmes. The college was established to educate the citizens of Oman in general and Muscat in particular by implementing high quality programmes in various technical fields. It offers programmes at the level of Diploma, Advanced Diploma, and Bachelor of Technology (BTech). The college has grown enormously from a student population of about 300 to the current size of about 10,000 (Ministry of ManPower, 2015). The college has more than 2,000 faculty and staff members and has an annual intake of about 1,750 students onto its foundation programme besides transferred students in the upper levels. The college's entire teams are committed to good quality education to meet the high technical manpower requirements of the job market in the Sultanate.

## **4.7. Data collection process**

The data collection procedures started piloting of all the instruments of the study and amending and improving them accordingly. Carrying out the actual study and administering the instruments was the following step in the process.

### **4.7.1. Piloting the instruments**

Preceding the data collection procedures, the research instruments were piloted. Piloting is considered a crucial stage in any research, as it is necessary to pilot the study's instruments before actually administering them to ensure that they function well and to identify future problems in the research design, if any (Bryman, 2016). To accomplish that, the teachers who participated in the pilot study formed target groups similar to those participating in the actual study's quantitative and qualitative phases.

#### **4.7.1.1. Piloting the questionnaires**

Piloting the questionnaires was essential since "questionnaires do not emerge fully-fledged; they have to be created and adapted, fashioned and developed to maturity after many abortive test flights" (Oppenheim, 2003, p. 47). Cohen *et al.* (2011) indicate that in a pilot study, researchers have to consider the format and coverage of the questionnaire on the one hand and the type of data gained from the questionnaire on the other. Both of these concerns, in addition to identifying any possible communication difficulties while sending the surveys, were recognized while piloting this study's questionnaire. The main aim of the piloting was to increase the reliability, validity, and practicality of the questionnaire (Oppenheim, 2000).

The participants of the pilot study were self-selected and were assumed to be a representative sample of the actual study sample, as they were teachers and administrative staff from different Omani higher education institutions, which teach similar courses. The questionnaire was piloted on twenty ELT teachers who did not participate in the actual questionnaire study. I contacted them individually to explain the purpose of the study and the questionnaire.

They all showed their willingness to take part in the study. I distributed hard copies of the questionnaire to them, and they answered the questionnaire items within the same day. Based on Wallace (1998, p. 133), the respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and to provide information about how long the questionnaire took to complete; the clarity of the instructions, whether any of the questions were ambiguous, irrelevant, patronising or irritating, and, if so, how; whether the layout of the questionnaire was clear/attractive or not; and any other comments. After going through their comments and answers, in general, I identified the following areas to be improved in the questionnaire:

- The demographic information: They suggested deleting some demographic requirements like nationality as participants consume more time in answering them whereas they are irrelevant to the data to be gathered; in addition, they are more statistical variables, and this is a qualitative study.
- Wording and clarity: Some participants felt that some questions were too long and needed to be clarified further, so I tried to improve these questions by making them more succinct and more comprehensive.
- Change from a 5-point to a 3-point Likert scale: Participants argued that this would make it easier for the teachers and it would save them more time, as they were busy with teaching at the time of the data collection.

In addition, this piloting revealed how much time the participants needed to complete the questionnaire. Based on the responses to the pilot questionnaire, it was decided that the questionnaire needed 15-20 minutes to be completed. Following finalization of the questionnaire, the procedure for data collection was established. After obtaining official permission to conduct the study from the Ministry of Manpower, since HCT is under its jurisdiction (Appendix 4). Contact also was made to seek approval of the HoC to ask teachers to participate (see Section 4.7.3.1.).

#### 4.7.1.2. Piloting the interviews

Before I embarked on the process of piloting the interview instruments, I first had to analyse the questionnaires, since the questionnaire data provided some of the content for the interviews. Piloting the interviews was an essential phase in the data collection process to evaluate the clarity of the interview questions, obtain first-hand experience of conducting interviews, and modify the research questions based on the results of the piloting stage (Bryman, 2012). It is also beneficial and favourable to pilot the interview questions for the purpose of examining whether the questions produce the information that represents the data needed for the study (Cohen et al., 2011). If not, then any ambiguous and confusing questions need to be eliminated (Nunan, 1992). Generally, the aim of this piloting was for me to refine the interview questions, practise transcribing, examine the use of English language in the interviews, gain experience of interviewing, and test the recording device.

Piloting the focus group questions was coordinated after analysis of the questionnaire's results. The participants for the pilot interview were four teachers selected from those who had participated in the questionnaire phase; this means that the four teachers belonged to the same group of research participants, and thus they had similar profile characteristics to the participants of the main study. I asked the participants if it was better to use L1 (Arabic) or English to do the interviews, and they all agreed on English. I considered this in the actual interviews and asked participants at the beginning if they preferred to do the interviews in L1 or in English. At the beginning of the pilot interview, I did not expect that such rich data would have been provided by the four participants. However, after transcribing the pilot interview, I found that these teachers mentioned important information that the actual participants did not mention in the other interviews, that is, the focus group or the semi-structured interviews. Thus, I decided to include the pilot interview data as a source of my research data since the characteristics of participants taking part in the piloting stage were similar to those who participated in the actual data collection and they already gave their consent to participate in this study. The pilot interview took about two hours. Such an

extended interview might have been the result had the interviews been conducted in a group format. Hermanowicz (2002, p. 487) suggests that the optimum duration of an interview is between 60 and 90 minutes. After the piloting, participants suggested changing the order of the four categories of inquiry to correspond exactly to the order of the study's four research questions (see Section 4.4.) so to start with the perception of PD. There was also a need to amend and add some of the prompts and probes in a number of the interview questions for further clarity and guidance.

For the semi-structured interviews, four individual pilot interviews were carried out with lecturers from HCT and other HE institutions who were experts in the field of teaching English, so they had similar backgrounds. The piloting stage was critical for the study for various reasons. For example, the piloting made me realize that an optimal time for the interviews would be no more than 45 minutes since participants tend to get impatient, and usually, no new information can be obtained from them after that time. This time-frame also meant that I had to be careful with the interview time and use strategies and prompts to ensure that the respondents did not deviate from the focus of the research and start talking about unrelated matters. In addition, transcribing the interviews revealed to me the difficulties associated with transcription. These difficulties were related to the quality and clarity of the recordings and the time needed to complete a single interview, especially since I had decided to transcribe all the interviews for the main study. This exercise also showed me the importance of starting the transcription process during the data collection stage and not leaving it until the end of the fieldwork. The main changes were adding a number of questions to gain more insights into the different categories of inquiry and some changes in the prompts and probes of some of the questions for guidance.

By the end of the piloted interviewing, I needed more information about some technical issues related to the interviews, such as the quality of the recording, the length of each interview, and how to use strategies like probing to elicit further clarification and more explanations from the participants.

#### **4.7.2. Administering the instruments**

This study followed a mixed-methods design. The first phase was quantitative, and the second was qualitative. Information regarding the methods, stages, and number of participants for each data set is shown below in Table 4.1.

##### **4.7.2.1. Administering the questionnaires**

The data collection procedures began with collecting the questionnaire data. According to Muijs (2004), there are various ways to administer questionnaires, such as pencil and paper questionnaires, telephone interviews, face-to-face, postal, online, and e-mail questionnaires. In this study, a pencil and paper questionnaire form was employed, as teachers are overloaded with many activities and thus filling in an online questionnaire or sending it by email might create more work for them resulting in a low response rate. In addition, pencil and paper questionnaires would give teachers more time to think about their responses compared to telephone or face-to-face questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2011).

The questionnaire was administered to those teachers who had agreed to participate. Teachers were also assured that their responses would be anonymous, that participation was entirely voluntarily, and that they could choose not to complete the questionnaire without suffering any negative consequences (see Section 4.11. for further details about ethical issues). I administered the questionnaire myself with the help of the ELC administration. That was beneficial, as it enabled me to give immediate clarification to any questions and enquiries asked by the respondents and to make sure that all questions were clear to them (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Punch, 2014). Consent was obtained from the applicants after they had been assured of total confidentiality and anonymity. They were asked to fill in the questionnaires independently in order to minimize the response bias and to ensure a high response rate and sampling accuracy (Oppenheim, 2000). Nonetheless, I was afraid that my presence could create "a sense of compulsion, where respondents feel uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 404). Self-administration of the

questionnaire was also time consuming and resulted in expanding the time frame of the data collection phases (ibid.). To overcome such concerns, I allowed an adequate time frame to collect data and reminded my respondents that their participation was totally voluntary, and they could quit at any time if they wanted to.

In general, I believe that the use of pencil and paper questionnaires in this study helped me to employ larger samples, thus allowing the identification of patterns of orientation towards theoretical assumptions and associated practices that could not be obtained using qualitative methods (Poulson & Avramidis, 2004). Once participants' views from the questionnaire were collected, I sought to investigate these views in more depth in an attempt to understand them, and this was one of the goals of the interviews undertaken in the interviewing phase.

#### **4.7.2.2. Conducting the Interviews**

The second stage of the data collection process involved interviews with teachers and the ELC administrators. Interviews are considered to be one of the most powerful data collection tools. This is because they "give voice to common people, allowing them to freely present their life situations in their own words, and open for a close personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects" (Kvale, 2006, p.481). With regard to this study, the main premise for facilitating my interviews stemmed from Kvale's belief that "interview research is a craft that, if well carried out, can become an art" (Kvale, 2007, p. 13). In this study, interviews were used to trace teachers' perspectives of PD. After analysing and reporting the questionnaire data, I had two weeks to a month to design the focus group schedule. As mentioned earlier, the interview schedule is a guide for the interviewer to ask and adjust the interview questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It assists the researcher to consider the "difficulties that might be encountered and how he could overcome them" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 59). I therefore decided to use a semi-structured interview approach after analysing the focus group data because of this approach's advantages in terms of granting the interviewer a



degree of flexibility and giving the interviewees power and control over the course of the interview (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

All of the interviews, both focus group and semi-structured, were held in the participants' places of work. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participants about the aim of the study, and I explained the aims of the research in general and of the interviews in particular. I obtained their informed consent and approval for the interview to be recorded. In the consent forms, they were informed that they had the right not to answer questions that they did not want to answer and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Confidentiality was a crucial concern (Yee and Andrews, 2006); thus, participants were all guaranteed that the interview data would remain confidential and be used for research purposes only. I had to provide my interviewees with full details of the value of the provided data and to ensure the participants' total anonymity when the data were reported (BERA, 2011), which meant they enjoyed more freedom while expressing their views. Regarding permission to tape-record the interviews, it was important to have a full tape recording of each interview since such interviews usually generate huge amounts of qualitative data and interesting material (Powney & Watts, 1987, p. 139). Silverman (2005) warns that interview data might be lost because of technical problems, so I used two devices for the recording. Thus, the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were then downloaded onto the computer and transcribed. All the audio files were saved onto my computer and onto two external hard drives to ensure against the possibility of data loss due any unforeseen technical problems.

One significant issue I needed to consider when conducting these interviews was that I, as the researcher, had been granted access to and acceptance by the organizations to carry out the fieldwork required (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). To do so, I needed to request official permission to conduct the study from the institutions' governing bodies or from the administrative departments that governed the study's research sites, which were the colleges and the workplaces I conducted my research in. Accordingly, the Directorate General

of Technical Education granted me a requesting letter (see Appendix 4) explaining the nature of the research and the types of data to be collected to demonstrate the cooperation and assistance I would require while conducting the study. Having previously worked as an English language lecturer in the ELC I had very good relationships with the heads of the English Language departments. This excellent affiliation in addition to the permission request letters (see Appendix 6) I had been given from the Director General of Technical Education assisted my access to and acceptance by my study's research sites.

#### **4.8. Role of the researcher**

Before collecting the data, I had thought data collection would be an easy task, where I would need only to distribute the surveys or ask the questions, and the participants would answer them effortlessly. However, I faced some challenges during the data collection process. Therefore, I took certain steps to ensure that my data collection procedures were well prepared and well conducted.

For example, my position was as an insider interviewer rather than an outsider one, working with participants, some of whom had the same identity, language, and experience bases (Asselin, 2003). This role helped me to be accepted by the participants, as I was already familiar to them, which facilitated the interview process and accordingly generated richer data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). When conducting a research study, it is essential for the researcher to be or become familiar with the research participants (Kvale, 2009). In contexts similar to my research, as discussed by Holliday (1994), the researcher is usually an outsider, an expert who is from another culture. Indeed, according to Al-Husseini (2004), outsider researchers spend a lot of time familiarizing themselves with the participants, and even then, the participants themselves try not to be open with the researcher. This sometimes affects the data generation process. Insider researchers, in contrast, are able to understand the psychological, emotional, and/or cognitive precepts of the participants, and they have a deeper knowledge of the practical and historical events in the field (Chavez, 2008). Thus, being an

insider researcher, I was able to understand the responses of my participants who answered in multileveled and nuanced ways (Berger, 2013); for example, they made culture-specific assertions and references. This provided me with an opportunity to better analyse the participants' responses and discuss them in more depth in the interview stages. Furthermore, my awareness of the participants' lifestyle, as I shared with them features like language, ethnicity, religion, identity, lifestyle, and culture, placed me in a good position to conduct ethical research that represents the participants' voices (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

Furthermore, as an interviewer, I took into account that any information produced via semi-structured interviews can be biased by the interviewees' views, so the produced data might not be trustworthy (Nunan, 1992). Thus, I needed to choose the questions carefully and consider their consequences for the participants so as not to stress them and maybe increase the possibility of them deciding to withdraw from the study. With this in mind, I also allowed more time in some cases so participants could experience a greater level of freedom and trust and thus elaborate further upon their answers (Opdenakker, 2006). I also needed to record, transcribe, and analyse the interviews as soon as they had been conducted, so I could check with the interviewees their answers in case any were not clear and to avoid losing recorded data due to any technical problem (Kvale, 2007). I also made sure that my participants were still focused on the main area of PD, as, during the interviews, they sometimes deviated from the main topic to talk about other issues not related to this research topic while conflicts arose during the discussions in the focus group interviews. Indeed, some teachers deviated from talking about their views on professional development to focus instead on issues of immediate concern to them, such as teaching-related issues, learning situations, or their day-to-day work. In such cases, I encouraged the teachers to keep focusing on answering my questions related to their professional development. As a researcher, I should have anticipated such issues since the whole task of interviewing, especially in a focus group, relies on group interactions and dynamics (Robson, 2002). Several researchers have identified other potential problems with focus group interviews that I also

encountered in my research. Patton (2002), for instance, explains how limited time for each group member to present their views can be an issue. Also, contributions may be unbalanced for reasons of shyness, or belief that one's view is a minority opinion, which could limit involvement etc. Thus, my role extended to be a facilitator as well to aid in developing the interviews smoothly.

#### **4.9. Rigour in research**

The quality of a study affects the consistency of its results; thus, rigour in research tends to be assessed in different ways in multi-methods research. For quantitative data, judgments are usually made in terms of reliability, validity, and objectivity whereas qualitative data work with alternative but roughly corresponding concepts of confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability. These two views of quality are different but equally important. Thus, these two quality strategies were applied in this study, as data collection methods were both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structured interview and focus groups interviews). Quantitative researchers argue that the research must be tested for reliability and validity to ensure its quality, whereas qualitative researchers propose general principles and guidelines to help in assessing the trustworthiness of the research (Klein and Myers 1999; Lincoln 1995).

##### **4.9.1. Quality of the questionnaire**

To ensure the questionnaire's consistency with the aims of the study, its reliability and validity were evaluated. Reliability is defined as the likelihood of attaining the same results again if the measures were to be duplicated (Punch, 2014; Oppenheim, 2000). For example, in the current study, the application of the questionnaire is supposed to yield similar results when it is taken by two different teachers having the same profile characteristics. Reliability is usually assessed by conducting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient test, which provides the average correlation among all the scale items. Therefore, in this study, to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the overall scale items were subjected to the Cronbach's alpha test. The results

showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire items was higher than the recommended value of .70 required to claim internal consistency. In addition, the item-total statistics tables for the questionnaire items indicated no significant change and no negative correlations through the removal of any items. These results suggested that the scale obtained in this investigation demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability (Pallant, 2007).

Similarly, the validity of a questionnaire is concerned with ensuring that the scale measures what it is intended to measure (Punch, 2014; Pallant, 2007). According to Pallant (2007), content validity "refers to the adequacy with which a measure or scale has sampled from the intended universe or domain of content" (p. 7). To ensure the content validity of this questionnaire, I took several steps. First, I consulted and reviewed the literature addressing the issue to locate previous research and identify major themes. Then, the questionnaire was revised by my two supervisors, who teach research methods in the University of Exeter, and I modified it further on the basis of their feedback. It was also shown to three Omani PhD students who had experience teaching at the Colleges of Technology in Oman or in similar contexts and to an experienced ELT teacher trainer, who had more than 15 years of experience in the teacher education field. These experts assessed the content of the questionnaire and identified the need for some clarification in the scale items. Such a process also revealed some changes in the wording of some of the scale items to use vocabulary that the teachers would be more familiar with. After I had received the feedback from this expert panel, I revised the whole questionnaire and made changes accordingly.

#### **4.9.2. Credibility and trustworthiness of interviews**

Usually, researchers employing qualitative methods use the concepts of 'credibility' (Creswell, 2007 & 2009) and 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell and Miller, 2000) to illustrate the quality of qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to the confidence or trust one can have in a study and its findings (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Researchers agree that credibility is an aspect of trustworthiness, which also incorporates the

application of other aspects such as transferability, dependability, and confirmability to assess the quality of constructivist/interpretivist research (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Richards & Morse, 2012; Morse *et al.*, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000 among others). These four elements are further explained below.

Credibility is associated with “the focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well the data and the processes of analysis address the intended focus” (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 109). The current study's credibility was addressed using two methods. The first method is prolonged engagement in the field, which means the longer the researcher stays in the field (context of the study), “the more the pluralistic perspective will be heard from participants” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128) so the better the understanding of the context of participants' views will be (*ibid.*). I devoted one academic semester (around 13 weeks, as each semester is 15 weeks) at HCT, the site of data collection, to conduct the focus group interviews, carry out an initial analysis, and conduct the semi-structured interviews. Such a long period ensured the required prolonged engagement in the field. The second aspect of trustworthiness is transferability, which is the applicability of the outcomes reached in a certain study to a new research situation (Richards, 2009). This study is transferable, as its results will form a rich resource for other studies to be conducted in tertiary technical institutions and in universities, either in or beyond Oman. Dependability, in qualitative research, “involves an interrogation of the context and the methods used to derive the data” (Richards, 2009, p. 159). Such interrogation has been achieved throughout this study. For instance, I have described the suitability of the methodological approach adopted in this research study to investigate the teachers' experiences in relation to the CPD in the technical context. The final aspect is confirmability, which in qualitative research relies on making the data accessible to the reader. This, in turn, depends on “the transparency of representation” (Richards, 2009, p. 160). To ensure the confirmability of the conducted study, there were richer and fuller representations, with research participants' voices and perceptions emerging clearly (*ibid.*), as that guarantees that the findings reflect the participants' points of view and that they are not influenced by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To confirm this, I

conducted an external audit where I asked a colleague (a person outside the project) to conduct a thorough review of the interview data (Creswell, 2009). I first coded the interview transcripts, and then, I asked a colleague to look at the data and my codes and themes. Once he had looked at the data, we discussed the codes and themes until inter-coder agreement was reached.

#### **4.10. Data Analysis:**

Data analysis involves bringing together, shaping, and interpreting the collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Yet, this does not mean that data analysis is iterative in the sense that the researcher continuously moves between it and the distinctive phases of the whole research process (Al-Badwawi, 2011). Consequently, as Cohen et al. (2011) argue, it is preferable for the researcher to analyse data immediately after they have started data collection, hence reducing the risk of accumulating data. As this study adopted a mixed-methods approach, there were two different analysis procedures - one for the quantitative and one for the qualitative sources.

Precisely, data analysis in this study occurred in three phases over the academic year 2016-2017. I planned to leave about two months as the interval between one phase and another to allow time for a recognisable analysis and development of each stage instrument. Accordingly, the three analyses were carried out separately. The first phase of data analysis commenced in October 2016, and it was regarded as the baseline to gather and analyse the remaining data. Great care was taken in terms of the nature of the items included in the questionnaire and length of time and accuracy to analyse these items. Shortcomings in any of these aspects could affect the analysis process of the other data collected through interviews, and accordingly, the study findings. The results of the following data analyses provide answers to the study questions mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter (Section 4.1).

#### **4.10.1. Analysis of the questionnaire data**

The questionnaire items were analysed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). Before beginning the process of analysing the quantitative data, responses to the closed statements were entered into SPSS and each statement was given a code indicating the section and the statement number. For example, the first statement in Section A was coded as A1. The same is applicable to the answers, with each given a score of 1-3 where 3 corresponds to "agree", 2 to "not sure" and 1 to "disagree". Where no answer was given or more than one answer was ticked, this was considered a missing value, and it was coded as 99. Answers to the open-ended questions were transferred into the computer using a word processing programme. Descriptive statistics in which I need only the frequency distributions were calculated. Figures and percentages in the SPSS outputs are presented in tables and bar charts to help develop an understanding of the patterns of the data, as can be seen in the analysis and findings chapter (Chapter 5).

A total of 81 academics returned the questionnaire with a nearly 97% completion rate. Descriptive analysis was performed to address the research questions to be explored by employing the questionnaire (for example, current participation, PD needs and wants, views of current provision, and factors to enhance PD). The results of the study also helped with formulating the semi-structured interview schedule.

#### **4.10.2. Analysis of the interview data**

The procedures followed in running and analysing the second and third phases of data were to some extent similar, as these phases represented the analysis of qualitative data collected through the focus group and semi-structured interviews. In this section, the analysis procedures are presented.

Creswell (2007, p. 148) states that qualitative data analysis "consists of preparing and organizing the information for analysis, then reducing them into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion". Such a process is



called "thematic analysis" (ibid.). In fact, thematic analysis is appropriate in this research, as, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), it is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data". It minimally organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic. In the current study, I applied thematic analysis to analyse the data gathered through the focus group and semi-structured interviews. This was done by following the guidelines set by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) and Clarke and Braun (2013) (see Table 4.2 below) to apply thematic analysis. The analysis process of the data from my interviews was conducted in six phases.

Phase	Processes of the phase
Familiarity with data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transcribing, reading and re-reading data</li> <li>2. Noting down initial ideas</li> </ol>
Generate initial codes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Coding interesting features of the data</li> <li>4. Collating data relevant to each code</li> </ol>
Searching for themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Collating codes into potential themes</li> <li>6. Gathering all data relevant to each potential theme</li> </ol>
Reviewing themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set</li> <li>8. generating a thematic map of the analysis</li> </ol>
Defining & naming themes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the story the analysis tells</li> <li>10. Generating clear definitions and names for each theme</li> </ol>
Producing the report	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples</li> <li>12. Final analysis of selected extracts</li> <li>13. Relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature</li> <li>14. Producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</li> </ol>

Table 4.2: *Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006 & 2013)*

The first stage in data analysis was familiarising myself with the collected data. This began with transcribing the whole interviews. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), the first steps in analysis are the transcription and, where applicable, the translation of the interview data. The transcription did

not depend only on summarizing the interviews or considering only parts that are associated with the aims of the study but included all the utterances recorded, as that helped me develop a thorough grasp of the data since I had transcribed it all myself. When researchers transcribe their own data – rather than outsourcing this task to others – it helps them to think critically about the data, as they are repeatedly listening to the recorded conversations (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Davies, 2007; Silverman, 2000). The reasons for transcription were to increase the data's reliability (Gibbs, 2007); it was easier for me to access specific information within a transcript than within an audio file for the purpose of giving supporting quotations (Shopes, 2013), and in the case of data loss, the transcript would provide backup data for the conducted and future research (ibid.). After I had finished transcribing the interviews, I read and re-read the transcripts and noted down the initial ideas stated by the interviewees, their general comments, and interesting issues that were emerging from the data.

The next stage is generating initial codes. A code is a "symbol applied to a section of a text to classify or categorize it" (Robson, 2002, p. 477). The stage of generating initial codes encompasses "coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79) while coding involves joining and linking the codes to form broader themes or categories (Creswell, 2007). Bryman (2016) recommends that researchers code the data as early as possible after collection, and then, Gibbs (2007) suggests, throughout the coding process, researchers should produce a list of codes that can be used to identify relationships between all the codes.

Thus, for this coding stage, I started the examination of the transcripts as soon as the interviews had been conducted. I went through all the transcripts, highlighting with different colours in the sorting process and assigning initial codes to chunks of data that were relevant to the general topic that I wanted to investigate through conducting the interviews. Based on this, in this study, codes were allocated to different parts of data that were related to the main themes being investigated. As the data analysis progressed, the codes were

modified and revised. Manual categorization was also conducted at the initial stages of the analysis in order to make sense of the data (Table 4.3 illustrates the coding and manual categorization of extracts from one of the interviews). Comments and notes were written in the margins of the transcriptions in order to understand the data more adequately.

Extract/Transcript	Codes	Manual categorization
<p>R: What does professional development mean to you?</p> <p>T: Professional development is <b>important</b>, it is extremely important because <b>it is my professional growth</b>, it is <b>my knowledge, my skills</b> ...we work with young people we have <b>to get updated, upgraded, improved every day</b> and it is not only technology, science, and language teaching and <b>it is also psychology</b>; the <b>attitude to the students and to their performance...</b> it is also <b>growing psychologically</b> I mean knowing all this is also professional development so PD is not only learning techniques and ways to introduce grammar or vocabulary it is <b>understanding your students</b> trying to reach them right! That is part of PD.</p>	<p>Updating skills</p> <p>Subject knowledge</p> <p>Language development</p> <p>Pedagogical Knowledge</p> <p>Growing psychologically</p> <p>Understanding students</p>	<p>Practice aspects of PD</p> <p>Personal aspects of PD</p>
<p>R: What is your perception of the ELC staff professional development needs?</p> <p>T: We have <b>to work on our language</b> right! How? Maybe <b>book few sessions for teachers the latest</b>, professional books and like anything else should something like that. Also, <b>technology how to use technology in the classroom and how to get it work</b> here and then ok I don't know how to explain it this <b>pedagogical psychological aspect of teaching</b> like there are some <b>new developments in psychological</b> right! What are they, how do we use them to reach the students as we have <b>mixed-levels groups</b>... would be very happy to know how to do that.</p>	<p>Language development</p> <p>Teaching through technology</p> <p>Pedagogical psychological aspects of teaching</p> <p>Teaching mixed-levels groups</p>	<p>Language-related PD needs</p> <p>Teaching-related PD needs</p> <p>PD to overcome staff challenges</p>

**Table 4.3:- a semi-structured interview extract with initial codes and manual categorization**

I then reduced the large number of codes to a more manageable number of sub-themes, as Creswell (2007) suggests combining the codes into broader categories/sub-themes or themes, and displaying and making comparisons in the data graphs, tables, or charts. Thus, I then grouped the sub-themes into themes that could be discussed in relation to the research questions (see Figure 4.2. for examples). I collated the final codes assigned in the previous stage into potential sub-themes (see Figure 6 for an example of this process) and then gathered all sub-themes relevant to potential themes. The themes were derived from the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 89), searching for themes involves “sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded extracts within the identified themes”. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to define, explain, and further refine the generated themes that will be represented in the analysis, and then to analyse the data within them. In addition, they recommend making the themes' names “concise, punchy” so they “ immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about” (ibid., p. 93). This entailed thinking about the relationships between the different codes and grouping the relevant code extracts under the corresponding theme. That helped me see the broader story of the data and see how the different parts fit into an initial analysis framework. Finally, I used the QSR NVivo 11 software programme to assist in the analysis. In this research, the interviews were all imported into the programme for the analysis process and to revise the manual coding where relevant. Nodes were created for coding purposes. Coding with nodes was achieved through highlighting relevant texts and then dragging and dropping the text onto the appropriate node. Nodes were organised into hierarchies to show relationships between themes assigned out of the coding process. The analysis process using this software was very helpful and saved me a significant amount of time.

Code 2: AC, FG3	Code 3: AD, INT6
“for me, the things that the institution does for the employees. for example, involving them in like teachers training courses like CELTA, for example which you know guides the teachers and help them”	“it is more of training to be honest. organised by the management so they find out what is missing and what teachers maybe lacking and from there they are organising workshops accordingly”

Code 2: AD, INT6	Code 3: AD, INT5
“professional development for me personally is when I have been doing my master’s distance wise and paying for myself and you know paying for the books and everything so doing that independently from the college”	“it may not mean that I will provide you with all the information it could be that I will give you just the first steps and then you need to carry on investigating and learning on your own trying to improve yourself on your own”

Codes are combined into

**Sub-theme:  
Management directed PD**

Codes are combined into

**Sub-theme:  
Self-directed PD**

The sub-themes 1 and 2 were grouped together into theme 1

**Theme 1: Sources of Professional development**

Figure 4.2: Process of collating codes into subthemes and gathering sub-themes to form themes

In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91) suggest that the researcher should “check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set”. Accordingly, I reviewed the extracts of coded data under each theme to evaluate their coherence and ensure they formed a meaningful unit of analysis. Then, I re-read the coded data and their collated illustrative extracts and organized them into a coherent and consistent story identifying the significance of each extract in relation to the aim of the study and the research questions. By the end of this stage, I had an analysis scheme/framework that consisted of codes, sub-themes, and higher order themes. After these procedures, I progressed to present the findings of my interview data.

#### **4.11. Ethical dimensions**

When carrying out research studies, it is vital and fundamental for researchers to take ethical aspects into consideration (Yee & Andrews, 2006). Associations like the British Educational Research Association (BERA) provide ethical guidelines to help researchers conducting their research studies that involve themes such as consent, harm, confidentiality and privacy. This section reflects how I addressed these ethical considerations in the present study.

Obtaining acceptance and access to the organization in which the fieldwork was carried out is considered to be one of the most important ethical issues when conducting educational research (Cohen et al., 2007). For the present study, requesting approvals or official permission from ministerial departments, specifically the Director General of Technical Education, was considered the best option. Thus, prior to the data collection process, I sent them a request letter describing the nature of the study, its objectives, importance, and the type of data to be collected. Being a former lecturer in HCT’s ELC (the current study’s research site) and having a good relationship with its staff and administration aided my acceptance and my access to the research site, and acceptance was granted (Appendix 4).

Informed consent is another major tenet of ethical research. Getting informed consent is necessary when conducting a research study, as it is important that participants in any research study be informed about the likely risks and possible consequences involved in participating in the study (BERA, 2011). That "involves

providing the participants with information on the purpose of the research, the party for whom the data is being gathered, the use of the data, the questions to be asked, and the risks and/or benefits for the person being interviewed" (Patton, 2002, p. 407). I made it clear to the participants that their participation was voluntarily and they had the right to withdraw whenever they needed to do so (see Appendix 3).

Avoidance of harm is an equally important ethical consideration. Discussing the topic of teachers' PD needs may have caused kind of sensitivity especially when regarding the administration and the Ministry officials, who might have felt that it was kind of evaluation of their system. That might have been the case with the teachers and the Heads of the ELC as well, who, as Al-Husseini (2005) states about interviewees in the Developing countries, may be more "reluctant to criticize government plans and they do not want to discuss questions about policies" (p. 69). Thus, I made sure that these officials and academics realized and understood that the aims of this study had nothing to do with evaluating the system or criticizing it. Asking any sort of sensitive questions was avoided to dispel any such fears among the participants, and I emphasised the absolute anonymity of their responses, as data obtained from them would be used only for research purposes so would not affect their future job prospects at the college.

Finally, confidentiality and anonymity are very important with respect to the research participants (Cohen et al., 2011). This involves "disguising the identities of the participants to ensure that their privacy and anonymity is protected" (Patton, 2002, p. 411). In the present study, the research participants were guaranteed that their identities and any details that might reveal their identities would not be exposed to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. In the data analysis stage, the participants were identified as academics (AC) or administrators (AD), and their interviews were symbolized by numbers (for example, INT1, INT2,...) to identify them rather than their real names, so the findings were delivered anonymously.

#### **4.12. Limitations, potential difficulties and challenges**

It is inevitable that there will be some potential difficulties when conducting research studies, and these must be anticipated and dealt with in advance. One of the issues with this research was related to guaranteeing the access and acceptance to the



research site and to the required people and resources to conduct this study. The proximity of Higher College of Technology (HCT) to where I, as the researcher, live (only a 15-minute drive away from my home) was an essential element in the success of conducting such a project on such a site, as it eased visits to the research site whenever I needed to. In addition, being an English language teacher at HCT and having good relationships with its administration as well as its teachers also facilitated conducting the study successfully with a minimum number of difficulties. Such familiarity eased access to the required people and the resources needed to carry out the research. Leech (2002) suggests that working with familiar applicants can help in constructing a peaceful and friendly atmosphere in which the interviewees' elaboration may be maximised, which will improve the efficacy of the data collection stage.

Interviewees were another area of concern. Sometimes, they were not willing, for one reason or another, to provide all the required information (Nunan, 1992). Therefore, I sometimes found it difficult to conduct the interview and to obtain the data I wanted. A relaxed and secure atmosphere was essential to get the required information (Kelliny, 1994), and as a researcher, I thought it would be easy to establish such conditions in my interviews. Therefore, I had read the literature about how to conduct semi-structured interviews, but having commenced the interviews, I found that reading was not enough to make me sufficiently skilful in dealing with interviewees' unexpected behaviours (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Therefore, practice in interviewing was required, and self-evaluation after each interview positively enhanced my professionalism. Such evaluation was achieved through listing and reflecting upon the procedures performed and the challenges that arose in the interviews (*ibid.*). While embarking on each interview, I also attempted to build a relaxing atmosphere where the interviewees could elaborate on their answers in a way that would enrich the data collection process. Indeed, to establish such an atmosphere, a rapport with the respondents must exist (Leech, 2002). However, building a rapport with the respondents might not always be advantageous, as it might raise some unexpected ethical concerns, especially if the interviewer and the participants share the same ethnic background. For example, Ochieng (2010) interviewed participants from the same background and found that in such cases, it is difficult to separate general talk from the topic being investigated.

Other issues were related to the socio-political context in Oman. Currently, there is debate regarding using the English language instead of Arabic at schools and universities or colleges as the medium of learning and teaching and in the curricula as well. The policy-making authorities are suggesting keeping the Arabic language instead of using English (A'Shura Council, 2011), as they argue that students receiving and gaining knowledge through their first language will understand their specializations better and will fulfil the workplace requirements much better than is currently the case. Accordingly, given these circumstances, the importance of developing English language teachers professionally may receive less attention among the policy-making authorities, as some of the ministry officials believe that the English language teachers have no need for further PD since their job is mostly limited to teaching basic linguistic skills. Thus, it may be challenging to convince these policy-making authorities of the significance of the present research study. However, in line with Al-Mahrooqi (2012), Al-Issa (2006), and Al-Husseini (2005), I believe there is an urgent need to upgrade the students' proficiency in the English language, as it is a vital requirement of the job market and is essential if Omani workers are going to take over expatriates' positions. Upgrading and enhancing students' mastery of English language skills entails developing their teachers professionally in different aspects of teaching the English language, for instance, applying technology and matching learning outcomes to the requirements of local and international job markets. Accordingly, I will follow up the outcomes of this study by both trying to convince the higher authorities to implement its recommendations and by conducting further research within similar contexts.

Another issue was the representative sample. There are seven technical colleges under the jurisdiction of Directorate General of Technical Education in Oman, and this study assumed the applicability of considering HCT as representative of them due to them being alike in many features. For example, they use a similar curriculum, have similar catchment populations, and follow the same systems with regard to teaching and learning English and staff PD. However, the study's outcomes might not precisely represent the experiences of the ELCs' teachers, as they may differ widely from one another, and teachers' interests in PD are different as well. Nevertheless, future studies in the other colleges can resolve such issues and offer a more holistic picture of the PD needs in the remaining technical colleges.

#### **4.13. Summary of Chapter Four**

This chapter detailed the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study, the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods and procedures, as well as highlighting issues about the research quality and ethical considerations. Aiming to challenge the way CoTs' English language teachers think about their CPD, the present research adopted an interpretivist paradigm and employed a mixed-methods research design to collect data. To dig deeply into the CPD system, the study also adopted a case study to investigate the benefits and/or disadvantages to teachers from the offered CPD activities and to address the need for change and improvement. Having done this, the following chapter presents the findings of the current study.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data collected for this study's purposes through multiple data sources, that is, questionnaire, focus group interviews, and semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 4). The quantitative data retrieved from the questionnaire are integrated with the qualitative data obtained from the analysis of the open-ended questions in three sections: the questionnaire itself as well as data from the analysis of the interviews, the three focus group interviews, and the twelve semi-structured interviews. I start the chapter by presenting demographic information from the questionnaire. Such information is of importance when presenting the findings, as it provides some background information about the research participants' gender, age, and teaching experiences. This information can help in explaining, justifying, and interpreting some of the findings. I then present the research findings in six main sections, which correspond to the main themes from the study, as Table 5.1 shows below:

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Sources of professional development	1.1. <i>Management-directed PD.</i> 1.2. <i>Self-directed PD.</i> 1.3. <i>Effectiveness of management-directed and self-directed PD</i>
2. Perceived roles and responsibilities in terms of PD	AD staff responsibilities:
	2.1. <i>Provide PD opportunities.</i> 2.2. <i>Identify staff's PD needs and work on them.</i> 2.3. <i>Provide support and encouragement</i>
	AC staff responsibilities
	2.5. <i>Take responsibility for developing themselves in their profession.</i> 2.6. <i>Take initiatives and share responsibilities</i>
3. The need for professional development	3.1. <i>Update teachers' knowledge of recent developments in teaching</i> 3.2. <i>Improve teaching practice</i> 3.3. <i>PD for institutional growth</i>
4. ACs and ADs views regarding areas of staff developments.	4.1. <i>Language-related PD needs</i> 4.2. <i>Pedagogical (teaching-related) PD needs</i> 4.3. <i>PD to overcome staff challenges</i>

5. Staff experiences of PD in the Colleges of Technology	<p>5.1. <i>PD policies in the College</i></p> <p>5.2. <i>Staff involvement in decisions regarding their PD</i></p> <p>5.3. <i>A comparison of the AD staff and the AC staff's views on the PD provision at the ELC</i></p> <p>5.4. <i>Kinds of support provided for the staff's PD</i></p>
6. Factors for successful PD in the ELC and the Technical College	<p>6.1. <i>Factors contributing to successful PD practices in the ELC</i></p> <p>6.2. <i>Factors facilitating PD for the ELC staff</i></p>

**Table 5.1 The study's themes and sub-themes**

The analysis resulted in the emergence of a number of codes, which were further refined and clustered into a set of major themes. Table 5.1 above shows how major themes were organized into sub-themes to allow for better interpretation of the findings and to answer the main research questions as will be indicated in Chapter 6.

Within each section, findings are shown according to the sub-themes derived from the qualitative data, their categories and sub-categories (see Section 4.10 for a sample of the analysis). Extracts from the interviews are used to illustrate the findings. The extracts are the participants' own words, which have not been corrected. The quantitative data present the questionnaire results in the form of tables and graphs, which are used to support the explanation of the themes. For confidentiality purposes, an alphanumeric system is used to represent the interview participants and to identify whether they are academic or administrative staff, as well as the type and number of the interviews (focus group or semi-structured). Table 5.2 explains this.

Symbol	Source of citations
AC	Academic staff
AD	Administrative staff
FG1/2/3	The first/second/third focus group interviews.
INT 1/2/3 ...etc.	The first/second/third staff semi-structured interviews.

**Table 5.2: Symbols used to indicate the sources of citations**

## 5.2. Demographic information about the participants

The questionnaire was applied as the first tool to investigate the ELC staff's views of professional development and their PD experiences as staff members in the Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman. The first part of the questionnaire revealed some background information about the respondents, such as gender, age group, years of experience, highest qualification and the section in which they teach at the ELC.

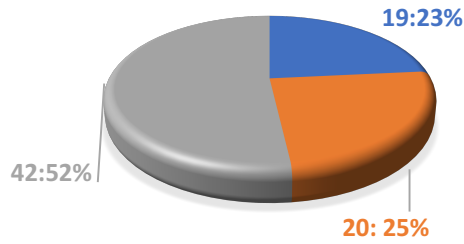
A total of 81 out of the 140 AC staff at the ELC answered the questionnaire. Out of these 81 participants, 24 (30%) were males while 57 (70%) were females. This proportion reflects the fact that more females than males tend to choose teaching as a profession in Oman due to the culture in the country and among Arabs in general that teaching is the most suitable job for females compared to other jobs. In terms of participants' age, a small majority of the participants (49: 60%) were aged between 40-60 years whilst a minority of them were less than 40 years old - (13: 16%) were between 25-29 and (19: 24%) were between 30-39 years old.

The highest number of participants (42: 52%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience in HE institutions as Figure 5.1. shows below. Those are mostly expatriate teachers because Omanis have only recently started joining the CoTs. This is likely to be connected to the Omanisation policy, which is "the government scheme for gradually replacing the expatriate skilled labour force with Omani citizens" (Al-Jadidi, 2009, p. 5), taking place in Oman currently.

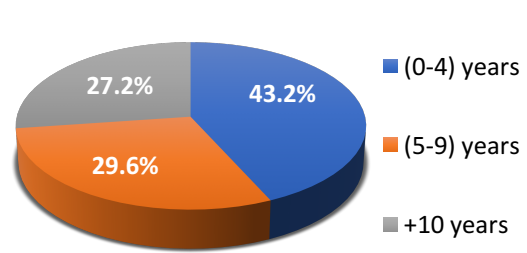
For teaching in ELC, many of those who participated in this study (22: 27%) also had more than 10 years of experience of teaching English in the ELC whereas (24: 30%) had been teaching for only 5-9 years in the ELC as Figure 5.2. shows. Most of the participants (62: 77%) were teaching in the foundation programme and only (19: 23%) were from the post foundation programme.

**Figures 5.1 & 5.2: Participants' Years of Experience in HE and ELC**

**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN HE**

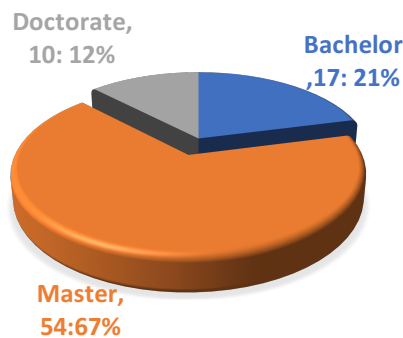


**YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN ELC**



In terms of qualifications, a majority of the participants (54: 67%) have a Master's degree in ELT while (17: 21%) have a Bachelor's degree as Figure 5.3. indicates.

**Figure 5.3 Participants' Qualifications**



Many of those who had a master's degree were Omanis who had been sent to complete their higher education after graduation in order to gradually replace expatriate teachers in the CoTs in Oman. The lowest number of participants, only (10: 12%), had a PhD; that could be related to the fact that the Ministry of Manpower, who has the CoTs under its jurisdiction, does not accept staff proposals and requests to pursue doctoral studies. The ministry officials may have thought that the English Language Centre staff do not need to have a PhD to do the job of teaching English language.

Those who participated in the focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews were also from this sample, as they were the ones who provided their details voluntarily to be contacted for the next step of the study. The AD staff in the ELC

who participated in the qualitative part of the study had a similar background, as they had also been teaching in the ELC before moving to these positions in the College.

### 5.3. Sources of Professional Development

The section reports how the ELC staff viewed their professional development, which was the initial question in the FG and SS interviews as well as the first section of the questionnaire. The participants discussed a number of aspects when defining PD, one of which was the source of their PD. The analysis of both the questionnaire and the interview data revealed that PD, from the participants' perspective, derives from two directions, namely, management-directed and self-directed PD, as shown in Table 5.3. The sections reporting these findings are followed by the questionnaire respondents' evaluation of the effectiveness of some of the management-directed and self-directed PD practices.

Theme 1	Sub-themes
Sources of professional development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Management-directed PD.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Self-directed PD.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Effectiveness of management-directed and self-directed PD activities.</i></li> </ol>

**Table 5.3: Theme 1 and its sub-themes**

#### 5.3.1. Management-directed PD

A strong category that emerged among participants was that PD is mainly organised and guided through the institution's management. A general observation obtained from most of the participants' accounts with very few exceptions is that they focused on describing PD as an institutional issue with little mention of their self-initiated efforts to seek PD. For example, PD was defined by a member of the AC staff as follows:

*“professional development for me is like anything that the institution does to help the staff improve their skills... for example, involving them in like teacher training courses like CELTA, which you know, guides the teachers and helps them”. (AC, FG3)*

Participants viewed PD in the forms that are management-directed, like workshops, forums, courses, and training sessions; as another member of the AC specified,



*“by professional development, I understand it as going to conferences, workshops in the College. Now we are having the symposium since last year; they help” (AC, FG3).*

Participants’ responses seemed to be affected significantly by their experience of participating in PD activities or events in the College, which were mainly organised by the institution’s management. Likewise, administrative staff held comparable views. From their perspective, the management staff are the ones who observe, discover their staff’s areas of deficiency, and plan PD practices based on their needs, as follows: *“It is more of training to be honest... organised by the management, so they find out what is missing and what teachers are maybe lacking, and from there they are organising workshops accordingly” (AD, INT6).*

This view illustrates the norms that are followed in many institutions in Oman regarding staff PD: the management are the ones who usually decide what PD needs to be provided. Thus, it can be said that the top-down approach is the norm when organising PD for the staff. The related questionnaire item indicates that almost 42% of the ACs agreed that PD is usually organized through a top-down approach. However, a similar percentage of participants (46%) were not sure about who should provide the development opportunities (see Table 5.4 below). However, this might be due

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Professional development programs are usually based on a top-down approach planned and executed through a higher authority.	34 (42%)	37 (46%)	10 (11 %)

**Table 5.4 Academic Staff’s Perceptions of PD organisation (n =81)**

to these participants’ lack of awareness of the professional development programmes offered by the institution and the way they are planned. Furthermore, a general observation based on the obtained data was that some participants, particularly AD staff, defined and perceived professional development simply as a form of training, as the previous extracts (AD, INT6) showed. Another member of the AD staff described PD as follows:

*“It means getting training that will enable you to form in the best way possible in relation of course to what you are supposed to do; in our case, teaching the English language” (AD, INT5)*

Thus, training seemed to be the dominant model implemented for staff PD, as AD staff suggested. ACs in the focus group showed similar views, as they also defined PD as “a chance to train teachers in the different aspects of their teaching” (AC, FG2). However, the questionnaire results revealed a mixed picture as Table 5.5 shows below.

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Staff development always takes the form of <i>in-service training</i> (the provision of organized programmes planned systematically to support teachers' development.)	32 (40 %)	26 (32%)	23 (28%)
Training is the most common approach of EFL Teachers' professional development.	55 (68%)	15 (19%)	11 (14%)

**Table 5.5 Academic Staff's Perceptions of PD as training (n =81)**

Over one third (40%) of the participants perceived PD as a form of in-service training while 32% were not sure about this statement, and 28% disagreed that PD always takes the form of an in-service training program. One explanation for that is probably the absence of such programs in the Colleges of Technology in Oman though they have always been available for the EFL teachers in Omani schools (AL-Lamki, 2009). This demonstrates the difference in PD provision between the two ministries in charge of the CoTs and the schools. However, a relatively high percentage (68%) of the academic staff considered training as the most common approach to PD for the EFL teachers as Table 5.5 shows, which again reflects their experiences regarding which training programs are dominant when it comes to their PD.

Al though training is the most frequently reported PD activity, some of the participants said some negative feedback about training sessions because sometimes they leave the session without something directly apply in the classroom. Teacher training would be effective if the activities are in line with the needs of the teachers and allow them to strengthen their skills as will be seen in section 5.8. I believe that even if teachers didn't take anything concrete from a session, there's plenty more they can gain from it. It's a chance to build rapport with colleagues, understand others concerns and their stage of development as teachers and share their own ideas with others in the field.

### 5.3.2. Self-directed Professional Development

More than half of the participants from both the academic and the administrative staff viewed professional development as resulting from the individual's own desire to improve and learn more in the different fields of their profession, as this extract shows: *"Professional development is to upgrade myself, and the institution I think should be helping"* (AC, INT6). This is classified in the literature as self-directed professional development, and it is defined as "the professional development arising from the teachers' own initiative" (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009, p. 71). It seems that most of the staff, especially academics, have widened their views of the options that can constitute PD for them to include the self-directed ones. Reference to this variety was made, for example, in FG2 where staff explained, *"sometimes it can come from the teachers themselves, sometimes teachers take initiatives to do such things ... It can even be the discussion teachers have with each other on any issue"* (AC, FG2).

The data indicated that the highest number of both AC and AD staff believed in the power and the need for more independent or self-directed PD. In a representation, one of the AD staff illustrated this using their own experience of not depending on the College to provide PD, saying,

*"Professional development for me personally is when I have began doing my master's distance wise and paying for myself and, you know, paying for the books and everything so doing that independently from the College"* (AD, INT6).

This participant was eager to learn and develop in her profession, so she used higher education as a tool to develop professionally, which mainly constituted conducting research on her own field or interest. Another member of the AD staff suggested that they could help staff with PD, but staff still needed to work independently:

*It may not mean that I will provide you with all the information; it could be that I will give you just the first steps, and then you need to carry on investigating and learning on your own, trying to improve yourself on your own.* (AD, INT5)

The consensus of the staff seemed to be that PD could evolve from the traditional view of being limited to training to involve a wider range of ongoing opportunities, which could be directed by the teachers themselves. Many AC staff members

expressed a broader perspective of what PD might involve by indicating that PD “is not only about training teachers in some specific fields... It is also giving them an opportunity to develop, giving them an opportunity for research because research is a PD” (AC, INT3).

Participants in one of the focus groups also suggested alternatives for staff PD other than “training”, for example, “presenting in workshops, in the College, or in conferences” and “doing small projects” (AC/FG2). They believed that PD happens through sharing knowledge, experiences, and ideas with other interested members in the same field. In fact, this sort of PD can be organised by the staff members themselves without even the need for the institution to intervene. AC staff seemed to consider collegiality as a good resource for PD, not only to share but also to get feedback on their work so lecturers can reflect on what they do and how things should be done as the following extract illustrates: “It can be anything when it comes to teaching; it can even be the discussion teachers have with each other on any issue or even the meetings or even the workshops. All is important” (AC/FG3).

This view of PD was evident in the questionnaire results as well. Generally, as it indicated in Table 5.6. most of the participants agreed that PD is varied through its diverse options and the nature of its practices or through the content area it might cover.

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Current PD for language teachers has evolved to include more open-ended or flexible choices.	50 (62%)	25 (31%)	6 (7%)
PD can involve engagement with materials, ideas, or colleagues in intellectual, meaningful, purposeful, and even emotional ways.	71 (88%)	5 (6%)	5 (6%)

**Table 5.6 Academic Staff’s Perceptions of PD (n =81)**

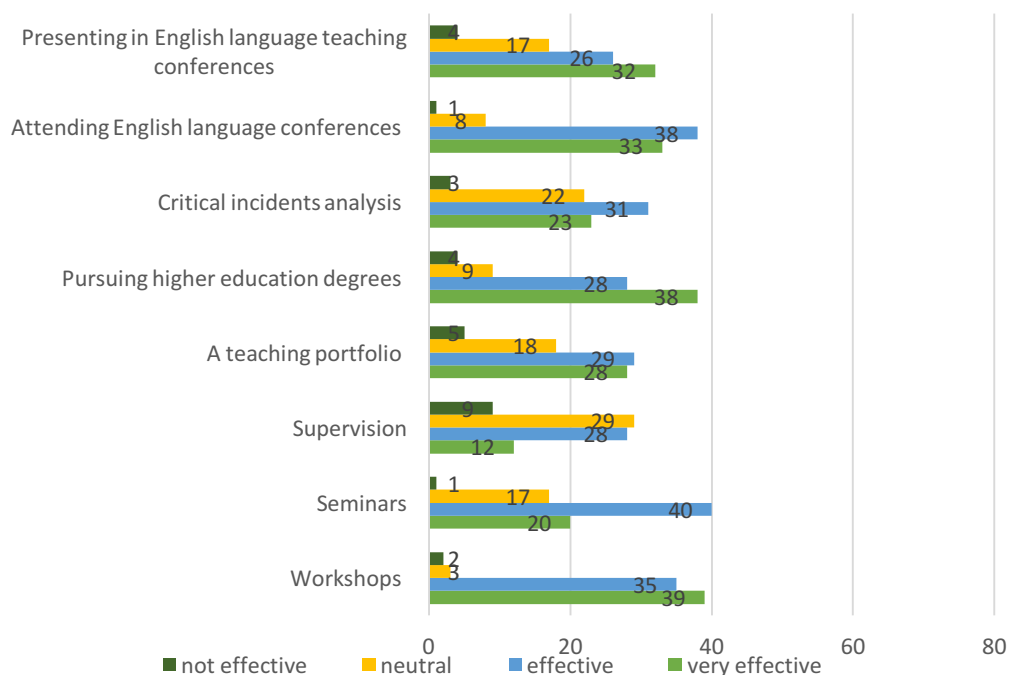
Item 15 of the questionnaire gave examples of these open-ended choices that can be used to develop professionally, and a large majority (71 of the 81 participants) agreed that PD may involve these. Participants’ understanding of PD demonstrated diverse views beyond perceiving PD as the range of training that is provided or intended to be provided for ELC staff members. Alternatively, it was remarked that PD is an intrinsic process initiated by the teachers themselves, as they know their

specific weaknesses or needs more than anyone else does. Thus, PD can happen through teachers determining their own goals and selecting the appropriate PD activities or opportunities that would help them attain these goals.

### 5.3.3. Effectiveness of management directed and self-directed approaches to PD

The questionnaire findings also corroborated the effectiveness of, but not limited to, eight management-directed and fourteen self-directed PD activities for AC staff. Section 2 from the third part of the questionnaire asked AC staff to rate some of the PD activities according to their level of effectiveness in their PD from very effective to not effective at all. Figure 5.4 shows the results. As can be seen from Figure 5.4, the data indicate that the majority of participants thought that most of the listed eight activities were either very effective or effective in helping AC staff develop professionally. Attending ELT conferences, pursuing higher education degrees, and participating in seminars and workshops were seen as the most effective management-directed activities for their PD. Interestingly, supervision was considered the least effective activity regarding staff PD. That might reflect the AC staff's experience and attitudes towards supervision in the ELC.

**Figure 5.4: Effectiveness of management directed PD (n=81)**



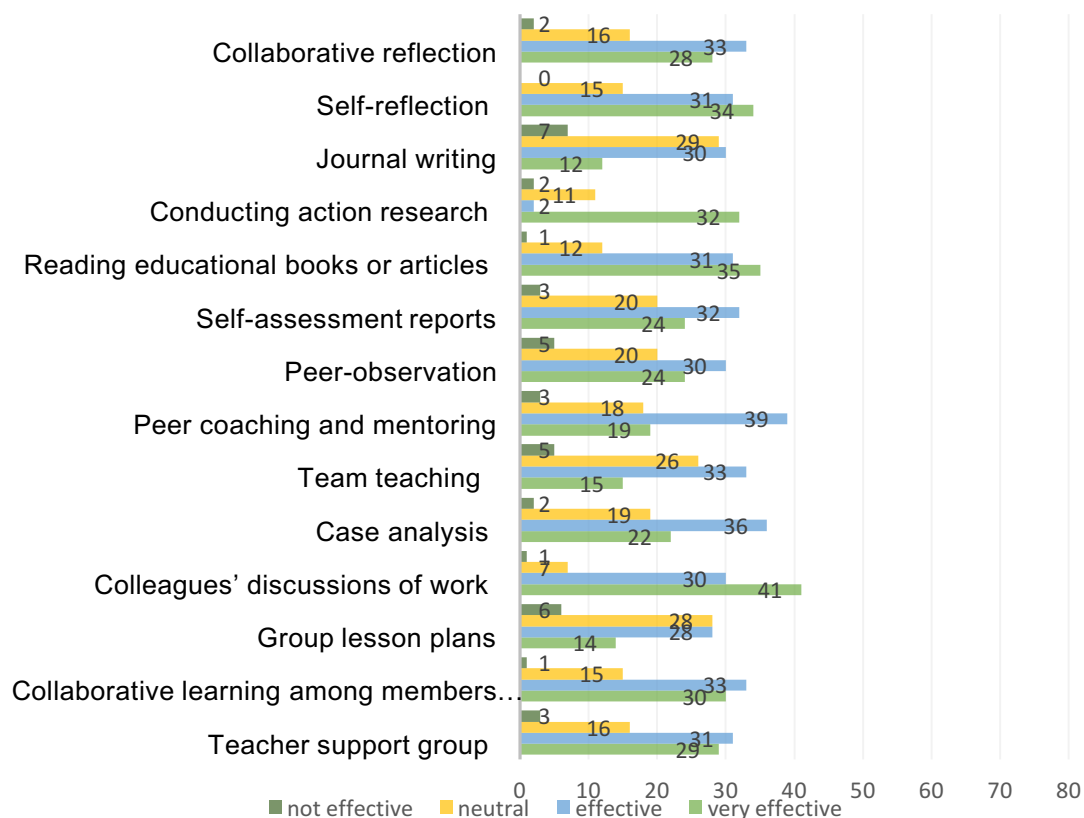
As a representation of the academicians' point of view, one of the interview participants shared her opinion and experience of supervision saying:

*I am not very satisfied with it because most of the people who come to do in class observation are teachers like you who just moved to their positions and all of sudden start assessing your classroom teaching, so I don't think they are properly equipped to handle this because at the end of the day, all they do is point out, you didn't do this, you didn't do that; they just point out the shortcomings of your lesson, but they don't suggest any improvement quarters. (AC, INT6)*

A number of participants were unsure about the effectiveness of some of the activities, like presenting at conferences, teaching portfolios, and critical incidents analysis. This point is furtherly explored later in Section 5.8.

Staff's opinions of the effectiveness of the self-directed PD activities are shown in Figure 5.5 below:

**Figure 5.1. Effectiveness of self-directed PD (n=81)**



Colleagues' discussion of work and peer coaching and mentoring were seen as the most effective activities for PD followed by reading educational books or articles, and self-reflection. Participants seemed unsure about the effectiveness of some of the activities especially group lesson plans, team teaching, and journal writing. That might reflect the fact that they were unfamiliar with these activities because they had not experienced them.

To conclude, the data reveal that respondents believed in the effectiveness of participating in a variety of different PD activities some of which are management-directed and some self-directed activities. It was evident from the data that AD staff were in favour of more management-directed PD activities, as they seemed not to have any faith in the AC staff's abilities to conduct PD activities as will be seen in Section 5.4.2.2. Furthermore, they considered these activities to be more systematic, as they are planned under their supervision according to their criteria and based on what they think needs to be covered. In contrast, AC staff showed more positive views about the self-directed options of PD, as the questionnaire and the interviews indicated (as will be seen in later in Section 5.7.3.2). They also believed in the power of collegiality, as they considered it to be more beneficial for them to share and learn from colleagues who are aware of the issues and challenges they encounter in their classes, and they were also aware of the taught material in their context as well. This conflict in the views of both ADs and ACs is directly affected by four main factors, namely, the PD policy in the college, staff involvement in decisions regarding their involvement in PD, internal versus external PD practices and the kind of support provided for staff PD (see Section 5.7.). I shall now present the participants views regarding these factors in further details, yet I first need to explain how the ADs and ACs' perceived their roles and responsibilities in terms of PD, why they need PD and the areas of PD.

#### **5.4. Perceived Roles and Responsibilities in terms of PD**

This section presents the findings on the roles and responsibilities of the staff for their PD, which participants discussed when defining PD.

Theme 2	Sub-themes:
Perceived roles and responsibilities in terms of PD	<b>AD staff responsibilities</b>
	1. Provide PD opportunities.
	2. Identify the staff's PD needs
	3. Provide support and encouragement
	<b>AC staff responsibilities</b>
4. Develop themselves in their profession.	
5. Take initiatives and share knowledge and ideas with others.	

**Table 5.7 Roles and responsibilities for PD**

It was indicated in Section 5.3.1 that the academics expected the management or higher authorities to provide and organise PD opportunities for them. However, the data also showed that both academic and administrative participants had opinions regarding where the responsibility for the staff's PD resides. Though they believed that the ministry in charge of the Colleges of Technology holds the major part of this responsibility, they also viewed it as a shared responsibility between both the management and the individuals themselves, as each had a role to play in this huge task. One member of the teaching staff who had recently become a member of the administrative staff described the responsibility of PD, saying, *"I think it's half and half because it is a big responsibility on both sides... I think it is a dual relationship"* (AD, INT6). This section described how the research participants viewed professional development as a responsibility of both the management and of the individuals as well.

#### **5.4.1. AD staff's responsibilities**

A number of the participants, mostly AC staff, viewed the management as being responsible for the PD provision initially. AD staff focused mainly in their organisational roles and the ELT symposium that was organised in the ELC for two years (2015 and 2016). However, participants talked about more than these roles. They summarised the AD staff's responsibilities as belonging to three areas: provision of PD opportunities, identification of and working on staff's PD needs, and providing encouragement and support. These three sub-themes are presented below.



#### 5.4.1.1. Provision of PD opportunities

Almost all the AD staff seemed to be aware of the key role they had in providing staff's PD provision, as explained by this administrative staff member

*"From the side of the management, we should provide training for that staff member either in-house or outside; outside depends on the financial matters of the College or the ministry itself - not in our hands. However, we can suggest some" (AD, INT2)*

As indicated, PD was connected to training, as explained previously in Section 5.3.1. The provision of external opportunities was conditional on the ministry's approval and financial support. Power over such issues was limited, but they were still able to suggest some PD events or training for the staff in which they could participate. Thus, administrative staff also talked about their role in informing the staff of PD offerings, stating, *"sometimes, we raise the awareness of the staff about PD inside and outside the centre" (AD, INT1)*. One of the AD staff members believed that the College should fight for their staff's rights to attend PD, saying:

*"...sometimes, I feel the College is helpless because the ministry has the power over these things, but sometimes, I feel, "What about the colleges? Why they don't fight for us? It is for your staff, for your employees; this the least that you can do for your employees" (AD, INT3)*

The majority of the participants assumed it was the College administration's responsibility to fight for their rights to obtain the maximum number of opportunities to develop professionally. For example, as a representation of this point of view, one AD staff member maintained that *"the College has a big responsibility to make sure that teachers kind of up to date of what's going on the world of EFL" (AD, INT6)*.

AC staff also agreed that *"the role of the establishment or the College is extremely important now as a leading when it comes to staff PD" (AC, FG3)*.

One example of the management's provision of PD is the ELT symposium. The majority of the AD staff focused mainly on the symposium as the main PD event conducted in the ELC; as one of them affirmed, *"I focus mainly in the symposium as a major event with regard to the staff professional development" (AD, INT1)*. However, more than half of the AC staff complained that there were almost no other

opportunities after the establishment of the symposium throughout the year, as was discussed in some of the FG interviews:

*I remember year ago, there were a lot of people come to college to speak, invited by the College management... Last year, we just had the symposium; nobody else came to speak... We had our symposium, right? What else did we have? Nothing!" (AC, FG3)*

The implication is that the management shifted their interest and efforts to the organization of the symposium only, without giving attention to other PD opportunities and activities.

#### **5.4.1.2. Identification of the staff PD needs**

Another mission of the AD staff was to identify the areas where staff might need development and then work on them by filling in staff 'gaps', as the interviewees called it, through the provision of PD tasks. This is how one of the interviewees described it:

*I think it has to be organized by the management, so it is kind of intrinsic training because you find out what is missing and what teachers are maybe lacking, and from there you are organizing workshops accordingly I suppose. (AD, INT6)*

Participants also indicated how these PD needs could be identified using several ways without relying on the teachers only to state their needs. One member of the AD staff listed the tools that were mentioned by most of the participants by stating that:

*"Management can have some tools to find out staff needs like the class observation, students' evaluation; also, we can do the training needs analysis ... Then also, from outside, they need to know what is happening, what is the best. They can also invest some time in finding out what is relevant, and they can have then a real kind of amalgamation or combination of both, so they have the teachers' views as well as what is the real need, what is more required, what is the more innovations". (AD, INT4)*

This participant specified how the management can figure out the ELC staff's PD needs. Tools vary to include classroom observation conducted by AD staff, students' evaluation of their teachers, and teachers' surveys of their training needs inside the College. Yet, they need also to extend their search outside the College and invest

some of their time to find out more about what is going on in the field, what is the best and most relevant to their institution and staff. Then they move to the next step, which is working on these needs after deciding which ones to include. It seems that AD staff were aware of the various ways to find out what areas or needs are the best match for their staff's and institution's requirements, but are these means applied in the ELC when planning PD?

The final responsibility for the AD staff is to work on the staff's needs and help them improve. In representation of the AD staff members, an interviewee described his role saying, *"based on the classroom observations, whatever gaps I observed, I tried to work on them, and I am also a member of the committee that works on the symposium"* (AD, INT5).

#### **5.4.1.3. Support and Encouragement**

One important responsibility of the AD staff discussed by the participants is to provide support and encouragement. Participants identified several ways in which management can support and facilitate PD in the College. For instance, describing how AD staff form a supervisory team when organising PD events. This is how one of the ADs put it: *"Our major role is to form a team... As a supervisory entity, we try to provide the logistic and financial needs; we also take care of the official communications"* (AD, INT1).

ADs also explained that their support for their staff's PD could vary, so if they were unable to help them find financial support, their support could be through giving them a development plan, especially when their appraisal forms showed areas of deficiencies in their performance. This process is explained here:

*"Sometimes, the teacher realizes because they are qualified and has experience in the field, they know how to improve themselves, but sometimes, it is difficult for them, so they have the peer observation; they are put with mentors, they observe the classes of others will be recommended, and we also ask them to attend workshops within the next two or three weeks"* (AD, INT4)

Thus, support could be through assistance and guidance in how teachers can improve, so they can maintain their teaching at the expected level. Another form of support is to facilitate the teachers when they need to take any development courses

through giving them time, yet their duties and teaching load remain the same. This view is represented by the following quote:

*“we support them as well when we schedule them, giving them the teaching schedule... I know these development sessions are after their classes, so we consider that when we schedule them” (AD, INT1).*

AC staff also talked about the AD staff’s roles regarding their PD. A member of staff described how majority of AC participants perceive the Ads’ roles, saying:

*“...the educational institutions in this case ... give a chance to go to a conference perfect, they motivate you to present a workshop, in the College or in conferences, right! Do small projects, and this is also a professional development” (AC, FG2)*

Such support and care towards staff PD were seen as encouragement for the AC staff, who indicated that they feel motivated once they are involved in any PD activity. One of the AC staff described her experience of this, saying:

*“In my previous workplace, I noticed a lot of PD opportunities were provided for employees; we were giving lots of things... That made me really grateful, made me loyal to my workplace and want to give more... You know, this commitment you create, really beneficial for both, the institution and the teacher as well”. (AC, FG2)*

#### **5.4.2. AC staff’s responsibilities**

Many participants from both groups talked about the academic staff’s major role in their own professional development. AC staff remarkably were very involved in the discussion of this point and stressed the importance of their involvement in this process. They believed it is essential to devote time and effort to develop in their profession. Both groups of participants also considered it important for ACs to take initiatives towards their PD. Participants also suggested that PD can be teacher-driven through collaboration, which they believed can be more effective and relevant to their classes and students. The findings here are presented in two sub-themes.

##### **5.4.2.1. Responsibility for self-development**

Both administrative and academic staff showed an understanding of the need for academic staff to take responsibility for their own professional development. As one AD stated,

*“I think you have to be independent in your learning as well. I wouldn’t expect the College to provide me with my own needs with regard to my own professional development” (AD, INT6).*

This does not mean the AD staff do not agree with their roles in the provision of PD, but they also emphasised that staff PD was the responsibility of the teachers themselves. For instance, an AD staff suggested, *“Teachers should not rely only on the sessions provided by the centre, but they can also attend others outside the College”* (AD, INT3).

Several members of the AC staff showed their awareness that they should not rely on what is provided by the College only and that they are also responsible for their PD. For example, this participant’s viewpoint represents the views of most of the respondents:

*You can’t rely just on the College’s workshops and stuff; I think you have to develop yourself because otherwise, you stagnate, and you end up not enjoying your work. Personally, I feel like I always have to learn - I can’t stop learning...I don’t feel like I am doing my best.* (AC, INT6)

Staff taking care of their own PD was also evident in the questionnaire as Table 5.8 below shows. A majority of the participants (61%) agreed that the EFL teachers can themselves take charge of their PD progress by reflecting on their teaching. The 26% who were uncertain may have had a lack of experience and confidence in their ability to take charge of their own PD.

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
EFL teachers can take charge of their own professional development through the continuous examination of their own teaching.	50 (61%)	21 (26%)	10 (12%)

**Table 5.8 AC staff’s responsibility for self-development. (n:81)**

Another aspect of the AC staff’s responsibility with regard to their PD is to be ready to change and improve, a topic the ACs discussed in a focus group interview: *“...we have to be ready, willing to clean and change, and sometimes, you have to dedicate your time, you have to share things, you need to be like generous, you have to benefit others, not only yourself”* (AC, FG2). Another member expanded on this theme saying that AC staff should also be *“willing to be open to suggestions, open to receiving new ideas, contributing to the process is very important”* (AC, FG2). AD staff also talked about the ACs’ responsibility to develop themselves in their profession as ELT teachers. They thought it was fundamental for staff to do so, as it

might affect their evaluation and job status at the College. A member of the AD staff explained that ADs have to:

*“...do a lot of reading on what do we expect from them, and the criteria of evaluation is already known to them, so they have to do a little bit of research, and they themselves have to take the responsibility. We always tell them, “Don’t depend only on us because finally you have to improve”, like, as we tell them what they need to improve, so that helps because we hardly has any terminations” (AD, INT4)*

From the administrative perspective, AC staff need to keep improving their teaching abilities to keep their job.

#### **5.4.2.2. Taking the initiative and sharing responsibilities**

The second sub-theme on AC staff’s roles in PD is to take initiatives and seek opportunities for development. AD staff, for example, encouraged AC staff to take the initiative regarding their PD and to feel confident when expressing their needs, identifying where they need to improve, as the management might be able to help them with that: *“Teachers need to express and indicates their needs; points of weakness in order to help in the provision of the required sessions that meet their needs” (AD, INT2).*

They can also contribute by giving their feedback or ideas regarding PD in the ELC. A member of the AD staff represented their views by indicating that *“...from teachers’ side, I would like teachers to participate more, you know, giving ideas” (AD, INT4).* The AD staff clearly believed that AC staff should take responsibility for identifying and addressing their own PD needs. Besides identifying their needs, AC staff were also seen as responsible for sharing their experience with others. From the AC staff interviews, staff believed collaborative, teacher-led PD to be more effective and easily implemented. A member of the ACs explained: *“Instead of bringing people from outside, people from us can actually help us more in the current situation” (AC, FG2).*

However, AD staff seemed to doubt staff’s capabilities for delivering PD sessions. One of the AD participants explained this view stating:

*“...there are ways to do it through teachers themselves... but sometimes, if all the teachers involved really don’t have the skills or the knowledge to*

*teach or achieve the objectives, then again at the end of the day, we will not achieve your main objectives... This not to say that teachers don't have knowledge, but sometimes ... for our new post-foundation courses, these courses were a bit more technical courses, and the teachers are mostly used to teach general English". (AD, INT5)*

Yet there were other AD staff members who agreed that AC staff themselves can constitute a good resource for staff PD; as one remarked, *"Experienced and senior lecturers can be a good resource with regard to the staff PD"* (AD, INT2).

While all play an important part, it is, however, the ultimate responsibility of the individual teachers to ensure that they are engaging in professional learning to continually improve their practice, especially as it is connected to their job status. However, a focus needs to be shifted to create a culture in the ELC to make sure that effective opportunities for CPD are being provided whether they are management- or teacher-led opportunities.

### 5.4.3. The Need for Professional Development

One of the dominant perspectives held by the participants, and the third theme of the findings, was that there is a growing need for professional development. They perceived PD as highly important for them as staff, for their students, and their institutions. The reasons given by the participants for the vital role of PD are presented below under the three subthemes shown in Table 5.9:

Theme 3	Sub-themes
The need for professional development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Updating teacher's knowledge of recent developments in teaching</i></li> <li>2. <i>Improving teaching practice</i></li> <li>3. <i>PD for the institutional growth</i></li> </ol>

**Table 5.9 The need for PD**

#### 5.4.3.1. Updating teachers' knowledge of recent developments in teaching

Teachers' knowledge includes a range of aspects. In the literature, it is defined as "a body of professional knowledge that encompasses both knowledge of general pedagogical principles and skills and knowledge of the subject matter to be taught" (Grossman & Richert, 1988). Thus, it comprises teachers' philosophies or methods of teaching, their teaching skills, and subject knowledge. Professional development,



as Wermke (2012) claims, serves as a tool to update teachers in these aspects and fill in the gaps in their knowledge either intentionally or accidentally. The analysis of both sets of data, that is, the questionnaire and interviews, revealed that the AC staff who participated in this study were aware of PD as a tool to update their knowledge of recent developments in teaching. For instance, one of the ACs considered PD as significant because it is a way to keep up with current teaching knowledge: *“It is important because you need to develop your own teaching skills; it is important to find out what new developments and studies are going on your field, so you can bring that to your classroom”* (AC, INT1).

Results from the questionnaire data underlined similar views of the importance of PD as indicated in Table 5.10 below:

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
PD programmes are responses to the constant changes in the knowledge base of teaching.	64 (79%)	12 (15%)	5 (6%)
PD is necessary for teachers' career advancement and promotions.	66 (%82)	9 (%11)	6 (%7)

**Table 5.10 Academic Staff's Perceptions of PD (n =81)**

The results reveal that 64 (79%) of the research participants agreed that PD provides them with knowledge of the current developments in the teaching field. A similar number (66) of the academic staff who took part in this study believed that they cannot advance in their careers unless they develop professionally.

The data from the AD interviews revealed similar views on the need for PD as a means of updating staff knowledge. Most of the academic staff thought that pursuing a higher qualification or further education is another aspect of their professional development. They suggested that their current qualifications are insufficient, and their professional growth should be continuous:

*It is not enough for a teacher to finish like master or PhDs; she or he has to continue upgrading him/herself in terms of her/his chosen profession and in this case, it is 'teaching' ... It is upgrading teachers; it is knowing what are the trends nowadays, especially in terms of teaching current trends in teaching.* (AC, INT4)

Similarly, AD staff viewed PD as essential and important especially for AC staff to update their teaching methods to more interesting and productive ones;



*“they need to use different new strategies, move away from traditional teaching styles to more updated methods” (AD, INT3).*

and as a way of addressing a changing knowledge base,

*“PD is important because the world keeps changing; it is very dynamic, so we need to keep really updated of what’s happening in the whole universe especially with teaching or even with the content” (AD, INT4).*

The focus here was in updating staff’s teaching methods and their content knowledge. The management seemed to focus more on using PD to help the AC staff attain the necessary tools for their job in the best way possible. PD was even directly defined as *“improving the lecturers’ and the staff’s abilities and capabilities of doing things in relation to their profession” (AD/INT2)*. In addition to that, another AD staff member believed that opportunities for PD can be a way for busy staff members to keep on growing and learning new things to apply in their classrooms. It was explained as follows:

*“...sometimes, teachers don’t have time to read, so professional development in terms of courses, in terms of workshops, ...can help teachers more in raising their awareness in the current teaching practices” (AD, INT3).*

It is interesting that the administrative staff focused on the aspect that PD is needed to enhance teaching practices. They accentuated this point more than the academics themselves. This might be related to the fact that the AD staff are themselves teachers who have been promoted to be administrative staff, so they presumably think about the main role of the academic staff, which is teaching.

#### **5.4.3.2. Improving teaching practice**

ACs also drew attention to how their professional development is important in satisfying and improving the teaching practice through which they can develop their students’ interests and achievements. Several participants from ACs believed that updating knowledge is required because *“some think that what we have been using as a teacher before might not be applicable now with the changing times” (AC, INT4)*. Staff PD then can be used as a tool to raise staff awareness of what methods would work better and raise the interest of the changing students. This view was furtherly elaborated by one of the participants in focus group interviews, who said, *“time is changing! We need to move with the time... The kids are coming to us from*

*different generations, so being aware of the things that are just happening related to our field” (AC, FG3).*

Through PD, teachers become familiar with innovative approaches to ELT that can make teaching and learning more interesting for both teachers and learners. This teachers’ belief was pointed out by an AC staff member, who identified PD as

*“a life learning process, it never stops ... We have to update ourselves in order to keep up and make the teaching more interesting and intellectual” (AC, FG3).*

Participants think that by keeping teachers interested in teaching, students would be more interested and learn the language more effectively, as AC staff adopt new methods and update their ELT approaches from time to time. Thus, they considered PD as a way to keep teaching exciting, thought provoking, and knowledgeable for their students.

Additionally, it was indicated by the AC staff that PD helps them reflect on their teaching. That was explained by one of the AC staff, who believed that reflection is essential and that it benefits their students:

*“We keep reflecting over teaching...how to re-teach and looking at our students’ reactions. Sometimes, the students make you feel that “No! I could have done better than this. Next time, I will change the method.” Sometimes, you choose a method, and when you apply it in the class, it doesn’t work ... Sometimes, it works like miraculously, but sometimes, it doesn’t work at all, so you try to correct yourself. That is why, sometimes, you need some guidance to do, so for that, we attend some seminars and workshops to update ourselves”. (AC, FG2)*

The data from the AD interviews revealed comparable views on the importance of PD to improve teaching practice. They agreed with the view that PD can enhance teaching methods through reflection, saying, *“PD will also help them to reflect more on what can be applied and what needs to be changed” (AD, INT3).* They also believed that once staff members have attended a PD programme, they will find out more about the new developments in the field of ELT, so they get *“updated and he/she keeps themselves apprised with the latest trends in the field” (AD, INT1).*

In addition, AD maintained that PD is also significant in improving the teaching practice through introducing the staff to various methods and techniques. Thus, PD, as indicated in following extract, helps AC staff in

*“improving his quality of teaching whether the approaches used, the techniques of classrooms management, the questioning and answering techniques, the students’ motivation” (AD, INT1).*

It can be noticed here that both teachers and administrative staff members believed that PD is essential to improve teaching quality, which can be fundamental in enhancing the students’ overall performance.

#### 5.4.3.3. Professional development for institutional growth

The participants revealed also that PD is crucial for any educational institution’s development. The analysed data from both questionnaires and interviews suggested that the significance of PD, from the AC staff’s point of view, extends to include the development of the workplace as well, that is, the educational institutions (CoTs) in this case. AC staff think of PD as a way to develop the institution to be in line with its counterparts as expressed in the following extract:

*“PD is very important because nowadays, in any organization, there should be a department like this who is responsible of following up what is new in the field, without which I think we will be out of date or behind of what is happening around” (AC, INT3)*

The data from the questionnaire also suggested similar views, as indicated in Table 5.11 below.

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
Providing EFL teachers with opportunities to develop professionally is necessary for the success of the program in which they work.	76 (94%)	2 (2%)	3 (4%)
Staff PD is necessary for the institutional development.	71 (88%)	4 (5%)	6 (7%)

**Table 5.11 Academic Staff’s Perceptions of PD (n =81)**

An overwhelming majority (93%) of the participants agreed that PD is essential for EFL teachers to do their job efficiently and for the success of the programme in

which they work. In addition, 88% of them agreed on the necessity of staff PD for developing the institutions they are working at.

AD staff members also held a similar opinion. They recognised the value of PD for their institution, asserting that *“PD plays a major role in any institution... because professional development leads to the growth of our staff in their specialisations”* (AD, INT1). One of the AD staff members gave a simple example from their experience of attending an international conference and how that benefitted not only the individual attendee but the institution as well, saying, *“It was a great conference... Their booklet is a thick one with a lot of information, and I brought it here, so we can implement some here... We came back with suggestions, so we can implement and improve ours”* (AD, INT2). This shows the importance of sharing whatever experiences or knowledge they gained with others to improve and make changes.

Most of both academic and administrative participants suggested that the benefits of PD can also extend to maintaining the quality of the institution. Quality assurance is essential in any esteemed educational institution, and in Oman, it is a gateway to receiving international academic accreditation. ACs stated how the quality assurance manual also focused on staff PD:

*“based on the quality assurance manual, teachers need to be equipped with latest trends in terms of teaching and other thing based on research by attending at least two national workshops twice a year and in the College”* (AC, INT4).

It was even reported that it is mandatory for the staff to pursue PD either inside or outside their academic institution as one of the AD staff put it:

*“In the quality assurance policy... it is mandatory in the action plan that is produced by the quality assurance a particular percentage of our teachers get training regardless of the venue, whether it's here or whether it is outside ... At the end of the year, reports are always written on how we achieved our plans, so this is always assessed whether we really managed to provide the training that we had in our plan”.* (AD, INT5)

This shows how a quality assurance audit realises the need for PD in each academic institution. They are also keen to encourage institutions and their staff to seek PD to the extent that they are evaluated on that at the end of each academic year.

To conclude this section, AC and AD staff seemed to acknowledge the importance of PD for the teachers to update their knowledge, for students' performance enhancement, and for institutional improvement. Through PD, teachers can strengthen their teaching skills and expand their pedagogical knowledge. According to both AC and AD staff, PD introduces teachers to new studies, updates their ELT approaches that in one way or another can enhance students' performance, and maintains the quality of institutions.

### 5.5. Academics' and Administrators' Views Regarding Areas of Staff Development

Areas of staff development in the staff of the English Language Centre (ELC) were investigated in this study. In this part of the study, the participants felt freer to express their PD needs and relate them to their current context probably because this side touches many aspects of their personal life and their college life. Data revealed that staff needs were diverse in nature and content. These needs that emerged from data have been classified into three categories as illustrated below in Table 5.12:

Theme 4	Sub-themes
ACs' and Ads' views of the areas of staff development.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Language-related PD needs</i></li> <li>2. <i>Pedagogical (teaching-related) PD needs</i></li> <li>3. <i>PD to overcome staff challenges</i></li> </ol>

**Table 5.12 ACs' and Ads' views of the areas of staff developments**

#### 5.5.1. Language-Related Professional Development Needs

The first theme that the staff perceived as one of their professional development (PD) needs is PD to improve their language proficiency as academics teaching English language at tertiary level; that is, the Colleges of Technology.

##### 5.5.1.1. English Language proficiency

The findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data showed that improving the staff's level of English was considered as essential especially in a place like the English Language Centre, as teachers, particularly the Omanis and other non-native speakers, need to master the English language in order to do their

job efficiently. Most of the participants perceived language proficiency and a command of the language as essential qualities for English Language teachers. The questionnaire's results indicated that the majority of the AC staff perceived improving their general English or English for Specific Purposes to be a moderate to high need as shown below:

Professional Development Needs	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
English Language courses	32 (40%)	39 (48%)	10 (12%)
ESP (English for Specific Purposes)	35 (43%)	35 (43%)	11 (14%)

**Table 5.13 Language-related PD needs (n=81)**

Thirty-two (40%) of the academic staff who participated in the study considered improving their English language as one of their main professional development needs. Besides, around half of them considered it to be a moderate need whereas only 10 (12%) considered it to be a low need, most of whom probably who had English as a first language. The contributions from the administrative and academic staff in the interviews supported these findings. For instance, the AC staff explained that they needed development in this area, as they need the language not only to communicate with each other but most importantly for their teaching profession. Additionally, the language level of the AC staff at the centre seemed to be a concern for the AD staff as was highlighted by a member of the admin staff, who said,

*"...there are a number of teachers whose language level is not up to the standard level, so maybe they need to be given a bit more training in terms of language itself"* (AD, INT4).

#### **5.5.1.2. English for Specific Purposes**

Another aspect of the English language that attracted considerable attention from the research participants, particularly the academic staff, is strengthening their English for Specific Purposes (ESP) knowledge. A majority of the participants believed that such knowledge is essential for a context like the Colleges of Technology where students are supposed to be equipped with the language and skills needed for their technological specialisations. This is specifically relevant to the AC staff, who teach post-foundation (PF) students (i.e., students who have already started their

academic study in their diverse technical majors). The following statement by a member of the academic staff represents this view of most of the academic staff:

*Professional development in ESP is needed especially for post-foundation teachers. In the foundation, the language we use is something between general English and ESP; we need to introduce a few things from ESP ... It is not school anymore. (AC, INT6)*

This participant talked about the need for AC staff to have good ESP to cope with their students' needs. They need it to be able to introduce ESP to their students in the colleges to fulfil their needs and current levels. A member of the academic staff elaborated:

*Since we are dealing with different students, and they have different needs and specializations, and if you would cater to their needs and what they want, then they will be motivated to learn, and they will be more interested because the things we are discussing in the class are the things they are truly in need for their specializations. (AC, INT4)*

She explained it is important for the AC staff to improve their knowledge of ESP so they can teach the English language to their students with reference to the particular vocabulary and skills in relation to their majors and future jobs. This may justify why almost 86% of the academic staff found ESP a high need for their professional development, as shown in Table 5.13.

As ESP is mostly needed in the post foundation programme, a member of the AC staff argued that the foundation year programme (FYP) and post-foundation year programme (PFYP) are similar in terms of presenting materials to the class, yet in PFYP, especially in the context of technical colleges, they use:

*“the language that addresses more their majors rather than just general English like the foundation; they have technical writing, so how you write for science is different from the way you write for photography: the kind of reports you do, the language they use, they aren't the same”. (AC, INT1)*

This member of staff believed that as PFY students have technical writing, so the language differs from one major to another, which urges the teachers to have a good level of ESP to be able to manage. They need to have the required knowledge in order to fulfil their duty and students' requirements.

In the light of that, another point raised by some of the participants teaching the PF students is that the professional development needs of PF AC staff might differ from those teaching in the foundation year. For instance, a member of the AC staff

suggested that the offered PD should not mix between the foundation (FYP) and post-foundation (PFYP) staff members in its content saying:

*There should be a clear division between each section's needs, as, for example, they teach general English in the foundation program while it is 'Technical writing' and 'public speaking' that are taught on the post-foundation programme. These courses are quite different and more towards ESP. (AC, INT3)*

Thus, this participant added, *"The language differs; the ability of the teachers and the material taught all are different"* (AC, INT3). The AC staff agreed with this view and further elaborated that they needed to be equipped with appropriate ESP knowledge before taking any further step to teach in the PFYP. The differences in the language needs between the FYP and PFYP teachers were also mentioned by the AD staff; as one explained, *"In post-foundation, they (teachers) need training also on how to teach the technical part in the curriculum, which is not applicable to the foundation because over there, they just teach general English skills"* (AD, INT5).

### 5.5.2. Staff Pedagogical (Teaching-related) PD

The second major theme regarding PD needs was the teaching-related needs. There was a consensus among the participants from both groups, AD and AC staff, that developing teaching-related knowledge and skills is a very important aspect in their professional development as teachers. Respondents mentioned five aspects with regard to the pedagogical needs, as Table 5.14 illustrates:

Subthemes	Categories
Staff's pedagogical needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PD in teaching methods and approaches</li> <li>2. Teaching certified courses</li> <li>3. Curriculum development</li> <li>4. Assessment</li> <li>5. Time and classroom management</li> </ol>

**Table 5.14: Aspects of the staff's pedagogical needs**

Each of these categories is discussed in detail in the following sections supported by evidence from both sets of data.



#### 5.4.2.2. PD in teaching methods and approaches

Both sets of data indicated that staff's PD should involve aspects that help staff members improve their teaching skills and introduce them to new trends as regards teaching methods and approaches in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Table 5.15 demonstrates how this view was quantitatively indicated by the participants.

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Using appropriate teaching method(s)	38 (47%)	27 (33%)	16 (20%)
Strategies to teach language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening)	38 (47%)	27 (33%)	16 (20%)

**Table 5.15: Pedagogical needs**

It shows that the almost half of AC staff who participated considered professional development in how to use suitable teaching techniques as a high need and 27 (33%) considered it to be a moderate need by, while only 16 (20%) thought that it was a low/no need. A high percentage of the respondents 38 (47%) also believed PD in approaches to teaching English to be a high to moderate need whereas only 16 (20%) of them regarded it as a low/no need. The results indicate how essential this aspect is to most of the academics who participated in the questionnaire. The 20% of the respondents who found teaching approaches to be a low/no need could be the ones who thought themselves experienced enough and thought they knew how to teach so they did not believe that changing their teaching style was worth trying.

Findings from the qualitative data also indicated the need for staff PD to cover teaching aspects that most ELT teachers would need. A member of the administrative staff remarked that the ELC staff's PD practices needed to focus on aspects such as the following: *“Reading techniques, listening techniques... the general English language skills... different techniques of teaching these skills, also activities like the learning activities needed, peer work and group work”* (AD, INT3). This participant further elaborated that it is not only about techniques or strategies to

teach language skills but also about how and why to engage the learners with activities that incorporate peer work or group work, for example.

Similarly, AC staff showed their interest in learning more and developing their teaching skills through PD. They expressed their need for PD that would help them learn new strategies that can be applied in their classrooms. A member of the academics highlighted this point of view:

*“It is more of strategies, how the teacher would be able to, for example, make a good strategy by which this task is achieved without appearing like heavy, so it is like how to incorporate some kind of interest to the students who are learning a difficult topic for instance”.* (AC, FG3)

From this participant’s point of view, lecturers need PD that provides them with the kind of strategies that will help them not only make things easier and more interesting for their students, but also with strategies that will enable them to solve the issues they face in their classrooms and with their students. The student-centred approach, for instance, was one of these teaching approaches that was recurrently mentioned by the AC and AD staff as well. Almost half of the academic staff identified the implementation of a student-centred approach as a high need.

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Adopting a ‘student-centred’ approach	40 (49%)	30 (37%)	11 (14%)

**Table 5.16 Pedagogical needs**

One of the justifications of the teachers’ high need for this approach could be that the implementation and adoption of a student-centred approach is one of the criteria used to evaluate the academic staff at the ELC in particular and the College in general. A member of the AD staff, in a representation of this view, pointed out:

*“We need to focus on the teaching methods and approaches like the student-centred approach because that is the main role we have to focus on once appraising our staff members, so that is a focal point if we can call it”.* (AD, INT1)

Thus, it is not surprising that a student-centred approach is one of the goals in the Centre’s strategic plans that is approved by the ministry, as one of the administrative staff explained:

*“Talking about student-centred learning, what we have is only on our strategic plan; there is a well-set goal by everybody. Ministry was the one who has actually approved it, that is how it came into existence. That is how the focus is now on the student-centred approach”. (AD, INT4)*

However, she clarified that it is not easy to implement it in the ELC with the Omani students, but teachers can use some techniques to shift the focus from teacher-centred classes to more of student-centred lessons. She explained:

*“When we talk about the student-centred approach, the whole system itself doesn’t support that... For the students, the actual meaning for that, you know, is the students studying on their own, studies what he or she wants... but what we have the students centred learning in the sense that the students is the focus in any method; the teacher uses basically; the strategies and the techniques that the teacher uses like not more of pulling down, more of eliciting or group activities, there are different techniques”. (AD, INT4)*

Although it is a stated college goal, it is not easy to apply such an approach in a context like the Omani Colleges of Technology where most of the students are passive learners. Nevertheless, this interviewee still believed that PD could help them achieve such an application.

Strategies to teach grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation were also perceived as a high need for the ELC academic staff development. Table 5.17 below illustrates the participants’ views with regard to this point:

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Strategies to teach grammar	38 (47%)	27 (33%)	16 (20%)
Strategies to teach vocabulary items	(47%)	(31%)	(20%)
Strategies to teach pronunciation	40 (49%)	26 (32%)	14 (17%)

**Table 5.17 Pedagogical needs**

Interviews with the participants highlighted the areas of teaching grammar and pronunciation as well. Teaching grammar was the least favourite among some staff

members; as one of the AC staff stated: *“Most of the teachers here, they don’t like to teach grammar”* (AC, FG1). That is why they called for PD that focuses on practical tips that make it easier and more interesting for the staff members to teach grammar and for the students to grasp it. For the pronunciation aspect, the AC staff pointed out that PD in teaching pronunciation is also essential in language teaching, and staff PD plans need to highlight this aspect as well. For instance, one of the academics remarked,

*“We need professional development on how to teach pronunciation; we need to work on pronunciation because students feel uncomfortable when they in the class and they mispronounce a word”* (AC, INT4).

Moreover, one of the questionnaire items broached the area of innovative teaching approaches. Interestingly, the results, as shown in Table 5.18 below,

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Realization of innovative teaching methods	42 (52%)	32 (40%)	7 (8%)

**Table 5.18 Pedagogical needs**

indicated that half of the respondents (42: 52%) considered there is a high need for professional development to introduce and teach academic staff the new or modern teaching methods. In contrast, only 40% of them considered that to be a moderate need, and only 8% of them thought of it as a low need with regard to their professional development. Staff who considered it a moderate or low need might be the older members who would prefer to continue using what they are accustomed to and of the traditional teaching approaches. Sometimes, it can also be about experience where staff believe they know better how things work and what suits their students whereas younger staff members, especially those who lack experience, are more open to change and more willing to update their teaching methods. A member of the AC staff highlighted, *“I think we need to know the up-to-date information of what is going on in the EFL world”* (AC, INT6).

In addition, the findings show that PD also needs to include aspects like how to incorporate the College’s facilities in teaching, in particular, technology. Technology is one example of the facilities provided in the ELC in the forms of computer laboratories and smart boards. There are also self-access centres, which have

variety of educational books, and the American corner, which provides hard audio and visual or video resources. Yet, there was no mention of these two centres in the interview data. Largely, their need for PD in how to use technology to aid teaching and learning was considered by most of the academics as Table 5.19 shows:

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Using information technologies to support teaching and learning processes	37 (46%)	37 (46%)	7 (8%)

**Table 5.19 Pedagogical needs**

It can be seen that a significant proportion (74) of the questionnaire’s respondents considered this a high to moderate need for them, and only 7 disagreed; they might be staff who prefer the traditional style of teaching. The qualitative data also showed that AC staff emphasised this area. For instance, one stressed that *“staff professional development needs to focus on how to use technology in the classroom and how to get it work here”* (AC, INT3). Another AC staff member questioned that since each classroom at the ELC is provided with smart boards, so *“those smart boards are there to decorate the classes or what?”* They continued,

*“They should make use of these things... Technology can help teachers deliver the materials in more interesting way for the students. Ok, there are like online apps to use; how can you use them if the technology is not there or if they don’t know how to use them?”* (AC, INT6)

This participant indicated how beneficial technology could be to teaching practice. In their opinion, students become more interested in the lesson content when technology is integrated. It also helps in keeping the students engaged, which can result in more students-centred classes.

#### **5.4.2.3. The need for teaching certified courses like CELTA and DELTA**

The second point that was raised by the interviewed academic staff particularly is the need for certified courses, and they mentioned the CELTA and DELTA courses as examples. In a focus group discussion, for example, a member of the academics stated:

*"I would love to do the DELTA; this is my dream, but it is the time factor - time money energy and everything. But why technical colleges - when you say technical colleges it is a big thing - why can't they help us to take the DELTA course?" (AC, FG1)*

This member was eager to do the DELTA course to develop in her profession, but she found that the surrounding atmosphere does not support her ambition. Instead, issues like getting finance and the workload prevent achieving her goal. Another member of the academic staff, one of the EFL lecturers in the same group, also highlighted the importance of CELTA and DELTA courses for them, as they said:

*"It is like PD is expected from us, but the kind other than random workshops here and there, something really fruitful is not provided... Certified courses are more valuable, so planning like certified courses for one or two days at least are more valuable especially if conducted by people who have been in the field or has their master's". (AC, FG1)*

In fact, the issue of certified courses, like the CELTA or DELTA courses, emerged later during interviews with AD staff, who stated that it was a requirement for some academics after their appraisals. One of the administrators explained:

*"Staff who score below average once we visit their classes... we give them a second visit within two to three weeks. If the same remains, we advise that staff member to take some of the staff development courses like CELTA, DELTA and some other courses like TEFAL, so we encourage them to take these courses". (AD, INT1)*

Thus, staff are encouraged to take these certified courses when their evaluation is not up to the expected level. Yet when they were asked about the kind of support the administration can offer for the staff so they can accomplish that, it was revealed that the provision or the financial support is not provided. The only support they receive is through giving them a period of time to finish the course and arrange their timetables in a way that allows them to attend their course. One of the AD staff explained:

*We give them a period of time, they keep teaching here, but we postpone our third visit to a period of time ... We support them as well when we schedule them... I know these development sessions are after their classes, so we consider that when we schedule them. (AD, INT1)*

However, the data showed that academics thought that was not enough. They claimed that some staff who enrolled in such courses sometimes had to cancel and stop their CELTA and DELTA courses because of the lack of support, their heavy

workload, and the difficulty in getting permission to attend the courses. A member of the academic staff described her experience and frustration saying:

*“I wanted to go to a DELTA course this semester. I couldn’t because it starts few days before the end of the semester, but we are done with the exams. They could have let me go, but NO, the system doesn’t allow that...It is like... they want to make an omelette but not break any eggs... operate yourself ... We just want the results”.* (AC, INT6)

#### **5.4.2.4. Training in curriculum development and delivery**

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed the AC staff also need to develop their abilities and skills to deliver, design, and develop curricula through PD. Currently, the AC staff seemed to be confused about the new curriculum introduced at the ELC. A member of the administrators suggested, *“I think teachers need some training on how to use the new materials, so they can deliver the material as they should”* (AD, INT3). However, Most of the academic staff complained about the lack of clarity. One of the AC staff described the situation as follows:

*“To be honest, I don’t think the people planning the curriculum are very clear, and that is where the problem is, and the questions that we are getting in the exams don’t match what we are teaching in the classrooms like there is divide between the two!”* (AC, INT1)

This means that the materials taught in these classes are used to achieve a pre-designed syllabus that is prepared by elites at the ministry level "who do the thinking while teachers are reduced to doing the implementing" (Giroux, 1988, p. 124). Al Riyami (2016) describes the effects of such a situation in the ELCs by indicating that the emphasis is on learning vocabulary lists and grammar forms without real meanings or contexts. Yet, teachers have to depend heavily on the textbooks to teach since the assessment is based on their content. Therefore, the participants, especially academics, emphasised the need for PD in relation to the curriculum design for the administrative staff, who are the decision makers, planners, and sometimes also the trainers. A member of the academic staff remarked, *“They need to be trained in the curriculum development, or they need to bring in someone who knows how to do curriculum development”* (AC, INT3).

The training they asked for is not only in the hard copies of the books; they also insisted on training in the use of the software attached to the books. The participants

felt that the current generation of students tends to pay more attention to the technological part of the materials. One member of the academic staff reported:

*“There is a lot of technology attached to the books, and no one is using it, and teachers think it is an option to use the technological side of this thing... It is not; it should not be... They should train everyone on how to use those books. The new listening book we have actually is interactive, so if we knew how to use the smart boards, so you can put that online section on the board properly... We are not using it... And oh!! They didn’t buy the online content by the way”. (AC, INT6)*

This participant claims here that it is obligatory for the academics to pay more attention to the software attached to the course books. The Centre’s administration should organize workshops and PD sessions to develop the staff’s technological skills to enable them to use such technology adequately. These qualitative findings were confirmed by the statistical results from the questionnaire as Table 5.20 below shows.

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Curriculum development/ syllabus design	33 (41%)	33 (41%)	15 (18%)

**Table 5.20 Pedagogical needs**

The findings indicate that 33 (41%) of the respondents from the academic staff regarded professional development in curriculum development and syllabus design as a high need. Besides, almost the same percentage thought of it as a moderate need while only 15 out of the 81 participants put it as a low need for their PD. The participants who believed this aspect to be a low need for PD could be those who prefer to be recipients of ready-made materials rather than participants in the process of designing and developing extracurricular materials. Academics also indicated their need for professional development that would help them prepare for their course lessons. Of the 81 respondents, 60 considered that to be a high to moderate need while 21 of the respondents regarded it as a low or no need. This group was the experienced teachers; such teachers usually do not appreciate anyone telling them how to prepare their lessons at this stage of their career.



#### 5.4.2.5. Training on assessment and on how to write good exam items

The fourth significant point highlighted in relation to the teaching staff's PD needs was assessment. Both AC and AD staff, as indicated in the survey and interview data, showed an interest in having PD that helps them assess their students' achievements and grade them adequately. For the questionnaire, half of the respondents categorised professional development in assessment as a high need, as indicated in Table 5.21 below.

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Using an appropriate assessment method to evaluate student learning	42 (52%)	25 (31%)	14 (17%)

**Table 5.21 Staff pedagogical needs**

Besides, one third of the participants classified assessment as a moderate need whereas a minority, about 17%, considered it a low or no need. The latter group could be those who think that assessment is the job of the exam coordinators rather than theirs, and that therefore it is the coordinators who need such development, but not the teachers.

In the qualitative findings, both the AC and AD staff members mentioned this aspect in the interviews I conducted with them. They believed that assessment should become another main issue that needs to be taken into account when planning staff PD. One side of the issue was giving students marks. One of the AC raised the following issue, saying,

*“...some people are spoon-feeding the students; they may do anything to make the students pass, short of helping the students, and they don't actually help them” (AC, INT6).*

This lecturer indicated an issue with how the staff members assessed the students in their written or oral performance. They needed PD to train them in how to become more professional and objective when grading their students. Another lecturer saw that such an issue might be attributed to the large numbers of writing course assignments and exam papers that teachers need to mark. This participant

exclaimed, *“How can teachers be fair to all!!”*. Thus, PD is needed to help them deal with large numbers of students:

*“We need PD on how to deal with great number of students, what are the strategies to teach and assess a large number of students specifically in the writing class because it is really a tough job... because if count the number of papers you will mark, and it is one week after another... plus the fact that you are teaching a large number of students”*. (AC, INT3)

This participant, like many others, called for PD that would help her to deal with large numbers of students in the classroom for teaching and marking especially in the writing classes and for marking exam papers. The administrators expressed their agreement with the academics' point of view and elaborated further on other aspects of assessment. They believed that lecturers should be trained on *“how to write exam items; that is very, very important. I guess this one is of the main needs of our teachers”* (AD, INT5).

This seemed to be a concern not only for the AD staff but also for the AC staff, as they had received relatively little or no training or information on how to write effective or appropriate test questions. Even the exam coordinators themselves believed that they needed PD on how to construct exams, which is their main task in the college. One of them stated, *“What I would like is someone who is experienced in CFI, specifically with listening, to give me some advices and guidelines because you have to write your exams according to balance and levels”* (AD, INT6).

The interviewee explained that the centre is currently following a new system and is implementing changes in the curricula; thus, it is normal that the staff members call for PD that guides them through all the aspects, one of which is assessment.

#### **5.4.2.6. Time and Classroom Management**

The final element of the staff's pedagogical PD needs that emerged from the obtained data were time and classroom management. Teachers are now facing larger numbers of students and more diverse classrooms, which if not dealt with appropriately might affect the quality of their teaching. The interviewees expressed their desire to have PD in both areas, namely, time and classroom management.

One of the academics illustrated this view through describing her experience with time management of the course as frustrating. She explained:

*“Sometimes, it is frustrating because we are having ‘learning outcomes’ to cover, we have exams, and all of this put pressure on you, and you really don’t do the language teaching the way it should be because it should be about communication, expressing themselves whether orally or in writing forms”. (AC, INT6)*

The time-management of the course seemed to be challenging for the AC staff. They found it difficult to cover the course learning outcomes, prepare the students for the exams, and teach them the language communicatively in a short period of time. Another member of the AC staff had a similar perspective. She emphasised this point saying:

*“When you are asked to cover certain target language in a certain period of time, it is not realistic... You feed the students... We are really stressed because we have to prepare our students for the exams, and we are wondering why our students can’t produce a correct sentence in English because...we don’t teach them English we don’t get chance to prepare them for the real life of English”. (AC, FG1)*

It seems that teachers found it difficult to manage under the current time constraints, as they have no control over the delivery plans, which are decided by the management. Yet, they thought that PD could help reduce this frustration by equipping them with the techniques and strategies to overcome the challenge of time management issues. A similar point of view was expressed in the questionnaire data, as can be seen in Table 5.22 below:

<b>PD related to teaching methods and approaches</b>	<b>High need</b>	<b>Moderate need</b>	<b>Low/no need</b>
Time management techniques of the class/course	31 (38%)	27 (33%)	23 (29%)
Classroom management	31 (38%)	25 (31%)	25 (31%)

Table 5.22 Staff pedagogical needs

The statistical results show that professional development for time management of the course was seen as a high need by almost 40% of the respondents and categorised as a moderate need by 33%. As mentioned earlier, this could be attributed to the fact that teachers find it difficult to manage the time for the courses,

as they have no control over designing the materials to be taught in these courses. Surprisingly, the percentage of those who thought of it as a low or no need was also high (29%). Classroom management was also another concern for the ELC academic staff. A similar number to the participants expressed their concerns regarding classroom management as expressed their concern with regard to time management of the course. This aspect of classroom management was classified by 68% of the respondents in the range of a high to moderate need for the staff's professional development, which could be attributed to the diverse background of the students and the large numbers of students in each classroom. However, a high percentage (31%) considered it a low or no need. A member of the academic staff illustrated his concern by stating:

*“Discipline is a huge thing, like, you don’t expect to deal with some of the discipline issues that you do in the College here, so I think teachers get like a bit frustrated with that so would like to know how to deal with that... This is rarely covered here as professional development”. (AC, INT2)*

AC staff claimed that they are rarely provided with PD that covers these aspects of classroom management and discipline. A member of the AC staff emphasised, *“We have also that thing of discipline... We are focused in passing the students not teaching them”* (AC, INT6). She thought that discipline is not given enough attention, and the main focus for the AC staff is to have their students pass the exams.

### **5.5.3. PD to overcome staff challenges**

The participating ELC staff members highlighted that they needed professional development that would help them reach their students, understand them, and recognise and fulfil their needs. They pointed out that students' needs require consideration when it comes to staff PD. Staff thought that would help them improve their students' learning outcomes as well as their classroom behaviour and study habits. As a representation of this viewpoint, a member of the AC staff highlighted the importance of staff awareness and understanding of their students, stating,

*“Understanding the students is very important. With time passes, things change; you can see that during the classes, the kind of topics they discuss - we have to be aware of them”* (AC, FG3).

This participant exemplified her concerns by the changes teachers may encounter because of the rapidly changing world. Thus, generally speaking, staff need PD to help them adapt to such changes and deal with various generations with different ways of thinking, different habits, and multiple interests. One of the academics expressed a similar perspective saying that they needed PD which would cover the various daily-life aspects and would help them understand how to deal with their various students' psychological concerns:

*“We work with young people; we have to get updated, upgraded, improved every day, and it is not only technology, science, and language teaching, but it is also psychology, the attitude to the students and to their performance”. (AC, FG2)*

It seems that teachers were able to realize what they lacked in their context. For example, they mentioned that they needed PD to cover aspects which would help them accomplish their mission as academics in the best way possible to suit their students' thinking, attitude, and habits. The participants highlighted their need for PD that would help them develop in such aspects as detailed in Table 5.23:

Sub-theme	Categories
PD to overcome staff challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. PD to motivate students</li> <li>2. PD to help students with special needs</li> <li>3. PD in cultural differences</li> <li>4. PD to deal with low level students</li> <li>5. PD in psychology</li> </ol>

Table 5.23 PD that helps teachers overcome challenges with students

### 5.5.3.1. PD to motivate students

Most of the interviewed academics expressed their need to learn more how to reach their students, motivate them and attract their attention and interest to learn. They called for professional development that provides them with strategies for motivating students to learn. One of the academics remarked, *“I need workshops on how to deal with teenagers, how to make them more engaged, how to motivate them, more student-centred approaches, sessions”* (AC, FG3).

The issue of motivating students and how it seemed to be challenging for the teachers was revealed in the group discussions as well. For instance, one of the academics stated,

*“My concern has always been how to motivate students because our students tend to be quite lazy, and that is the biggest problem that we always face here... I want to learn something that helps me motivating my students” (AC, FG2).*

The participants regarded PD to help with that to be significant to the ELC staff. The statistical results confirmed that as shown in Table 5.24 below:

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Motivating students to learn English	38 (47%)	26 (32%)	17 (21%)

**Table 5.24 Motivating students to learn English**

The highest percentage of the questionnaire participants (47%) classified PD to motivate the students to learn as a high need, while 32% of them considered it a moderate need and 21% as a low or no need. The high percentage of participants who thought they did not need this kind of PD could be relatively attributed to the possibility that some of these staff had confidence in their ability to manage motivating their students. Another possibility is that some teachers did not give much attention to this issue, as they believed that students should be intrinsically not extrinsically motivated.

Similarly, the administrative staff also showed their awareness of the significance of motivation to the students as well as the academics themselves. A member of the AD staff extended the limits of motivation and elaborated upon this, saying, *“The teachers’ PD needs is not only restricted to teaching; they have the other areas, for example ... there is motivation; it can be students’ motivation as well as teachers’ motivation”* (AD, INT5). This participant considered motivation as necessary for both sides - the students and the staff - as it drives them to give more.

#### **5.4.2.2. PD to help students with special needs**

Another challenge that was highlighted by the ELC staff was how to support special needs students. After the inclusion programme in the Sultanate of Oman, students with special needs are now admitted to schools and colleges just like their counterparts. However, there were no specialised teachers who could recognise these students’ special needs and thus give them the support they require. The

academics were not prepared to deal with students with special needs, so they thought PD to help staff with that was necessary in their institution, as they had faced a number of cases. AC staff's responses showed that many of them did not feel well-equipped to deal with these learners. They needed PD that would help in understanding their needs and accordingly improve their learning outcomes. One of the academics, for example, in a representation of these staff's point of view highlighted the requirements to provide extra support for these students or to recruit teachers specialised in teaching students with special needs, saying:

*"They should be given extra help. I know that our exam coordinator sent for special needs teachers, and they were sent like two or three times, and every time, it was rejected; the College refused to bring in a special needs teacher to help the kids with special needs". (AC, INT1)*

It seems that the higher authorities in the College do not pay much attention to this issue, which is an issue of concern for the academics, who are the ones who deal directly with the students with special needs. One of the academics elaborated:

*"You have really good students, but on the other hand you have those who hardly understand what are you saying, so we require alternative strategies in which you sometimes have to work effectively and efficiently with both groups in your group, so PD should show us how to do that". (AC, FG2)*

The questionnaire data showed how much attention was attributed to this issue by the AC staff and their eagerness to learn more about how to deal with this category of students (see Table 5.24. below).

PD related to teaching methods and approaches	High need	Moderate need	Low/no need
Dealing with special needs students	47 (58%)	29 (36%)	5 (6%)

**Table 5.25 Dealing with special needs students**

More than half of the participants (58%) considered professional development on how to help students with special needs as a high need whereas 36% regarded it as a moderate need and only 5 out of the 81 participants considered it as a low or no need as the table above shows. Special needs students are another aspect that needs attention in the staff development process. However, this is an issue that needs to be given more consideration not only at the CoTs but also at all the



institutions around the Sultanate because it is not fair to neglect these students rather than supporting them.

#### 5.4.2.3. PD in cultural differences

Cultural differences between students and teachers appeared to be an issue in the College. According to the data from the interviews, it was reported as challenging for some of the AC staff especially for the non-Omani staff members. They had come to the Sultanate of Oman, which was a new country for them, with different religions, language, traditions and habits, and different rules as well. They thought it a good idea to allocate some of the professional development sessions for induction and to raise their awareness of the cultural difference and guide them on how to deal with issues they may encounter. For instance, the AC staff expressed their need to have PD that would introduce them to their students' native language and how it differs from English. This view can be seen in the following complaint from a member of the academic staff, who stated:

*“Unfortunately, I have not attended any workshop related to Arabic interference over language two, language one interference over language two... Either you don't have this kind of studies or for reasons there are difficult to present, but we need to know; even non-Arabic speakers, it would good to know the structure of Arabic sentence to avoid mistakes in the future when teaching English”. (AC, INT3)*

This interviewee agreed with the other participants in requesting PD sessions that would familiarise them with the Arabic language to understand the similarities and differences, which might be involved in the mistakes students make.

Another cultural issue that foreign staff were not aware of is the gender-segregated education that is applied in the Omani school whereby girls and boys do not attend the same class in schools. This issue was addressed by the academic staff, who found it difficult to help them work together, as their experience had affected their college learning, as one of the AC staff explained:

*“My other challenge is boys and girls in the same group. The problem is they were separated in the school... Now, when they come to college, girls and boys feel shy; they don't want to show they know or they don't know, so you lose them because they just don't want to say they don't understand... So, I*



*really do want to know how to work with boys and girls in one classroom because it is not a problem back home". (AC, FG2)*

This illustrates one example of the cultural difference and how this experience affected college learning. They asked for PD that would provide them with strategies or techniques to encourage participation and group work. One of the lecturers, for example, had joined the ELTPN, the English Language Professional Network organized by the British Council in Oman, which she thought would be a good way to help her cope with the new culture in Oman and understand her context more. She shared her experience saying, *"One way of up-lifting my self is by joining that group... That is what keeps me updated with what is happening specifically in Oman in terms of dealing with students"* (AC, INT4).

Another point raised by the AC staff is discipline. They needed to know more about dealing with discipline and what teaching styles would work best with Arab Omani students, as one of them demonstrated:

*"Dealing with discipline, for example, or you know, different teaching methodologies for Arabic students; that kind of thing is, I guess, part of the professional development, tailoring it to the people's careers in that place, so it depends in the context". (AC, INT2)*

One of the basic discrepancies in such contexts is the difference in educational methods. Teachers sometimes find it difficult to match the Western methods of learning that they had studied and which place greater emphasis on students learning to think for themselves and how to acquire, process, and present objective information, with the learning methods of Arab-speaking students like Omanis where the educational systems are still more based on traditional rote learning. This difference in pedagogic approach is one of the first obstacles to overcome, as the students do not have study skills appropriate for the Anglo-Saxon educational system.

#### **5.4.2.4. PD to deal with low level students**

Another challenge where staff thought professional development was needed is dealing with low-level students. This issue is not unexpected because the Colleges of Technology accept students with low grades on the Higher Diploma programme.

This is what many of the research participants highlighted as an issue that needed to be resolved by their PD: *“Low level students is great challenge; we need to find out ways of helping them to cope with other students”* (AC, FG2). A member of the academic staff suggested that low-level students needed more effort and materials than what was provided for other students. She elaborated, *“Some of the students that come in are extremely low, and they are going to need just more than the kind of teaching the curriculum they are getting at the moment”* (AC, INT1).

Staff called for PD that would guide them and supply them with different kinds of strategies and methods to motivate this category of students to learn more inside and outside their classroom. One of the participants remarked,

*“My first challenge is low level students, activities or techniques to keep them learning not only in the class but also after the class and encourages them to do their homework and encourage/motivate them”* (AC, INT3).

On the other hand, some of the academic staff in the same group focused on passing these students. One of the staff commented, *“One thing that I am interested in is how to help low-level students, how to help them reach the possible passing grade”* (AC, FG3).

This could be attributed to the fact that the ELC’s administration, at the end of each semester, focuses on the number of students who pass in each class, and sometimes it ends up with the teacher being the one blamed if the students fail. Academic staff also addressed another issue they faced with their students, which is the lack of knowledge in the different fields. As one of the staff explained:

*“If I could get my students to broaden their knowledge because that is one area where the problem is... Most of them have nothing to fall back on; they don’t have any background knowledge of anything, which is difficult... You use a topic to teach a skill, you start explaining the topic itself, you explain the words, and you are not in your lesson yet, so it just distracts the lesson”.* (AC, INT6)

They argued that students’ low proficiency in English is a crucial factor influencing how much knowledge they have or can understand about the topics of their courses. Teachers thus thought that because of the students’ low level, some of the topics were very challenging for the students. For instance, it takes time for students to

write a long essay about some topics because they have little or no background information about them. Al-Azmi (2016) also mentioned similar findings in his study about Kuwaiti technical context. Academics mostly believed that they needed PD that would develop their skills and widen their knowledge with regard to how they can deal with students' lack of competency and devise ways to encourage them to widen their knowledge, to learn and equip them with what they need as college students.

#### 5.4.2.5. PD in psychology

The ELC staff also expressed a need for some professional development in psychology. A number of participants in this study highlighted the importance of understanding their students, their distinctive mental abilities, and their different learning pace, especially for the age group they are teaching. One of the interviewees clarified that it is important to

*“learn not only the techniques, procedures, ways of teaching but also the latest development in the psychology especially because of the age group of the students we are teaching”* (AC, FG2).

Some of the academic staff explained that adolescents might require more care and understanding than other age groups. That is why they talked about their need to know more about their thinking, preferences, interests, and learning challenges. For instance, as one of the AC staff put it:

*“We need to go for or use what they like, what they are interested on, and then sometimes, we need PD to cover the classroom management as well because, you know, they are teens, and they are hyperactive. I need workshops on how to deal with teenagers, how to make them more engaged, how to motivate them”.* (AC, FG2)

Staff stressed that educational psychology would help them resolve many of the challenges they may face in their classrooms such as mixed ability classes, as one of the participants elaborated:

*“The pedagogical psychological aspect of teaching, like, there are some new developments in psychology, right! What are they? How do we use them to reach the students as we have mixed-levels groups? Ok, how do we work so we do not work ourselves out and the students do not get frustrated because they cannot catch with the good ones or those excellent ones get bored*

*because the teacher is working with those poor students? I would be very happy to know how to do that". (AC, INT3)*

In contrast, a member of the administrative staff showed her awareness that staff's PD needs were not restricted to pedagogical needs, but she also highlighted some areas of the psychological aspects as well.

*"The teachers' needs are not only restricted to teaching; they have the other areas, like, for example, how to manage stress. Then there is motivation; it can be students' motivation as well as teachers' motivation, 'stress management', and then how to manage troublemakers in the class". (AD, INT4)*

#### 5.5.4. Other PD related to the students

The questionnaire data suggested that the staff members, as shown in Table 5.26 below suggested other significant PD needs with regard to the students.

Students' needs, wants, and learning styles	High	Moderate	Low/no need
Developing students' problem-solving skills	44 (54%)	24 (30%)	13 (16%)
Communicating interactively with students	30 (37%)	27 (33%)	24 (30%)
Providing feedback to students about their learning progress	33 (41%)	25 (31%)	23 (28%)
Developing students' critical thinking skills	47 (58%)	26 (32%)	8 (10)
Identifying students' needs before and during the course	37 (45%)	30 (37%)	14 (17%)

**Table 5.26 Student-related PD needs (n =81)**

The AC staff surveyed through the questionnaire rated developing students' critical thinking and problem solving skills as a high need for them; 82% of the participants considered being able to identify the students' needs as a high to moderate PD need. Other aspects of communicating interactively with students and providing feedback to them about their learning process were also identified in the questionnaire. There was no significant difference between the 'high' and 'low' PD need columns. A plausible explanation for this may be that, previously, many of the AC staff may have thought that they faced no issue in communicating interactively with the students whereas latterly, the reason could refer to the feedback culture at the College in particular and the educational institutions in Oman in general, as not much importance is given to this aspect in particular.

## 5.5. Staff experiences of PD in the Colleges of Technology

The fifth section of the findings is concerned with the ELC staff's experiences of PD; their insights about the PD practices offered to them by the College were investigated in this study to better understand the PD provision in the CoTs. Data from the questionnaires and from individual and focus group interviews showed conflicts in some aspects regarding respondents' views of their PD experiences in the College. Generally speaking, the data revealed that most of the administrative (AD) staff believed that the current PD opportunities are more than enough to develop the ELC staff members professionally whereas the academic (AC) staff disagreed with that. The data also disclosed diverse perspectives about the PD provision. For example, participants mentioned gaps in the current applied PD process in the ELC. In this section, the data have been classified into four sub-categories as Table 5.27 below shows:

Theme	Sub-themes
Staff's experiences of PD in the Colleges of Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>PD polices in the College.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Staff involvement in decisions regarding their involvement in PD</i></li> <li>3. <i>AD staff verses the AC staff regarding views of the current PD experience</i></li> <li>4. <i>Kinds of support provided for staff PD</i></li> </ol>

**Table 5.27 Staff's PD experience**

It starts by participants presenting the college's policies regarding staff professional development as the participants described them. This is followed by an analysis of teachers' views of the people involved in the decision-making process related to their involvement in PD. It then sheds light on the points of view of both the AD and the AC staff on the current PD provision, whether internally or externally provided. This section ends with an account of the staff discussing the kind of support provided for the staff in relation to their PD. For each section, key issues are highlighted, and links to the findings from questionnaires and interviews are exemplified as appropriate.

### 5.6.1. PD policies in the College

Almost all the administrative and academic staff who were interviewed talked very briefly in their responses about the College's policy regarding staff professional development especially for academics. This could be attributed to these participants' lack of awareness of the policies and their rights with regard to their PD. Another possible reason for this could also be the time factor, as some of them do not have time for PD especially those who have other personal responsibilities. One of the AD staff clarified that staff PD comes as part of the staff affairs policy, which suggests that there has to be a plan for staff development in every department. This participant explained that *"in the College, we have a plan called 'staff professional development training needs' and this plan usually comes from the College administration"* (AD, INT1). The interviewee explicated that the source of the plan is the training needs' survey and the AD staff evaluation of the staff performance:

*"Internally, in the Centre, we come up with our own plan... We know the staff needs through the surveys... and the other part is based on the staff appraisal system; once we evaluate our staff, we know where are their areas for improvement".* (AD, INT3)

The plan was usually conveyed through workshops, but lately, for 2015 and 2016, it has only been through a symposium. Both AC and AD staff highlighted that there is a criteria for those who intend to present papers at or attend local and international conferences and symposiums. They need to go through a lengthy procedure to be able to attend. A member of the AD staff indicated this saying:

*"In the staff affairs policy, it is mentioned that the staff has to be a speaker in the conference... in the area of attending a workshop or a conference... there are also some procedures or regulations for attending workshops or a conference whether for presenting or attending".* (AD, INT1)

The interviewee elaborated that there are two categories of PD policies: *"Actually, as far as I remember, there are two categories for Omanis and non-Omanis"* (AD, INT1). So, each group is treated differently when it comes to staff PD. AD staff also talked about the quality assurance system in the College and how it supports and calls for more PD opportunities for the staff PD. For example, one of the AD staff explicitly said:

*“In the quality assurance, in the action plan that is produced by the quality assurance, a particular percentage of our teachers get training regardless of the venue ...but then at the end of the year, reports are always written on how we achieved our plans, so this is always assessed whether we really managed to provide the training that we had really in our plan or not”. (AD, INT5)*

PD is also one of the criteria investigated by the internal and external quality assurance (QA) audit teams so the College can achieve the academic accreditation. Thus, adopting a QA approach requires particular improvements to ensure the quality of the academic work and the enhancement of the teaching quality and, hence, the development of faculty members who are concerned with a teaching role (Al Afi, 2014). Colleges of Technology are no exception to such requirements. That could be a good reason for the English Language Centre AD staff to encourage staff to seek PD. It was even remarked by one of the academics that, *“I don’t know if they organize PD for the QA thing, or they really care about our PD”* (AC, INT6).

The abovementioned responses from the administrative staff, in fact, show recognition among these officials of the importance of teachers’ growing awareness of the significance of PD. However, the teachers, on the other hand, reported the absence of such recognition by arguing that there was no clear plan for staff development. For instance, AC staff said:

*“There is no clear plan for staff development to be honest. For example, I am a new lecturer - when is my next training? I don’t have any idea!! What is my right to have training for example, in-house or inside or outside the Sultanate?! Things are not clear”. (AC, INT3)*

This participant suggested examples of a clear plan like funding conferences that teachers need to attend, saying,

*“If we have a clear plan, at least I have the right to attend one conference inside and one training outside partially or fully funded. Ok, that I can call it staff development programme”* (AC, INT3).

From this interviewee’s point of view, it can be inferred that the process of PD in the Centre is inexplicit. The ministry’s involvement as regards staff participation in PD was by distributing their regulations; the participant commented, *“They keep sending us like memos and regulations with regard to the staff development”* (AD, INT4).The

ministry plays a central role with regard to the staff development in the colleges, as it was concurred that:

*“No budget for the staff development from the ministry to the College ... sometimes like even for our symposium, so you have to apply to the ministry not through the College, because College doesn’t have any budget; it is not set at all on their plan” (AD, INT4)*

To summarise this part, the orientation from teachers did not seem to be highly acknowledged by AD staff, as they focused, during the interviews, on discussing their basic role of managing the PD activities offered by the ministry. This reflects the top-down policy followed by the system.

### 5.6.2. Staff involvement in decision-making regarding their professional development

The extent of the staff’s involvement in decision-making as regards their PD appeared to have a strong connection to professional development policies in the ELC. In fact, the quantitative data from the questionnaire (see Table 5.28 below) revealed that nearly two thirds (64%) of the respondents agreed that PD themes were connected to their PD needs. In contrast, the other third (32%) were not sure whether the PD activities’ themes were based on their needs. That could be because of the lack of staff involvement and interest in the PD offered at the ELC. Just under the half (48%) of the participants felt that their feedback on the provided PD sessions was taken

PD provision at the ELC	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
The choices of the PD activities’ themes or subject areas are based on the teachers’ needs	52 (64%)	26 (32%)	4 (5%)
Teachers’ feedback about the PD activities is taken into account by the PD provider.	39 (48%)	37 (46%)	5 (6%)

**Table 5.28.** PD provision at the ELC

into consideration while a similar, approximately, percentage were not sure about that. One reason given by several participants was that the administrators did not get back to them with regard to their comments or suggestions, so they did not know if their comments and suggestions had even been read because they thought no



action was being taken. One of the participants commented to represent his colleagues' view, *"I complained about that, but I don't know if they took any action... So, you don't get any feedback on your feedback"* (AC, INT6).

Slightly over half of the 81 questionnaire respondents (53%) agreed that the Centre's administrators were the ones who decided about their participation in the PD opportunities (see Table 5.28). That is why it could be difficult to attend on weekdays when they had duties and would need permission to attend. In addition, 26% of the respondents were unsure about who decided about their participation. These could be the ones who were not aware of the regulation or had not tried it yet because they had not given their professional development any consideration.

PD provision at the ELC	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
The Centre's administrators decide my participation in PD activities.	43 (53%)	21 (26%)	11 (14%)

**Table 5.29: PD provision**

These findings were also supported by the interviewees' accounts. Staff involvement in the symposium's planning was seen differently. It was evident from some the participants' answers that the AC staff were asked about their PD needs in the preparation stage of the symposium via survey and emails. As one participant stated, *"We are asked before the symposium about the needs, topics, titles, but of course, we may not get the kind of speakers that you expect to deal with these topics... that is another issue"* (AC, FG1). However, some of the AC staff, when asked via the open-ended questions of the questionnaire about the current PD provision, made the following comments: *"they rarely meet my needs because teachers are not asked about their PD needs"*, *"doesn't mostly meet my needs"*, and *"the PD experiences can sometimes only be transferred to the classroom"*. They appeared to be dissatisfied with their input into the design of the symposium and other PD decisions. One of the interviewed academics talked about her only experience of external PD planned by the Centre's administration and how they decided which symposium to attend:

*"I remember ones, and it was the only chance given to me from the College to attend a symposium that was not relevant to my area, or my classroom, or even English Language teaching"* (AC, INT6).

AC staff's involvement in decisions with regard to the design and the plan seemed to be limited to the senior lecturers, as one of the administrators stated that the ELC council members, which includes the Head of Sections, the staff development coordinator, the Quality Assurance (QA) officer and some of the senior lecturers, are the main planners and decision makers for the ELT symposium (AD, INT2). That could be the reason behind some of the staff members' dissatisfaction with the final content of some of the symposium sessions, particularly the first one.

### **5.6.3. A comparison of the views of Administrative and Academic staff on the current PD provision in the ELC**

The majority of the AD staff seemed to be satisfied with the PD provision in the ELC and felt happy with their current plans. AC staff were also pleased with what was provided, but they had a number of comments about the current PD offered in the ELC, mainly about the quantity, quality, and relevance to their context. Both groups summarized the PD provision as the English language offerings in the ELT symposium, and internal PD workshops. In addition to these internal PD opportunities, staff also talked about the external PD chances, which they described as rare due to a number of obstacles as will be seen in the following sections.

#### **5.6.3.1. Internal provision of PD**

The first thing that came to the research participants' minds, which was evident in their answers when I asked about the current PD provision, was the English Language Teaching (ELT) symposium that had been organized in the ELC twice - in 2015 and in 2016. The findings revealed that in the planning stage, administrative staff are the ones who are mainly involved by using their records of the staff training needs surveys and the AC staff appraisals reports. One member of the AD staff described it as follows:

*"We started the staff symposium last year (2015)... The participants were only from inside the Centre... The second time, it has been improved; we had expanded the participations ... to people from anywhere in the Sultanate, and there was a big improvement... even the number of people attended and participated has also increased". (AD, INT1)*

The administrators regarded the ELT symposium, especially the second version of it, as a very important step in the staff development plan for the English Language

Centre. They seemed very pleased and satisfied about it to the extent that one member of the AD staff considered the symposium as the maximum support they could offer the staff, saying:

*“When we conduct 1 or 2 days symposium, teachers do nothing except attending the training, and they get paid for that. I mean, this is something you rarely seen in many educational institutions, so this is the utmost support we offer to our staff... Another support is that the staff are awarded certificates. It’s during their working hours, but they are not doing anything except getting some training and new ideas, and they are paid on the top of that, and they are awarded”.* (AD, INT3)

The academic staff also were extremely pleased with it and regarded it as a very important initiative towards their professional development. Almost all the interviewed AC staff had a positive attitude about the offered ELT symposium especially the second experience, as one of the academic staff illustrated:

*“I attend every time that we have this symposium and conference every January, and I am glad that we have this because this is the time when teachers from foundation and post-foundation can really go into different sessions. Even in one day, you can attend, like, five sessions, which I believe has been helpful to teachers”.* (AC, INT4)

This participant considered that the symposium was beneficial for them as teachers. The timing was considered to be very suitable for all to attend, as it occurred on non-teaching days. This interviewee also liked the variation of the sessions and number of chances they had to attend different presentations or workshops. It seems that the staff are in favour of having a variety of sessions that respond to the different needs of both foundation and post-foundation staff members whereas the others found the symposium’s sessions or topics as an answer to their needs that they had highlighted in the QA survey. Even some thought of it as developing different aspects not only teaching. A member of the academic staff shared her experience, saying:

*“It was a professional development for me because I was in the role of abstracts’ assessment... I learned the role, I learned to be a member of a team, I learned to troubleshoot because you cannot bring a special troubleshooter here, all the team members are troubleshooters, so I learned also combining different functions, and I really enjoyed as a professional development. Even I enjoyed the symposium”.* (AC, INT5)

This interviewee was one of the senior lecturers who had participated in the selection of the presenters through reading the abstracts. A number of skills were developed through the participation like teamwork skills and troubleshooting.

On the other hand, some of the AC staff made some comments about their experiences with the symposium. For instance, the AD staff claimed that the symposium was intended to be an annual event; however, the academic staff said, *“It is not annual; it happened only twice”* (AC, INT3) highlighting that it had not been organized in the last two years.

There were also some comments on the quality of the sessions especially the ones presented at the first symposium. Participants were not satisfied with the content of the some of the sessions, as they were not practical and sometimes were not relevant to their real classrooms and context. As one of the AC staff put it, *“Sometimes, it is not practical at all”* (AC, FG1). Another participant from the same focus group clarified further, comparing the symposium experiences in 2015 and 2016, saying:

*“The first symposium in my opinion was just a waste of time... Sometimes it looks good on papers, but because we are teachers, we know there is no way that it would work in real time teaching... I was not happy about it, but I have to say that the speakers and the topics were much better in the second symposium. We attended, like, five sessions. I did like three of them, and I even tried some of the ideas in my classroom”.* (AC, FG1)

Some of the AD staff shared a similar perspective, but they explained that it was not easy to guarantee the appropriateness or the relevance of the sessions to their teachers:

*“The quality of the sessions, you know, sometimes you go there with like high expectations from the title of the session without knowing the nature of the session itself, but then you get disappointed ... In terms of the quality of the workshops or the training, you can’t really know for sure until you attend ... There is no guarantee that they will help teachers to improve”.* (AD, INT3)

However, other academic staff emphasised that it is the responsibility of the organizers (administrators) to work on this problem and try to find solutions to maximise the benefits and quality of the sessions in the symposium. The staff’s experiences of the symposium varied; they especially highlighted that it was

conducted only twice, with the first one seen as not being as effective as the second one, and then it was stopped. That was demonstrated in one of the interviews:

*There should be a scientific research committee to select the best one and all of them from the same context 'Colleges of Technology' or higher educational institutions ... What are they presenting is the most important thing, so since you are calling for a conference, you have to compare for what it will be presented in a professional way. (AC, INT3)*

The findings also revealed that AC staff did not think that the symposium would be sufficient for the whole academic year; as one remarked, *"I think the symposium is great, but it is not enough; we still need stuff throughout the year because the symposium ends in Jan"* (AC, INT6). Therefore, additional PD opportunities are required as will be seen in the following sections. Thus, it was evident from the data that, in addition to the ELT symposium, there are other kinds of PD workshops organised at the English Language Centre, though these are organised more randomly. A member of the academic staff described this provision:

*"Apart from the symposium, they have speakers, or workshops from time to time; they have sometimes from staff inside the College and sometimes from staff outside the College. We have guest speakers and sometimes publishers to do workshops". (AC, FG1)*

A number of the interviewed administrators explained that these workshops are usually planned for Thursdays (the last day of the working week) when almost all the academic staff finish their classes early, and they become free for the last two hours of their work time. However, they explicated that the organisation of these workshops depends on a number of factors like the availability of resource people (speakers), the availability of the venues, and when AD staff have no other plans for that day of the week.

*"In our College, this is the only day where we can conduct a training session, as we end our classes at 1 pm, and when you look at the calendar, every semester, except for the third semester, as it is too tight, we schedule different activities... We have exams and meetings, so it is very difficult to have it frequently on that day, but it is a good thing to have a symposium and a few sessions, like, you know, one or two every semester whenever we have good topics and good resource people". (AD, INT3)*

A majority of the academic staff commented on the planning of these workshops or meetings on the last day of the working week and working hours. They usually have

marking or lesson plans before they leave for the weekend, so many feel reluctant to adopt such plans like workshops or meetings in the last two hours of their busy week. Besides, for those teachers who live in hostels or far away from their families, this also means a late journey home for the weekend.

The academic staff had differing views on the usefulness of the kinds of workshops conducted at the ELC. Some of them found the ones that are applicable to their classrooms contexts beneficial. One AC staff commented, *“I would say they all were helpful because, in way or another, you can apply them; you can make some modifications as to the kind of the students you have, the number of the students you have”* (AC, INT4).

Others highlighted that not all these workshops aim to develop the teachers, as was discussed in one of the focus groups: *“Even those speakers, sometimes they are publishers, I just feel it is more about business than anything else [...] they are just selling their books”* (AC, FG1).

Most of the AC staff also commented on the quality of these workshops. In a number of cases, they thought the speakers were not appropriately qualified or knowledgeable enough to present to college-level teachers. It was noted:

*“The problem is not with the provision; instead, it has to do with the speakers themselves, the quality of the workshops ... They should be relevant to what we need as teachers... Many look good on papers, but when we attend, sometimes the presenter fails us”.* (AC, FG1)

Another one of the academics talked about her experience saying, *“I attended a workshop in which the person was just showing the colourful slides; he was showing so many slides, but there is no useful content for us as language teachers”* (AC, FG2). From their point of view, some of these workshops did not meet the academics' expectations. They explained that PD opportunities or activities for the teachers need to be chosen carefully to meet their development expectations and encourage them to attend more of them. As one of the academics put it:

*“When I want to attend a workshop, I want something new, I want something I can use in my classroom because sometimes, the speakers talk about something that looks good on paper but has nothing to do with your real life teaching, so it is just a waste of time for me”.* (AC, FG1)

The discussion of the kind of workshops provided and their practicality or helpfulness for the academics was extended in focus group 1. AC staff seemed to be dissatisfied with the current PD provision. That is why they rarely grasped or applied their content. As mentioned previously, one of research participant elaborated:

*“It is like PD is expected from us, but the kind other than random workshops here and there, like something really fruitful, is not provided; that is missing, and that is why you will not see results from just attending a couple of workshops here and there because you will forget, and you will go back doing what you were doing”.* (AC, FG1)

### **5.6.3.2. Informal PD activities in the ELC**

Informal PD activities, such as peer-observation or other kinds of collegiality, seemed to be neglected by the ELC administrators as PD activities in comparison to formal activities. However, many of the academic staff focused on these kinds of activities and indicated their high importance to them and their need for more informal PD opportunities in the ELC. Firstly, the AD staff, revealed that informal PD, such as PD through collaboration, do exist in the ELC. However, their level varies between staff members depending on their personality, attitudes, and willingness. That was exemplified in the following statement:

*“Peer-observation, facility is there but not many are doing that because they feel maybe resistant of visiting each other’s, but I know there are staff who are doing that, and they have this kind of sharing what went well in their classes during the meeting. They have the team meetings, they have the level meetings; even in the level meetings, the teachers always express their ideas and difficulties and what went well with them, so they have a chance to share, but they have some kind of fear of observations”.* (AD, INT4)

She clarified that there are many opportunities for the academic staff to gather and share or discuss issues through meetings. Yet peer observation as an example is not really practised or organized in the ELC as a PD activity. That might be because there are some who are unwilling to be observed because they assume it involves evaluation. AD staff expressed their readiness to accept AC staff’s involvement in PD activities as resource people using their experiences, as one of them revealed, *“we can use the resources we have like experienced lecturers senior lecturers also in providing this professional development”* (AD, INT2).

One of the interviewed coordinators talked about her AC staff's willingness to share and present their ideas and experiences with their colleagues through workshops. They seemed to have the confidence and capability to do so. She also revealed that she encourages her staff to present when she thinks they have really good lessons or materials that will benefit and can be used by other staff members in the department. She shared her experience with them saying:

*"I have already three proposals from my teachers, two of them from teachers themselves coming to me saying, "We want to present something next year", and a third teacher I have asked because her class was an excellent class, so I asked her to present it as a model lesson, so we are planning to have these three activities". (AD, INT5)*

That showed some of academics were ready and willing to share their experiences with colleagues in the same department so other staff could benefit. It also indicated how the management could intervene to make that happen by selecting the appropriate lesson and encouraging the staff to share with others to learn from. The kind of collaboration can extend from group lesson plans to classroom observations; some of the academics thought of it as *"like work together in the planning of the lesson or sharing the materials.... Less experienced teachers come to watch more experienced teachers, you know, teach lessons and get ideas from them"* (AC, INT1).

AC staff also pointed to cooperation through sharing worksheets as a very helpful tool to benefit their students, as they all aimed to achieve the same learning outcomes. It was commented that *"they could help each others in worksheets. I noticed that worksheets are very helpful for the students especially with the new curriculum. We were lost at the beginning; we never know where to start"* (AC, INT2).

Moreover, the AC staff data showed that cooperation and collegiality seemed to be the kind of PD tasks the academics preferred the most. One of the academics justified it as follows

*"Instead of bringing people from outside, people from us can actually help us more in the current situation... Maybe somebody does something we would like to use, because we all have problems when delivering the*



*course, so we look into our problems and then maybe somebody will have a solution". (AC, FG3)*

Almost all the academics interviewed thought that those of their colleagues who were more familiar with their context would provide them with much more relevant and practical input than outsiders. They considered the discussion academics have between each other regarding teaching and delivering the course material as one of the PD activities, which can be very fruitful for some of them. One of the AC staff who was a level coordinator talked about her plans, saying, *"I have been thinking actually when related to projects and presentations, at the beginning of the semester to have informal discussions, just to share the best practices (AC, FG3).*

Another course coordinator, in the post foundation program, for example, also shared her experiences with cooperative PD tasks where all her teachers would get together to share their practices and help new staff in their new journey. She said,

*"There is always a time twice every semester minimum of two meetings that I have with the teachers of technical communication (TC) that we have to discuss strategies that we use in teaching certain lessons; through this, colleagues can share what strategies do they use in teaching this particular lesson, what should they do and also, those new in teaching TC would get points on how to handle this kind of lessons, so we collaborate". (AC, INT4)*

It seemed that the academics believed that they can themselves be a valuable resource for their professional growth; as one member of the AC staff put it, *"You don't need the College to tell you what to do, you don't need any lecturers from outside; it is here - you don't need to spend money for that" (AC, FG2).*

In addition to that, they further explained that if the resource people are the AC staff themselves, then if you needed any further explanation or illustration, it would be easier to reach them. To represent this view, one of the academics shared her experience about that:

*"One of the lecturers did a workshop... I attended, but I missed things, so I had to call her to my office, and then she did it with me, and I called her in my classroom, and we did it together in my classroom. That helped a lot". (AC, FG2)*

She was very satisfied and found the workshop useful, as the presenter did not stop her workshop with the theoretical content, but she was willing to explain more for her other colleagues after the session. In addition, the presenter went even further and helped her colleague to apply the content practically in her classroom, which was a very satisfying and useful PD experience for her. Another participant of the same focus group elaborated, *“If we do a workshop in a certain topic, it will be good then to go to the classroom of this teacher and to see how this is integrated into classroom”* (AC, FG2).

She had this idea of presenting the material and then applying it practically in a real classroom to learn and absorb the content more efficiently. Obviously, that can only happen when the staff themselves are willing to share their knowledge, ideas, and experiences with other staff members in the same department. However, one participant gave some explanation for the staff being hesitant or reluctant to do so. First, some of the academic staff do not have the confidence to present, as they do not want to make mistakes in front of their colleagues, and they do not want to be judged. One of the AC staff highlighted that, as follows: *“They seem to be afraid of making some mistakes and be judged upon that, which is wrong because we all make mistakes number1, native and non-native ...I have no problems with sharing ideas or hands-out* (AC, INT5).

Academics also linked cooperative PD to experience, as they strongly considered experienced staff as a very rich resource who need to share what they have with the non-experienced staff members. That can happen in the following way:

*“More experienced teachers usually are asked to share; they are asked to present. That would be, I feel, a good way of helping the others by sharing whatever they have, whatever they know, what they feel is working at its best; that is how they give support to colleagues”.* (AC, FG3)

A number of the study participants mentioned that they seek support from their colleagues and coordinators for some of the issues they encounter in their classrooms and with the course materials. This is how one of the AC staff described it:

*“I seek support especially when I don’t know how this student should be considered, and in terms of materials, I do seek help from my coordinator,*

*and she is generous in giving the materials she has. I feel we all here are supportive". (AC, FG3)*

The study participants believed that *"lecturers can learn much better from each others, better than those who know nothing about our context"* (AC, INT6). AC staff showed the importance of cooperation and collegiality to enhance staff PD, and that is already practised by some of the teachers or even through their coordinators. Yet they should create a mechanism to use this kind of resource at the ELC more systematically and encourage the staff and facilitate them to give and share with others more.

### **5.6.3.3. PD as external opportunities**

Another professional development resource for the ELC academics that was discussed in the interview data is the external PD opportunities organized outside the College. The ELC administrators mentioned that academic staff should not rely entirely on the Centre to provide them with PD sessions, but they need to also make use of the external PD opportunities available outside the College either locally or internationally.

*"Teachers are always advised and reminded about external workshops like those offered by the British Council or other colleges, so teachers should not rely only on the sessions provided by the Centre, but they can also attend others outside the College". (AD, INT3)*

The interviewed academics showed significant enthusiasm to attend and participate in external PD activities like ELT workshops, symposiums, or conferences. They also talked about how beneficial they are for expanding their knowledge in the field since people from different places come together to share the best practices, findings of their studies, and innovations in the field of ELT. It was pointed out that *"it is good idea to have extended experiences because it opens our eyes to what is happening around in the ELT field"* (AC, FG2).

Besides, AC staff shared their experiences. For example, one described his experience, which he believed was motivating and helped him to develop more saying,

*"I had some PD outside the College, the ones organized by the British Council, and I presented in the SQU, which I think helped me a lot, as it is*

*related to my study, which is about English Language Teaching. I found out in my research how Arab learners of English acquire the linguistic items such as simple past, so I gave my talk. The audience agreed all of them with me and they were grateful and thankful for my findings I was very happy I felt satisfied". (AC, INT3)*

Many of the AC staff considered the workshops as a good opportunity to attend and meet other professionals in the ELT field as one (AC) stated, *"When I go, sometimes I found some useful workshops, and I use some of these techniques in my classes"* (AC, FG2). Yet, these workshops accept only limited numbers of participants and vary in their content. They are not restricted to the higher educational context, so not everybody can attend, and not all the topics are of relevance to them or their students, so they try to look at other opportunities also.

Another example of external PD that was evident in the interviews was higher education, which also requires funding and support. For example, one of the administrators sought PD through carrying out higher Master study. She said, *"Professional development for me personally is when I have been doing my master's distance wise and paying for myself and you know paying for the books and everything so doing that independently from the College"* (AD, INT6). Her experience, which represents the other Ads belief, indicates how much she was self-motivated towards developing herself in her profession. She could manage to pay the expenses for her study. Another AD staff also shared her experience, saying *"I did my PhD. My PhD was partial sponsored by the ministry, so I paid the fees myself"* (AD, INT5). They were eager to widen their knowledge in the field through seeking higher education, but they were not supported financially.

In addition, a number of the academic staff focused on the sponsorship issue and their need to attend external professional development courses or conferences: *"At least not fully, but we need support... not necessarily covering all the expenses at least some"* (AC, FG1).

Another of the academics shared a similar perspective describing the current situation and justifying the need for funding and other kinds of support:

*I think the external needs are not really covered in terms of funding. For conferences, workshops, outside the College, I don't think it is funded;*

*even it is difficult to get a day off in order to attend them. Actually, the criteria for selection are not clear, and I don't know if it even exists... The registration fees are too high; first of all, you are in another country, you need accommodation, airfare, the registration charge and all that. (AC, FG2)*

The AC staff seemed to be very disappointed and annoyed about the funding issue. Besides, the criteria for selection were not clear for the staff, as was mentioned above. It can be said that there is not always transparency between the administrative and the academic staff.

As the staff remarked, the situation regarding funding is problematic when it comes to attending any workshops or conferences locally or internationally, seeking higher education, or publishing studies or books. They found the situation demotivating especially for those seeking development in their profession. They used to send one candidate from each college to the annual TESOL Arabia conference. One of the AD staff commented:

*"Even before, they were not sending more than one or two people only from each college, and they don't do it anymore, so when you go and pay for your course, still they don't allow you, and they ask you to take an emergency leave. I mean, what kind of support is this whatsoever from the ministry or the College? They have complicated things now with regard to staff professional development". (AD, INT3)*

Though many staff expressed their desire to attend PD symposiums and conferences or to seek PD outside the College, it turned out to be a complex issue, as the staff noted:

*"I feel bad that we have big conferences that the staff really wants to attend, now the thing that they don't send anybody at all. Worse than that, they don't even allow staff to go even when they are going on their own expenses. So, I don't understand; you have people who really would like to improve, who are very interested, and they have the right to do so". (AD, INT2)*

This is how the current PD provision was seen by the ELC staff; it gives a clear picture of the current situation and what needs to be amended, changed, or adopted to create a more favourable environment for staff PD.

#### 5.6.4. Types of support provided for staff PD

Many participants discussed the support they are given regarding their professional development. The data showed some contrast between participants' responses in this regard. While a number of participants expressed their satisfaction with the support provided, others found it insufficient, and they asked for more support methods to be employed. For the Centre's administration, one form of support that was mentioned by the participants was the advice and recommendations after classroom observations. AD staff usually observe and evaluate academics in their classes using appraisal forms.

*"The only thing is that after the classroom observation, if the observer noticed something, and he has a plan to help that teacher, I think the only program we ask them to go is either the CELTA or DELTA courses, which as development programs, it is related to their teaching practice". (AD, INT2)*

In order for the academic staff to attend these courses, they need a supportive environment that will be flexible regarding time and funding. However, the only thing the Centre's administration does is help them with their schedules and to give them early classes rather than evening ones where they might attend their development courses. a member of the AD staff described the support as follows:

*"In terms of support, it doesn't have to be financial; we give them a period of time, they are teaching here, but we postpone our third visit to a period of time...We support them as well when we schedule them giving them the teaching schedule I know these development sessions are after their classes so we consider that when we schedule them" (AC, INT1)*

One of the issues or obstacles the staff members encountered when seeking PD chances is funding. That was evident in the data collected from both AD and AC staff questionnaires as shown in Table 5.30 below.

PD provision at the ELC	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
I am supported administratively to seek PD.	49 (60%)	25 (31%)	7 (9%)
I am supported financially to seek PD.	8 (10%)	16 (20%)	57 (70%)

**Table 5.30 PD provision**

The majority (49: 60%) of the questionnaire respondents agreed that management supported them to pursue professional development. Yet 25 of them were not sure about it. On the other hand, a relatively large number (57 out of 81 participants) agreed that the College did not fund them to attend or present at PD activities, especially the external ones. All these factors indicate that the ELC staff have little or sometimes no control over participating in formal professional development courses or activities especially the external opportunities.

Another form of support mentioned by the AC staff is the provision of permission and transportation to attend some of the local PD events in the other institutions like the other technical colleges. This participant talked about her experience as follows:

*"I had an experience in my first year, and I was thankful to the head of the department we were even given a free transportation attending a workshop in Shinas. They are having this workshop every year; we were given the go single to join that Shinas symposium". (AC, INT4)*

Additionally, in some cases, mainly with Omanis, staff were also supported by being given a day's leave from their annual 5 days of emergency leave when they attend or present at conferences or symposiums. That was confirmed by the experiences of two Omani administrative staff in the Centre; as one of them asserted *"Honestly, they didn't provide me any; the only things they provide me is a day leave"* (AD, INT2).

The interview data also shed light on the issue of the differentiation between Omanis and non-Omanis regarding the kind of support provided. As one of the non-Omani staff complained, *"They don't support us, as we are not Omanis; they don't even allow us to attend with our own money... We just need them to allow us to go when we are free"* (AD, INT6).

On the other hand, staff also talked about the ministry's support and how they helped them to seek professional development. The qualitative data from the interviews show that almost all the participants saw the ministry' support as minimum and limited with regard to staff PD. Although a member of the AD staff explained that *"for example, when conducting the ELT symposium, we ask for the ministry's support in the areas of financial and logistic support and, yes, the ministry approves it"* (AD, INT1).

It seems the ministry did support the initiation of the first symposium, but the second one was funded through sponsors, which were not easy to find, as it was confirmed: *“I think last year we got, but I think this academic year, what we did was only based on sponsors only”* (AD, INT4). If there is no institutional support, then the College needs to apply for other private organizations’ sponsorship like the British Council, Amideast, and Pearson.

Staff professional development seemed to be marginalised even by the higher authorities that are in charge of the Colleges of Technology in Oman. It was observed by a member of the AD staff that:

*“What I have heard is like there is no budget at all; College has no money for the staff development in the College, not a penny. It is the rule, no budget for the staff development from the ministry to the College; it is always being like that”.* (AD, INT4)

It seemed that all the heads of the department, the College administration, and the ministry itself need to pay much more attention and help more with regard to staff professional development, which finally, will reflect on the College’s growth and reputations as well.

### **5.7. Factors for successful PD in the ELC**

The final area addressed by participants in this research with regard to their professional development needs is the factors that would lead to more successful PD opportunities in the ELC in general and the Colleges of Technology in particular. Having reviewed the current situation regarding professional development in the ELC, both groups of participants (AC and AD), but mostly academics, commented on some of the deficiencies in the current provision. In response, participants talked about some of the factors that would facilitate the provision of more beneficial PD opportunities. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate this. Analysis of the data identified two main sub-themes: factors contributing to effective professional development and factors facilitating access to PD, as Table 5.31 below illustrates:



Theme 6	Sub-themes
Factors for successful professional development	1. Factors contributing to effective PD 2. Facilitating factors to the staff PD

**Table 5.31: Factors for successful PD**

### 5.7.1. Factors contributing to effective PD practices in the ELC

This section reports the findings regarding factors that help the ELC staff members benefit from the offered PD practices. Analysis of the data identified four main categories which participants classified as crucial to guarantee the success of staff professional development as Table 5.32 shows below:

Sub-themes	Categories
5.8.1. Factors contributing to effective PD	1. Address the target's needs 2. Qualified presenters and good topics 3. Follow up and evaluate after PD practices 4. Staff involvement in decisions about their PD and cooperative PD practices

**Table 5.32 factors for successful PD**

#### 5.7.1.1. Addressing the target's needs

The first factor that was highlighted by the majority of the participants is to focus the English Language Centre staff members' professional development needs, which participants believed will lead to a clearer picture of what PD should aim to achieve. The data revealed that almost all the ELC administrators found that necessary when planning for PD events in the Centre. A member of the AD staff confirmed that *"before deciding any courses or workshops or whatever, lecturers' needs should be identified, and that can be done through different ways like for example surveys or class visit"* (AD, INT3).

In this respect, the ELC administrators revealed that they usually have some techniques to identify staff's needs before planning PD events, such as the English Language Teaching symposium. Accordingly, when planning for a PD event like the ELT symposium, the identification of the themes and topics is usually based on the

QA assurance survey that is sent to the ELC AC staff to fill in by the beginning of each academic year.

Although some of the AC staff with higher educational qualifications emphasised that *“if you want a very good professional development ... intended for teachers, the needs’ assessment must be done”* (AC, INT4), it transpired that it was not that simple because not all the AC staff take the QA survey seriously or make it a priority in their busy working days, so many do not fill it in. A member of the AD staff confirmed this:

*“Actually, the participation from the staff for the needs analysis is very minimum, like, they hardly do it... So, we have to focus more on improving their participation in the need analysis. This is one of the main improvement we need to achieve”* (AC, INT4)

However, the lack of commitment could be because the survey is sent electronically via email to the staff. The AC staff suggested that there is a need to adopt a more systematic and scientific approach to identify the PD needs for the College staff in general and for each department in particular. The research participants highlighted that this is the first step to be considered when planning PD programs for the staff members at any institution. It was emphasised that *“one of the important things is to really know the needs of the teachers, so, what do they need, and then provide it”* (AC, INT4).

Yet, AC staff claimed that the needs analysis survey is not sent annually, and they thought face-to-face discussion would be much better than keeping to the particular terms in that survey. A member of the AC commented, *“The QA survey includes specific terms; they should ask us because sometimes, you feel you want to express yourself more”* (AC, FG2). One of the AC staff also commented that sometimes, the lecturers are responsible for not sending their suggestions. This participant elaborated: *“Each and every lecturer knows what abilities they have, what weaknesses they have”* (AC, INT4).

In addition to the survey, administrative staff revealed that staff PD needs are also identified through the staff appraisals. Members of the management team added some suggestions based on their comments following the class visits for appraising the AC staff. They considered staff appraisals as a way to find out about the staff’s

PD needs, which is also based on a form and on the management’s judgment. Their judgment and feedback are based on their experiences; they have never been trained to evaluate before. The AC staff also underlined the importance and effectiveness of having PD opportunities that match their needs. Almost all the participants stated that their PD should be tailored to their needs. A member of the AC staff explained:

*It should be related to the topics to what we teach and to my drawbacks and fill in the gaps with my needs. You have to know what I am teaching. First, you have to know what are my problems; second, then you have to decide what you should do for me. (AC, INT3)*

Planning PD that reflects the academics’ needs is what 59 of the AC staff questionnaire’s participants considered to be very important for the PD enhancement in the College, as Table 5.33 shows:

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Planning PD activities that reflect the academics’ needs	59 (73%)	18 (22%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)

**Table 5.33 Factors to enhance PD - Planning PD activities that reflect the academics’ needs**

Not only that, but some of the participants, particularly the post-foundation teachers, remarked that their professional development needs differ from those of the foundation ones. One of the academics explained this as follows:

*The PD you prepare for post-foundation staff, I think it should be different because we have two different contexts, yah? I can attend if I would like, but I will not be able to implement because I don’t have the context where I teach. (AC, INT4)*

The language they use with their students is more the language suitable to the context of their future workplace, more like English for Specific Purposes. They prepare the students to use the appropriate terms that suit their different future work contexts. Besides, as one of the AC staff explained, their needs can sometimes extent to “*understanding the needs of the market or the workplace*” (AC, FG3) for the benefit of CoT students. From their point of view, professional development “*is all about the needs of the institution, staff, and the needs of the students*” (AC, FG1). So, it can be said that there is an urgent need for a systematic training needs

analysis to recognize all staff professional development needs and meet them to the best extent possible. The academic staff also suggested that finding out about the staff's PD needs is not only by the survey, research also need to be utilised in this process. One of the participants remarked:

*“It would have to be listening to what lecturers would need, and basically doing research and finding out their needs because actually, sometimes, lecturers themselves don't know what they need, so maybe it is not a good idea to just listen to them, but to do research and finding out what is missing”.* (AC, INT6)

Staff needs were not restricted to the content of the sessions but also the timing, the delivery dates, the targets' workload, and the venue: all can contribute to a better PD experience. One of the experienced participants noted:

*“A successful professional development session is the one which prepares all the external factors, so the timing, place... that is suitable for everybody and the management, so people can come to set for the professional development”.* (AC, INT5)

Another one of the AC staff, in a representation of this view, summarised that saying, *“Just making it convenient for everybody because sometimes the workload is too much. We got to stop things about PD... I think the institution has to look into it”* (AC, FG3), while another of the participants also shared a similar concern saying, *“If you are planning some PD for all the staff, then that should be in their free time; don't get PD for some and leave others”* (AC, FG2).

That was also confirmed through the questionnaire data as well (see Table 5.34), as the majority (97%) of the AC staff found the timing and their heavy workload as important factors regarding the PD provision, their participation, and willingness in the Centre.

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Choosing a suitable period/time for the PD activities	57 (70%)	22 (27%)	2 (3%)	-
Reducing academics' workload to enhance their participation in the PD activities	41 (50%)	24 (30%)	13 (16%)	3 (4%)

**Table 5.34 Factors to enhance PD – reducing academic workload & choosing good time for PD practices**

#### 5.7.1.2. Qualified presenters and good topics

Another one of the factors that contributes to successful PD is to have qualified presenters or trainers and good topics that are worth presenting. From the participants' point of view, it is important to be selective in choosing the speakers and to do more screening before deciding on who will be presenting and what will be presented in the PD sessions at the College. It was also confirmed by a member of the administrative staff that *"there is always scope for improvement because of the feedback we receive for the past two years... was to screen the topics better"* (AD, INT5).

The academic staff also emphasized that when the AD staff plan for PD session, they need to choose professionals in the field who present significant and applicable content to their classrooms.

*"The presenter need to be well informed and knowledgeable of the topics they are giving; they need to be relevant to what we are doing here in the classrooms, to what is happening here in the College".* (AC, INT1)

The AC staff found these factors very necessary, and they contribute to more effective PD. Having beneficial PD opportunities will motivate the staff to attend willingly instead of it being compulsory, as it is done currently. This was evident in the data as one of the academics explained:

*"The content, first of all, makes it worth attending or not, and the personality of the presenter, and if he/she masters the materials him/herself as well, and the third one is related to the skills integrated in the session,"* (AC, INT2).

The AC staff 's suggestions were based on the experiences they had so it could be considered as one of the drawbacks of some of the previous PD experiences in the Centre, which needs a considerable attention by the organizers in charge.

#### 5.4.2.2. To follow up and evaluate after PD practices

According to the data from the questionnaire and the interviews, participants thought that in order for the PD to be effective, it has to be continuous and include follow up. They also thought that evaluation during and after the PD is an essential factor for more effective PD practices. The interviews with the participants confirmed that there

should be follow-up sessions on how teachers progressed in, benefitted from, and made use of the workshops and training sessions. As was indicated previously in Section 5.4, the participants considered that the responsibility for developing professionally is a shared obligation, so it is not only about the provision; teachers should be committed to what is provided.

Correspondingly, staff thought that to make use of the provided PD, there should be rules or actions established in the College to observe the progress the staff demonstrate after certain PD tasks to guarantee the concentration and commitment of the staff when attending PD. A member of the AC staff explained this view as follows

*“There has to be a follow up for that. Sometimes, it is not only the management; sometimes it is also the teachers themselves. Sometimes, the management arranges, you have these workshops and certified courses, and then the teachers are not using it. I mean, some are just using their phone throughout the workshop or not paying attention to what is happening, so then, what is the use? You need the other part of the story also ... so you have to show evidence that you are making use of whatever has been provided”. (AC, FG1)*

To ensure that they are making the most of the offered training in their classes after the PD, there has to be a progress or action after PD to show that the staff have made use of it and developed in some way.

Effective PD is also linked to the impact it has on staff members, especially teachers. Currently, to find out about the staff’s opinion of the effectiveness of the provided sessions, the AD staff distribute evaluation forms after every single PD session in the ELC. This is to track the success of the PD sessions. The findings from the questionnaire showed that 69 out of the 81 research participants found supervision and evaluation procedures when conducting PD activities to be an important step while only 10 found it slightly important, and 2 found it not important at all as Table 5.35 below shows:

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Implementing supervision and evaluation procedures during and after conducting the PD activities.	34 (42%)	35 (43%)	10 (12%)	2 (3%)

**Table 5.35 Factors to enhance PD - Implementing supervision and evaluation procedures during and after conducting the PD activities**

Yet, as one of the AD staff commented, staff participation in the feedback is “*very minimum... like they hardly do it*” (AD, INT4). It would not be enough to rely on their feedback. However, a number of the academics complained that they were not sure if their feedback is taken into account, as one remarked, “*They do collect feedback ... Well, you don’t know if your feedback is taken into account or not*” (AC, FG2). That could be the reason for them neglecting to give any feedback.

#### **5.4.2.3. Staff involvement in decisions about their PD and cooperative PD practices**

In addition to the previously mentioned factors to achieve more effective PD in the ELC, several participants highlighted the importance of the academic staff’s involvement in decisions and actions regarding their professional growth. This is what a member of the AD staff commented:

*“Running these programs are meant for the staff members... If they are involved, let’s say, in choosing the theme, the sessions, the papers in a program and then attending and getting benefits out of this program, then I think they will be more committed, and I think they will practise whatever they have seen there into their classrooms”.* (AD, INT1)

He explained that their contribution to and participation in decisions with regard to their PD plans would motivate them to attend and to implement in their classrooms what they had learned in the professional development. It would ensure their commitment as well. The kind of involvement the administrators apply currently is restricted to a QA survey they fill at the beginning of each academic year and their feedback after the PD provision. Their participation in both methods was described as minimum; thus, it still does not deeply engage most of the academic staff’s voices, so that is not enough. That can explain the negative attitudes that some of

the AC staff had regarding the PD activities that are usually, as was evident in the obtained data, planned through top-down approach. That is because they are not included in such decisions that impact the work they do on a daily basis. Empowering the AC staff through decision making with regard to their professional development can result in more commitment and great work, which eventually lead to the success of the management of the centre as well.

One of the ways to incorporate academic staff more, as was suggested in some of the interviews, is to use the resource people in the Centre itself and encourage a spirit of cooperation and sharing. One of the academics gave an example of that:

*“If the management feels that someone with class-observation, for example, got impressed with the way they teach, why don’t they ask that person and encourage them to make workshop in order to enhance other teachers performance I feel this can be one of the ways to improve?” (AD, INT4)*

Opportunities to share and exchange experiences appeared to be missing in the ELC. Staff felt that it would be constructive to share because they could present relevant practices, as they all share a similar context and face similar challenges. The qualitative findings also highlighted that teachers’ willingness to share, engage with changes, and put new ideas into practice are necessary to improve any educational institution. It was highlighted in some of the interviews that *“staff have to be ready, willing to clean and change, and sometimes, you have to dedicate your time, you have to share things, you need to be like generous, you have to benefit others, not only yourself” (AC, FG3).*

A number of those interviewed suggested that there is a need to establish new manageable approaches to PD. For example, if the Centre’s management claims that they are not supported financially, why do they not make use of the resources available at the Centre?

*“We got to know about the symposium and, like I said, they already organised two, but I think they could go a step further and do in-house training in the College; it is all about effective teaching, right? So, if they do a classroom appraisals, after that, if they found out that you are not doing enough, you are not doing up to what they are expecting, there should be a system in place to take care of such needs. They should be able to train in-house and emulate... There should be a system in place that operates constantly but none of that, is there?” (AC, INT6)*



Some considered PD through cooperating with other staff members in a different way and to achieve certain targets, such as for the purpose of Omanisation:

*“Inexperienced young Omani teachers need to be mentored by more experienced non-Omani teachers because, sooner or later, these non-Omanis will go back to their countries; as long as they are here, I can create a small mechanism - add something to their suites, balance their interest, and say, “Ok, you are not only teaching my students, but you are also training my teachers”. Those who can do that will do that with greatest pleasure, true. It is a necessity; it is a requirement to create a mechanism”.*  
(AC, INT5)

Those invited staff with the greatest experiences can train the less experienced staff, especially Omanis, as the trend is now towards Omanisation, so the management’s function is to understand these needs and requirements and create mechanisms because the management has the tools to reinforce it.

### 5.7.2. Facilitating factors for the ELC staff’s PD

It is not only about knowing what is really needed with regard to staff development, but it is important to make it easily accessible for all the department’s staff members. The factors that facilitate the staff’s access and provision of PD in this study context (CoTs) were explored in the questionnaire and the interviews respectively. The obtained data were grouped into sub-categories as below:

Sub-themes	Categories
Facilitating factors to the ELC staff PD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clear PD plans and sufficient amount of PD</li> <li>2. Raising staff awareness</li> <li>3. Encouragement, appreciation and Elimination of Differentiation</li> <li>4. More supportive atmosphere</li> <li>5. Sufficient and varied PD opportunities that suit the different needs.</li> </ol>

**Table 5.36 Facilitating factors to the ELC staff’s PD**

#### 5.7.2.1. Clear PD plans and a sufficient amount of PD

The ELC staff suggested that in order to enhance the PD provision at the Centre, a clear PD plan is required. That was evident in the statistical findings as presented in Table 5.37 below:

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Including PD goals in a College's mission	47 (58%)	26 (32%)	7 (9%)	1 (1%)
Setting up directed and realistic plans for staff PD	56 (69%)	22 (27%)	3 (4%)	-

**Table 5.37 Factors to enhance PD**

A relatively large number of the questionnaire's participants (58%) categorized incorporating the staff's professional development goals in the College's mission as very important, as it would make them more committed to achieving these goals. However, an even larger number (69%) of the participants considered setting up direct and realistic PD plans as very important to enhance their professional growth as the table clearly shows.

The interview data also indicated the importance given to creating effective professional development plans for all the staff members. In order to achieve these goals, these plans have to be shared with the ministry (higher authority) for approval and support. One of the interviewees said, *"I totally agree we need improvement; there should be a plan from the beginning cohesive and coherent for us here and the Ministry should know about it"* (AD, INT2).

Another of the participants suggested discussing these plans with experts in the field to guide the staff throughout the whole process:

*They should have a proposal plan regarding staff PD to discuss with the people who understand ... We have to make a professional proposal and they have to bring those who are experienced in the field to tell us what to do regardless the staff gender or nationality.* (AC, INT3)

In addition, a number of members of the AD and the AC staff claimed that there was no clear PD program for them at the College, which made their participation and attendance random and more like a personal issue. One of the participants explained:

*"I don't think they give professional development as a huge priority in my opinion ... They are kind of using it as a time-filler, so if the teachers are at the end of the semester and just finished their marking and just have few*

*days, they want them to do some workshops and stuff, and that's when teachers want to relax, so maybe that is another reason of why they are not very serious about attending... We haven't had one for long time ... Well, there are the stuff held by the British Council, but again, that is through individual motivation, so it is not to do with the College". (AD, INT6)*

As mentioned by the staff who participated in this study, not much attention is given to the staff's PD, and there is no clear program, so in their opinion, *"It should be organized and there should be a program. A program is not a sequence of events; the program should be as the definition of the problem, actions taken to solve that problem, leading to the solutions"* (AC, INT5).

They asked to have more systematic procedures when planning PD for the staff. Participants also called for the provision of more PD opportunities throughout the year for the staff members either internally as one of the AC staff suggested (*"We should have at least two programs for workshops a year, one is not enough"*), or externally:

*Lecturers should also attend more conferences; they should give us the opportunity to go, you know, SQU and TESOL Arabia conferences. It would better if they can send more lecturers... They only send few; we need more of this kind of opportunities... as they only send 1 or 2 lecturers out of 120, which is nothing. (AC, FG3)*

It should be borne in mind that the symposium is no longer organised in the ELC, and they stopped the one or two staff members they used to choose annually to attend external PD. Staff emphasised the need for more PD opportunities: *"We have to have it more. We've got staff meetings every week; I would prefer to have professional development sessions"* (AC, INT4). Staff thought that professional development practices give them the motivation and energy to carry on their career more actively and professionally. One of the academics shared her experiences in her previous institution:

*Four months ago, in my previous workplace, I noticed a lot of PD opportunities for employees; we were giving lots of things. That made me really grateful, made me loyal to my workplace and want to give more. You know, this commitment you create, really beneficial for both the institution and the teacher as well, (AC, FG3)*

### 5.7.2.2. Raising staff awareness

Raising staff awareness of the significance of whatever PD opportunities are available to them was also considered a way to encourage them to attend.

*It is very important to show the teachers the connection between what the training is about and what are they doing, so why am I really providing this, how would this improve the teaching that is in situation. (AD, INT5)*

The data also indicated that raising awareness involved talking about one's own weakness so others can help. That is not the case in the Centre, as most of the staff would not admit to not knowing something. A member of the staff described the situation as follows:

*We never talk about our PD needs because people, you know, they have this attitude that they know everything, so generally, people don't want to talk about what they don't know, and they can't do. (AD, INT6)*

It was also suggested that staff need to be independent and not rely on the institution only to provide for all their needs. They need to find their own ways to develop. It is necessary, sometimes, for the staff members to take charge of their own learning, which also means development. That has to do with the inner motivation of the staff member him/herself. So, on the one hand, the College has some responsibility, but *"on the other hand, the academics, they also have to work on their PD individually. So, visiting workshops - it is not like a must; it is if you really want to go, you will go, if you don't want to go, you just hate teaching"* (AC, FG2)

This point was also emphasised by the AD staff, as one commented, *"You can't rely just on the College's workshops. I think you have to develop yourself because otherwise, you stagnate, and you end up not enjoying your work"* (AD, INT6).

That is consistent with the AC staff answers in the questionnaire when asked about if they should be giving control over their participation in the provided PD sessions. The majority found that very important and important to them as Table 5.38 below shows.

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Giving academics control over their participation in provided PD activities	41 (51%)	33 (40%)	7 (9%)	-

**Table 5.38 Factors to enhance PD - Giving the academics control over their participation in the provided PD sessions.**

Nevertheless, in addition, the Centre has to work out ways to aid its staff members' PD even when they do not get the sufficient support from the higher authorities, from the colleges themselves, or from the ministry.

### 5.7.2.3. Encouragement, appreciation, and elimination of differentiation

In relation to the enhancement of the staff's professional development in the ELC and the College as a whole, staff should be treated equally especially regarding their rights for PD. AC staff believed that providing encouragement and appreciation, eliminating the differentiation between the staff members, and providing equal PD chances and support for all would definitely aid in improving the PD in the CoTs.

Interviews with the participants confirmed that there is a lack of appreciation and encouragement for their accomplishments, efforts, and attempts at development, which is discouraging and demotivating. One method of encouragement was indicated in the questionnaire, which is that encouragement can happen through the reward system, as 43 of the questionnaire's respondents considered it very important, and 27 considered it important for them as Table 5.39 below shows.

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Encouraging academics' participation in PD activities by using a reward system	43 (53%)	27 (33%)	8 (10%)	3 (4%)

**Table 5.39 Factors to enhance PD - Encouraging academics' participation in PD activities by using a reward system**

This was also evident in the interviews, as some of the participants pointed out the significant role motivation can play to enhance the current situation. It was remarked

that *“the motivation and part of that the professional development is really important”* (AD, INT6). However, a reward does not always mean financial rewards; it can be through appreciation as well, as was noted in one of the interviews: *“They don’t see the work you put in... Nobody says, ‘Thank you’. Added to that, they want results, but they do nothing to encourage us”* (AC, INT6).

Sometimes, AC staff complained also about the lack of encouragement and appreciation of their efforts. Another interviewee shared her experience saying:

*I was doing the crosswords for reading and listening, and some teachers with me in the same office liked the idea and asked me how to do it, and they said, “Why don’t you make a workshop?” I didn’t... I didn’t refuse, but maybe I didn’t find enough encouragement to do it.* (AC, FG2)

Encouragement was seen as a very significant factor for staff to participate in the professional development in the Centre either by presenting and sharing their knowledge with others or through attending and giving feedback on what is provided.

Staff pointed out the need to be treated equally with no differentiation between Omani and non-Omani staff members because differentiation would demotivating, as it was remarked:

*“In the class, foreign teachers should be encouraged as well. We’ve got a lot of foreign teachers - 50% or even more - so local teachers are encouraged, and foreign teachers are not encouraged - 50% of them. Why? They also go to the classrooms, they teach students, right?”* (AC, FG2)

She remarked on the importance of encouragement for the staff to participate more, seek PD, and share their knowledge and experiences, especially the successful ones with other staff members. A number of the interviewed participants observed that there is differentiation between the staff members regarding the kind of opportunities and support allocated for their PD, saying, *“the opportunities are not equal... each having their own agenda, each one treated differently, unity is missing. There is no oneness here; everyone is different”* (AC, FG3).

The majority of the practitioners also suggested some ways to have more equal opportunities and training for all. For example, they proposed the following:

*“I will make teachers take these workshops in turns so ten at one time, other ten at other times. I don’t want to miss teachers here; we don’t want them to get fed up because sometimes the work is very hectic”* (AC, INT2)

Another suggestion was that

*“the College should be able to say, “Ok, this session we are sending this number of people. When you come back, you hold a session in the College and share... and next this number of people go, and you come back, you hold session in the College, and you share”.*

(AC, INT6)

Their suggestions are to have more staff participating in PD by making sure all have a chance to attend and by asking those who attended to benefit others as well by sharing their PD experience with them. There also should be clear selection criteria when sending staff for PD, as it was claimed that *“the criteria for selection are not clear, and I don’t know if it even exists”* (AC, FG1), so clear criteria and equal chances for all are seen as essential.

This issue was stressed in the interviews, which could be because of the current staff experiences in the College. A member of academics stressed:

*“Opportunities should be given to everybody because there are times where they have to write about what they are interested to do, but the decision is with the head, although, yah, he has the right because if all the teachers participated, then they will have to miss their classes, which is not acceptable, so spreading opportunities to teachers. Another thing is, if there is one professional development opportunity, then they could repeat it so others could learn if they missed the first chance; they have to allow the teachers to experience the same opportunity especially if it is international one”.* (AC, FG3)

Opportunities should be provided not only for the AC staff but also to give the AD staff, coordinators, and people in charge the chance to participate so they can develop and perform their duties efficiently and professionally. A member of the AD staff shared their experience as a representation of her colleagues claims saying, *“No training was provided to me... I am a member of the management, and I don’t have a qualification in management”* (AD, INT5).

This participant also raised another point, that is, that there should be equal treatment for staff of all the College’s departments especially regarding PD or higher education opportunities, as EFL lecturers are not paid much attention. AC staff believed that should be considered and changed, as they felt that they should be given equal chances to complete their higher education. It was also stressed by a member of the AD staff that there is a need for resource people to develop the

Centre, as in tasks like curriculum review or development, there is a need for PhD holders who can guide the revision or development in more efficient and professional ways (AD, INT2). Yet this participant explained that the ministry never looks at it in this way; they suppose that there is no need for PhD holders to teach the English language, even though they do send a number of lecturers annually for higher education from the rest of the departments at the College.

#### 5.7.2.4. More supportive atmosphere

As was indicated in previous sections, not all the staff had satisfactory experiences regarding the support from the Centre’s management to join PD courses or external conferences. The research participants also asked for more support from the Centre’s management and higher authorities regarding staff participation and involvement in PD as a way to enhance the current provision. This was illustrated by a member of the AC staff:

*“Professional development in our College is another problem, even if there are people who are doing it for themselves, but they are not getting any response in terms of numbers of teaching hours or duties. I know there are many staff who are doing their master’s or some courses, but they are full on load with other duties so even time, you are not giving, so you forget about the financial support now”. (AC, FG1).*

The Centre’s management need to be more flexible in allowing staff to join courses, including being flexible about workloads so they get chance to find a balance between their duties and their PD. The College management also need to support staff members’ participation in PD as well as the provision of various PD options and utilities throughout the academic year. The data from the questionnaire indicated that staff considered administrative and financial support as important to very important to them as the numbers below show.

Factors to enhance PD	Very important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
Facilitating the conduct of the PD activities by administrative support	50 (62%)	27 (33%)	4 (5%)	-
Facilitating the conduct of PD activities by financial support	54 (66%)	22 (24%)	5 (10%)	-

**Table 5.40 Factors to enhance PD – facilitating PD activities by financial and administrative support**



Thus, in addition to support from the Centre’s management and the College’s management, both the AD and AC staff stated that PD provision be enhanced if the ministry were to offer more support especially financially. A member of the AD staff stated:

*“I believe the ministry should support more because we try every year to improve the event we are running, and of course, for the improvement we need more support especially the financial support because once we are conducting events like the ELT symposium, we have invite people from outside the country like the plenary speakers; inviting plenary speakers and teachers requires financial support”. (AD, INT1)*

Most of the research participants agreed that the ministry should give more attention and support to the staff PD to enhance PD at the College. A member of the AD and others described the same experience they had with the ministry:

*“Definitely ministry’s support - they investigate our needs through these forms, but we got nothing from them at all to the extent that I have stopped completing these forms and in the recent meeting... they told us this a lot, like, “Give us your proposals. What are your needs?” We did everything they wanted through our staff development coordinator, but unfortunately nothing has been done”. (AD, INT5)*

Another point that was also noted was the workload and pressure staff experienced at the College. That is why staff found it difficult to incorporate everything they had learned in workshops or sessions of the symposium, as one interviewee explained, *“If we don’t get time to practise what we learned, we will end up using nothing... Those things like the note you took, and everything you were very excited about, we just put them in the drawer” (AC, FG3)*. This was also pointed out by 80% of the questionnaire’s respondents, who considered reducing academic staff’s workload as very important to important for them in order to enhance their participation in PD opportunities as Table 5.41 below illustrates:

<b>Factors to enhance PD</b>	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Slightly important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
Reducing academics’ workload to enhance their participation in the PD activities	<b>38 (47%)</b>	<b>27 (33%)</b>	<b>13 (16%)</b>	<b>3 (4%)</b>

**Table 5.41 Factors to enhance PD- Reducing academics’ workload to enhance their participation in the PD activities**

Thus, the management should also look into this issue and try to devise a way or find time for the staff whereby they can establish a balance between their duties and their development, as it will eventually lead to more efficient or better quality work. They should pay attention to the factors that might hinder their AC staff's PD and create a favourable PD environment for them.

#### **5.7.2.5. Sufficient and varied PD opportunities that suit the different needs**

In addition to previously presented factors, a member of the interviewed staff proposed new ideas to initiate new approaches to PD in the CoTs through integrating online programmes in the staff's PD. He shared the experience, which can be considered as a representative of the others, he had in his previous workplace:

*"I was in the private sector working in one of the companies. The day I started, there is a clear program of 88 sessions that I have to complete within two years. They are online programs which we don't have here for our teachers. There are many universities around the world that run programs that can participate and get certificates for these for free, and some of these certificates are even for Harvard University. I had two, so it is a program for two hours: you sit next to your computer and just read the slides, understand, answer questions until you complete, print the certificate, and put it in your professional development file. If they ask me, I will suggest that we can do it, but just coordinate with these universities to have at least that program suits the culture, suits the context and the practice we have here. Maybe you can think of this one". (AD, INT2)*

His idea could offer easily accessible, affordable, interesting, and reliable PD. Another suggestion was concerned with the provision of variety and up-to-date topics and ideas for development, as the participant commented, *"The institution can provide experiences that are up-to-date; they don't have to nag on the same things everyday"* (AC, FG3).

Another member of the AC staff emphasised that saying, *"That is what we need - variety! That creates interest as well"* (AC, FG3). Indeed, regarding variety, to vary the ways adopted for PD in the Centre, research needs to be adopted as one method for the staff's professional growth in the College, as some of the participants strongly believed this was important:

*“If the College wants to establish itself as a highly respected educational institution, they have to come up with a program for research, and then amazingly, you will see how many people will volunteer. They like to do that. We have a lot of Omani teachers who are capable of doing anything if you just give them a chance; just give them a chance and when they do something, just little thing, help them - don’t judge them”. (AC, FG2)*

She believed that the staff have the ability and the motive to conduct research, but that the opportunities to do so are not available. Another member highlighted a similar point:

*“It should not be only about the short courses; it should include money to send for PhDs... If you want to improve, for example, the curriculum, the assessment system... you need researchers, you don’t need lecturers... Now we are reviewing new curriculum and new program, and who is reviewing? Lecturers! Ok, lecturers is part of it but based on what research? ... We need some PhD holders; they know at least how to suggest things what to be implemented what to be done”. (AD, INT2)*

Thus, as it is beneficial for both the staff and the institution as a whole, it is essential to raise the staff’s awareness and educate them on the research base, so they can use research to widen their knowledge of the field, experiment with their ideas and proposals and so use more scientific methods rather than just random suggestions to share and develop. This idea was also suggested so staff proposals and suggestions

*“...should be based on kind of experiment or research. You can’t just propose because you think it is just better for the students and that’s it. You have to work on your own, you have to experiment, and then the result of the experiment should be in the proposal... PD needs a background; research is a background, small research, or elements of research”. (AC, FG2)*

Activating the research committee in the Centre has become essential for the academic staff members’ professional growth in the field. It will also help them resolve any issues they might face in their teaching context, for example, if they face issues with the students’ pronunciation: *“Why don’t we have a group of teachers using research and work on exercises to help the students with that? ... Research should be part of the professional development at the centre” (AC, INT4).*

Accordingly, the provision of varied, yet high quality PD options for the staff is needed especially for large numbers of academics, as the College has around 140

AC staff. Those who participated in the questionnaire considered this to be very important, as Table 5.42 below shows:

<b>Factors to enhance PD</b>	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Slightly important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
Varying the PD options for the academics, so they can choose what best fits their needs	<b>51 (63%)</b>	<b>30 (37%)</b>	-	-

**Table 5.42: Factors to enhance PD - Varying the PD options for the academics, so they can choose what best fits their needs**

From the research participants' perspective, all the above-mentioned factors can contribute to successful professional development in the English Language Centre in particular and the Colleges of Technology in general.

## **5.8. Conclusion**

The findings from the analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data collected from different sources (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews,) was presented in this chapter. Similarities and differences between the data generated from these different sources were seen to enrich the interpretation and presentation of the findings, which sought to address the research questions my study is investigating. Having presented the research findings, I will now move to a discussion chapter in which I will critically reflect on these results and their implications for improving CPD for English teachers in Oman.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings of the data collected for the current study. The themes that were identified through the analysis of the data in the previous chapter are discussed in relation to the aims and research questions of the study and the existing literature. These themes are presented focusing primarily on how academic and administrative staff members conceptualised their professional development (PD) experience throughout their work life and the factors shaping this experience. I will also discuss how these staff members perceive their PD needs, the current PD provision and their insights on how to enhance PD. The discussion shows how the findings of the present study can contribute to a fuller conceptual understanding of the professional development of English Language Center staff in the Omani higher educational context.

### 6.2. ELC staff understanding of professional development (PD)

Both international and local literature acknowledges how EFL teachers perceive their PD. Internationally, the literature casts a wide net for what might be included as professional development, moving beyond discrete activities such as workshops, local and national conferences, college courses, special institutes and centers into newer, more complex and broad-based views on how to conceptualize teachers' professional development. PD was described by Little (1987) as "any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare paid staff members for improved performance in present or future roles in the school districts" (p. 491). PD is also perceived as a significant way for improving teachers' quality, and thus enhancing students' learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Similarly, Borg (2015) highlighted that teacher PD draws on their own inner resource for change and it is focused on their personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and what effects the changing process.

With regard to the local literature, and prior to 2009, the scope of the research on PD in the Omani context has been limited to either a small number of participants or only one type of existing PD activity (see Al-Lamki, 2009). Studies seem to have been carried out in isolation with no apparent awareness or reference to the previous

research carried out in the Sultanate (*ibid*). The teachers' understanding of PD received little attention as researchers mostly considered the relationship between the teachers' PD beliefs and their attitudes (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Habsi, 2009; Al-Harrasi, 2005; Al-Hinai, 2002) and practices (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Aufi, 2014). The studies were also carried out to develop a better understanding of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' beliefs in relation to PD (Al-Lamki, 2009). Al-Ghatrifi (2016) explained that the main differences that emerged in relation to his study participants' understanding of professional development were the development of teaching skills, curriculum and infrastructure and how these can impact on their motivation to participate in PD.

For the current study, the findings suggest that English language teachers in the Colleges of Technology hold different perceptions about their PD. For example, the participants, especially administrative staff, believe that the current PD is a directed practice that is organized through a top-down approach. Teachers here are likely to instantly recognise the PD practised in the ELCs as a model in which one or a group of administrative staff decides on the content to be delivered and the participants are largely passive recipients of this. They believe that a top-down approach like this can be seen as an imposition by administrators, who focus on the skills that they (the administrators) think teachers need to upgrade; thus, it does not always help teachers stay enthusiastic (Farrell, 2000, p. 27). Teachers, as a result, called for further involvement in deciding on and designing the type of PD they need. Such a process is called a bottom-up approach (Farrell, 2000); this model asks teachers to work together in a community of practice (*ibid*). A bottom-up approach to English teacher development is usually more effective because individual teachers recognize a need to develop specific skills (Farrell, 2000).

Al-Balushi (2017) applied this approach in the Omani context through employing a participatory model where teachers participated in deciding, designing, negotiating and reflecting upon their PD tasks. She found that this model allowed engagement among her participants in a meaningful way, thus creating the opportunity for the teachers to shape their own personal and professional development (*ibid*). She argued that offering a menu of activities for teachers to choose from encouraged them to have a voice. Thus, professional development is seen by her participants as

most effective when a bottom-up approach is favoured over a top-down one, a fact that was also emphasised by (Farrell, 2000).

Yet, and despite efforts to organize and prepare PD activities, taking part in these activities still related to the teachers' beliefs and attitudes. The current study's findings also show a certain relationship between the teachers' stated beliefs about PD and their reported practices of PD. A key source for teachers' beliefs of PD is their PD practices. Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova (2014) argued that PD should extend to include not only job-related skills or knowledge but also teachers' attitudes and beliefs. Borg (2015) also suggests that understanding teachers requires an understanding of their mental lives, attitudes and their observable behaviours. In a similar vein, Vries *et al* (2013) note that a comparable relationship exists between teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and their PD activities. It was clear that the current study participants' beliefs about PD are affected mainly by their experience of participating in PD events (Kennedy, 2016). For instance, findings revealed that many of the research participants hold positive beliefs about continuing their PD; they value the importance of PD and believe in the strong relationship between teaching and PD. They are of the opinion that some PD activities that teachers join can enrich them by supporting their teaching skills and thus they feed into their teaching and develop it. This is encouraging as it is well-documented that teachers with more positive attitudes towards PD are more likely to have beneficial learning experiences in PD programmes (Haney *et al.* 1996; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). However, it was also observed that the wide-range of beliefs that the participants of this study hold about their PD affect their participation in the allocated PD tasks. Vries *et al.* (2013) argue that teachers' PD can lead to improvement in the quality of their teaching practices, yet teachers differ greatly in the extent to which they engage in PD. Al-Lamki (2009) justifies such a situation in the Omani context through claiming that, since there is no formal guidance for teachers about the PD opportunities available for them, then teachers' understanding of PD depends on their preferences and interpretations. Accordingly, this study's practitioners suggested a number of procedures to enhance the situation, as will be seen in Section 6.5.

Understanding of PD as ongoing, continuous and embedded in teachers' daily lives

(Lieberman, 1995; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1987) was also mentioned by the current study's participants. This type of embedded professional development can take the form of co-teaching, mentoring, reflecting on actual lessons (Schifter & Fosnot, 1993), or group discussions surrounding selected authentic artifacts from practice such as student work or instructional tasks (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Gearhart & Wolf, 1994). Another kind of teacher activity that falls under this kind of professional development umbrella is involvement in a development or improvement process (Guskey, 2000), for example, designing or choosing new curricula or textbooks or assisting with the school improvement plan. Such practices were cited in a number of local studies as well, such as Al-Balushi (2017), Al-Aufi (2014) and Al-Lamki (2009).

To conclude this section, it can be inferred that the above-mentioned multi-understandings of PD indicate that there is a consensus about the lack of a shared understanding of PD among the participants of this study. Such a consensus was also mentioned in different studies conducted in the Omani educational context (for instance Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016 and Al-Lamki, 2009). I believe that, in order to explore why such a shared understanding was unobtainable, we need also to explore how teachers perceive their PD needs and the current PD provision.

### **6.3. ELC staff perceptions of their PD needs**

Throughout their careers, teachers have to deal with professional challenges as a result of (but not limited to) changes in curricula, policies and student needs. The participants of the current study claimed that what they learnt as teacher-students at universities does not satisfy their needs as they go through their professional lives. According to Richards and Farrell (2005, p.1), at the pre-service level teachers cannot be provided with everything they need to know due to the fact that the knowledge base of teaching changes constantly. In addition, from the obtained data it was indicated that the college staff, including the English Language Centre teachers, are asked to spend hours each year in updating their professional knowledge through attending local and international workshops and conferences, to meet professional standards and to improve teaching methodology, research and managerial abilities, professional and teacher qualities and most importantly to maintain their job.



Despite their participation in a number of PD workshops, the teachers maintained that many of these workshops failed to meet their needs. There were problems of, for example, the limitation and discontinuity of these workshops or the inappropriateness and non-suitability of their content for professional development (Meng, Tajaroensuk, 2013). Both international (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Devlin, 2008) and local literature (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009) highlight the complexity of linking such activities to tangible outcomes such as changes in the quality of teacher practices and of student academic performance. Al-Balushi (2017) goes further to attribute such a result (i.e. that these activities are not always seen by teachers as effective) to the fact that policy makers and higher authorities are not systematic in collecting, analysing and assessing EFL teachers' needs in Oman in order to meet their needs. Thus, the participants pointed out that they seek a form of PD that satisfies their personal and professional needs and one that will constructively influence teachers' perceptions and practices, students' progress, and the deployment of educational reforms (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). To achieve such a form of PD, significant attention should be paid to whether its content meets teachers' needs or not (Zein, 2017).

This study investigated the ELC staff PD needs due to their importance in developing PD plans for the staff members. The participants emphasised the significance of this step in order to maximize the chances of getting satisfactory and applicable results. It was highlighted that "imposing agendas in professional growth may not have the results expected as teachers tend to be more committed to be agents of their own development if they had more opportunities to say what they need" (Gonzalez, et al, 2002, p.30). The needs that the current study participants cited have been classified into teacher-related needs and student-related needs and are outlined below.

### **6.3.1. Teacher-related needs**

The participants considered improving and maintaining their English Language proficiency as essential and they seek PD that will help them to do so. This is attributed to the fact that the designated English curriculum and syllabus in CoTs' ELCs have shifted from the traditional grammar-translation approach and are now premised on more communicative and learner-centred competency as a reflection of the intensifying phenomenon of the "globalization" of English. This shift requires the

teachers to use the target language more in the classroom and also to improve their target language proficiency if necessary (Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths, 2018). According to (Zein, 2017, p. 295) “quality EFL teachers are distinguished by their abilities to use the English language proficiently” and to demonstrate strong performance in language-related pedagogies (Copland *et al.* 2014). Such a demonstration is likely to contribute to the eventual advancement of students’ performances and achievements (Barlow *et al.* 2014) whereas failure to focus on such core issues could lead to the failure of the PD programmes to sustain teachers’ motivation (Zein, 2017). Garet *et al.* (2001, p. 927) argued that teachers need PD programmes which are “more likely to be effective in improving teachers’ linguistic knowledge and skills”. These programmes are useful if they form “a coherent part of a wider set of opportunities for teacher learning and development” (*ibid*), and, according to Zein (2017), should primarily deal with pedagogical content knowledge including (but not limited to) methods of teaching, planning and conducting effective lessons, creating supportive learning environments and resources, and assessing students’ progress and proficiency.

It is worth mentioning that, in the current study, it was not only the academics who called for professional development, but that administrative staff also expressed their passion and need to develop these skills and their other administrative skills as they are also involved in teaching in the centres. In addition they asked for training in relation to the position they hold; for example, the exam coordinators need PD in how to write exams for the skills for which they are responsible, namely reading, writing, listening and speaking. Management staff also expressed their need for PD in relation to their roles as administrators, as their qualifications are in most cases unrelated to administrative procedures.

For the current study, the academics similarly perceived pedagogical needs as of high importance for them. The results indicate that all the respondents evaluated this area of knowledge to be important to their teaching profession. In relation to their need of PD in teaching methods and approaches, and due to the nature of their job and their job description as stated in Chapter two, the staff talked about some of their teaching-related needs. For example, the teachers focused on teaching methods and approaches as necessary to accomplish their main obligation as academics in

the English Language Center. They stressed their need for certified practical English language teaching courses such as CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) and DELTA (Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults). Such courses give the teachers the essential knowledge, hands-on teaching experience and classroom confidence to qualify as a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL). They involve a blend of both theory and practice that helps teachers to develop professionally throughout their career.

Within this domain of needs, teachers also look for PD that will help them improve their knowledge of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as they teach technical communication for students from different specializations. Banned and Lock (2010) suggest that, in addition to being proficient in English, an effective lecturer should also have sound content knowledge of the discipline in order to make learning more relevant and meaningful to ease the transition of undergraduates throughout the different academic settings. A similar finding was reported by Khaldi (2015), who claimed the lecturer's "proficiency in the subject matter a very important feature" (p. 3). These findings have also been reflected in ample local research. Al-Hinai (2018), for instance, attests that a number of the difficulties that students have with study in general and assignment writing in specific can be traced back to several aspects, one of which is the difficulty in understanding their teachers' instruction for the writing tasks that these students are exposed to on business writing courses. Al-Hinai's study participants were in consensus over the point that it is a convoluted task for lecturers of technical communication courses to attempt to make a distinction between the pedagogic content and subject matter knowledge while teaching these courses. Al-Azri (2016) suggested the implementation of authentic materials to partially overcome such issues in the Omani tertiary context, issues which the Colleges of Technology also experience. Authenticity has been extensively researched, in order to "devise a principled approach to using authentic documents and texts in both the teaching and testing of language skills" (Wiwczarowski, 2015, p. 5). Yet, producing an authentic piece of written text in the Omani context may result in frustration not only for students but also for their teachers, especially during the early stages of study, as authenticity is a criterion which requires continual updating (Al-Hinai, 2018). Teachers are aware of the complexity of designing authentic pieces of work and the support that students get from their teachers is crucial in determining

their confidence to learn (Al-Badwawi, 2011).

Curriculum and material development were also a concern for a number of the participants, as expressed in both quantitative and qualitative data. Administrative staff agreed that it is a necessary skill for staff members in the center so they can participate in the curriculum development activities whenever needed. Academics themselves pointed to their need of professional development that covers areas related to curriculum development to help them develop materials that match the learning outcomes they are required to achieve, especially considering that they are not provided with direct curriculum or materials that cover all the learning outcomes. Another aspect of the staff PD needs relates to classroom management and timing; it is the teachers who have to deal directly with the students in the classroom and to manage different personalities and backgrounds. They also seek PD that helps them with time management, both as regards the course (delivery plan) and the individual lessons. Assessment was also seen as an integral part of teaching English language or any other subject. Administrators considered it of primary importance for their staff members to develop assessment skills. Academics involved in the current study expressed their need to have PD in assessment to be able to properly assess their students' achievements. This resonates with Al-Hinai's (2018) findings concerning the issue of disparity between the extent and range of ways in which teachers interpret and assess reports. For example, in the area of technical studies, teachers tend to be overly sensitive to linguistic choices, whereas students appear to take a far more practical view of the way in which the message of their technical texts should be delivered to their readers. Researchers such as Al-Azemi (2017), Al-Badwawi (2011) and Obaid (2009) believe that teachers in such situations are often uncertain about what to consider when assessing students' communication abilities. This relates to the current study, where participants need PD that will help them overcome such uncertainty.

Al-Badwawi (2011) also believes that "students' awareness of the varying foci of their teachers influences their approach to assignment writing in the different disciplines and for different teachers". This raises another practical consideration that should be taken into account by teachers, namely the heterogenous nature of their classrooms, which, according to Hirvela (1997), is another problem facing language teachers

attempting to teach discipline specific courses. CoTs are no exception to this issue of heterogeneity as transition to study at these colleges entails, among other things, handling the varying and sometimes even contradicting requirements from the different academic departments that the students belong to (Lea and Street, 1998). Al-Bedwawi (2011) believes that having classrooms that consist of students from several departments (as is the norm in the CoTs' ELCs) makes it difficult to cater for the different needs of all students in the class (Al-Badwawi, 2011). All of this strengthens the argument for PD for teachers in assessing such groups of students.

These results lend support to a number of previous studies both in Oman and internationally. For instance, a number of Omani researchers have questioned the effectiveness of INSET courses in contributing to changes in EFL teachers' beliefs and/or their classroom practices (e.g. Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths, 2018; AL-Balushi, 2017; Al-Lamki, 2009). Correspondingly, in a recent study conducted by Zein (2017) in the Japanese context, it was revealed that the current PD practices failed to fulfil the diverse needs of participants and thus special attention should be paid to designing courses that do so.

### **6.3.2. Student-related needs**

In the present study, the teachers expressed their desire to understand concerns related to their students' psychology including (but not limited to) how to motivate them, how to interpret their behaviours and attitudes, and how to deal with special-needs students' emotions. All these challenges lead to the staff need for PD in psychology. PD in psychology was both directly and implicitly indicated within the interviews, which many of the academics participated in. They said that they needed to be aware of these elements of educational psychology to be able to clarify and cope with their students' different levels and needs appropriately. In fact, the inclusion of data that indicates the teachers' concerns regarding their students' psychological issues marks a departure from previous local research that exclusively generated data that focus primarily on the EFL teachers (for example Al-Balushi, 2017; among others, Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009). These studies investigated the pedagogical practices of teachers (Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009) and their perspectives of PD in relation to academic (Al-Balushi, 2017) and administrative (Al-Ghatrifi, 2016) life and drew implications for PD but paid

insufficient attention to the need to understand students psychologically. According to Zein (2017), by understanding their students' psychological needs, teachers can design activities and educational materials that satisfy these needs appropriately. Participants in this study thus seek PD experiences that help them to overcome various challenges they face in their job, especially with their students.

Regarding motivating their students, teachers said that it is an issue for many academics so they considered it an area in which they need to develop. They also indicated that they need to be updated on how they can cope with those students who tend to be demotivated and want to be spoon-fed. From the quantitative analysis, teachers rated teacher efficacy for students' engagement and motivation as low; however, the qualitative results showed that the participants need to use various strategies to raise students' motivation. It may be difficult for teachers to increase the motivation of students who have low interest in English, especially in an EFL setting like that in the CoTs ELCs. This may explain why teachers there seem to possess various strategies to cope with the issues of motivating low level learners who have low interest in English; indeed, the participants of the current study maintained that motivating low-level students is a considerable challenge. The number of these students increases annually due to the increase in numbers of students accepted into the Colleges of Technology with low grades in their General Diploma (Secondary School) level. Participants reported a number of strategies to motivate their students such as using pair and group activities, setting short activities so that students do not get bored, and incorporating topics that students are interested in.

Another motivation-related challenge reported by the teachers concerns the need to have a good rapport with the students and motivate them to study the language. Thus, teachers need to increase the motivational factors and eliminate the sources of dissatisfaction. Students' demotivation was attributed by the current study's participants to the attitudes and behaviours of students. Therefore, PD in cultural differences was also required, especially by foreign teachers who face difficulties in understanding their students' behaviors or attitudes which they believe may affect their study. Al-Badwawi (2011) related students' attitudes and behaviours to learning experiences, as students come to the college with diverse previous language learning experiences. These learning histories influence students' perceptions,

expectations and attitudes towards the new learning situation and shape their subsequent experiences (ibid). Vardi (2003, pp.89-90) argues that “when attempting a new learning task, students rely on the insights that they gained through their prior knowledge and experience with similar tasks”. This finding resonates with findings of other local studies in acknowledging the influence of students’ prior educational background on their attitudes towards learning in tertiary situations (for example Al-Hinai, 2018; Al-Azri, 2016).

Teachers also pointed to their lack of knowledge regarding students with special needs who are now integrated into the general education system in the schools and colleges. This issue was controversial and debatable among the participants of the current study. They argue that it is good to include students with special needs in the CoTs, yet there are no specialised staff in the colleges trained to cope with them. Administrative staff went further and added that the ELCs and other infrastructure in the colleges are not prepared to receive such students. For example, one of the HoCs expressed his concerns in an interview that they have two students who are deaf and dumb and, as a college, they do not know how to deal with such cases. This participant went on to blame the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) for distributing such students among the colleges randomly without making sure that the colleges are set up to receive such cases. Regarding PD, the current study’s teachers ask for PD that will raise their awareness of how to deal with such cases as it is not logical to prepare only the institutions and ignore the people who will be in direct contact with such students. As I mentioned earlier, unfortunately there is a lack of research on how teachers can be prepared to deal with special needs cases. It is beyond the scope of this study to cover this point here as it deserves a more thorough investigation in a way that may help not only the CoTs but other Higher Educational institutions as well. I suggest that this issue be further studied and the international literature related to the topic be explored.

To conclude, as Angela Scarino *et al.* (2009) stated, our understanding of learning and learners is not a simple acquisition of competency that can then be put into practice; rather, it develops over time and in diverse contexts by working with multi-level students. To further understand how such development may be sustained in the CoTs ELCs there is a need to consider the current PD provision in this context,

which is discussed in the following section.

#### **6.4. ELC staff perceptions of the current PD provision at the CTs**

Many academics revealed that they had limited experience of CPD; they experienced some learning opportunities through participating in formal structured activities such as training sessions, workshops, observations and symposiums. However, these models are still non-responsive to the continuous demands of teachers to be professionally developed. According to Al-Balushi (2017), “there is a real need now for new policies and practices to improve the quality and professionalism of the teaching force in Oman”.

##### **6.4.1. Training is the dominant model of PD**

The academics stated that the main PD activities they engage in are those which are promoted by the institution, and some tended to see them only as forms of training. Participants' accounts show that the model of PD promoted in the ELC is one that is most closely aligned with the training approach to PD discussed in the literature. This reflects the centralized educational system and the top-down PD system in the Omani context (Al Balushi 2017, Lamki 2009). In other words, policies are usually formed by people at the upper level either in the ELC administration or the Ministry of Manpower, which is in charge of the CoTs, and sometimes by outside experts.

The findings indicate that, in the PD system in Oman, structured formal training courses seem to be the most dominant approach and are commonplace in many educational settings. However, the PD literature highlights how teachers do not necessarily view training in a negative light (e.g. Assalahi, 2017; Yurtsever, 2013; Raza, 2010). In addition it is also widely acknowledged that, in the early stages of their career, teachers often find training beneficial (Zohairy, 2011; Kennedy, 2005; Wallace, 1991). The purpose of this form of professional development, whether in the form of workshops, observations or symposiums, was understood by the participants to address perceived teacher deficiencies. These are mostly determined by the administrative staff through staff appraisals, as the findings showed in Chapter 5. This reflects a traditional model of in-service professional development (Sandholtz, 2002), which perceives teachers as passive recipients (Johnson, 2006;



Day & Sachs, 2004).

However, while a training orientation to PD may well have a place in a teacher education programme (Freeman, 2009), in general, as Hargreaves (1995) notes, a training orientation to PD is increasingly cast in a negative light due to the fact that it reduces PD to “a narrow, utilitarian exercise that does not question the purposes and parameters of what teachers do” (Hargreaves, 1995: 26). The results of this study show that teachers themselves were not happy with the training model promoted, with many citing a preference for continuous, self-directed and informal PD. The findings also suggest that teachers favored PD that is more collaborative and saw collegiality as integral to teachers’ learning, something which was somehow absent from their workplace. This corresponds to the findings of a similar study, which reflect the teachers’ preference for “a more development orientated more normative re-educative form of PD underpinned by a view of learning as socially constructed” (Assalahi, 2017). It also resonates with the findings of the studies undertaken by Raza (2010), Yurtsever (2013), Fraser (2011), Crawford (2009), O’Connell (2010) and Al Hussini (2017).

#### **6.4.2. Staff views on current PD provision**

When describing the current PD provision in the English Language Center, staff views varied. Almost all the administrative staff had a very positive impression about their PD plans for the academics. Nevertheless, whilst there was overall satisfaction with the current PD opportunities, not all the academics seemed to be fully satisfied with what is provided. Academics were not totally content with the amount of opportunities offered, the practicality of the content, the timing of the sessions, the support provided and, in some cases, even the speakers or presenters were not up to the expected level. This reflects the previously discussed results of what PD is and how it can be promoted between both groups of participants, namely administrative and academic staff. Their visions of what constitute PD were different, each having their own agenda.

Some of the teachers were eager to seek PD and revealed that they almost always get some benefits from all the PD sessions they have attended, both inside and outside their educational institution. However, some academics rarely attend any of

the PD opportunities and considered them as extra work. They even occasionally described some of the sessions as useless and a waste of time. According to the results, a number of the participating academics believed that the contents of some of the PD on offer are far from the reality of the actual classroom situations. Such attitudes can be attributed to various factors, including workload, years of experience, staff beliefs on the values of PD and the degree of interest and priority regarding PD.

With regard to workload, Wyatt (2013) stated that a hectic workload makes it harder for teachers to be satisfied with their performance as professionals and reduces a sense of creativeness. It also conflicts with the timing of organized PD sessions, and thus minimizes the teachers' participation. For instance, it was notable that in some countries "conflict with work schedule" was most frequently reported as a barrier for teachers taking more professional development: 73% of teachers in Korea and 65% in Portugal (OECD, 2009, p. 72). Similarly, the findings from the current study show that workload seems to be behind teachers' negative reaction to and lack of participation in the PD activities provided and to negatively affect some teachers' attitudes towards PD. This finding lends support to the results of several previous studies conducted in Oman (Al-Balushi, 2017; AL Gatriffi, 2016; Al-Habsi, 2009) in relation to extra curricula administrative duties. In the same vein, the image of teaching internationally is no better as many studies have reported teachers' dissatisfaction with the job due to unfavourable working conditions including workload (e.g. Takayama, 2015; Cheong, 2009; Choi & Tang, 2009). Yuan & Zhang (2017) consider that governments worldwide, including in Oman (Al-Balushi, 2017), need to improve teachers' work environment and conditions and make them attractive by lightening teachers' workload among other procedures.

Al-Balushi (2017) suggested hiring more teachers, preferably experienced and qualified teachers. This would likely require that teacher recruitment should no longer be automatic and that the government should pay considerable attention to teacher selection/recruitment even if the country is facing a problem of teacher surplus (Al-Balushi, 2017, p.221). Such criteria should also be applicable to access to PD opportunities. Most of the current study's participants maintained that their degree of interest regarding PD is low as they consider the current PD opportunities to be

useless. Sahlberg (2012) believes that when access to teacher education is highly selective and stringent and follows criteria and different stages, as in the case of teacher recruitment, then only the most capable candidates are admitted.

The other reason mentioned by the current study participants for the negative attitudes towards participating in PD opportunities was the degree of interest and priority regarding PD. In a study of the reasons for not taking more professional development, across the participating countries, among the most commonly cited reasons was “no suitable professional development” (42%) (OECD, 2009, p. 73). Such a percentage indicates that the lack of suitable PD opportunities is a significant factor, and, according to the literature, this seems to be the case in Oman as well (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009). Huberman (1993) believes that lack of participation increases according to the number of years that teachers spend in their career, as their different views of the needs are related to the phase of their career cycle: whether they are in the exploration phase, or the stabilization or the engagement phase. In Oman, the more experienced the teachers are the more they lack interest to participate. The participants of the current study consider that such an issue can be attributed to the fact that, when teachers reach a level of competency where they have sufficient knowledge of teaching methods, they feel that the PD opportunities offered to them add nothing. These teachers may prefer to pay for the type of PD they need to attend: surprisingly, OECD (2009) reported that globally teachers who pay the full cost of their PD take part in more than those who receive it free or at partial cost. However, even when teachers pay for their development, they are still demanding, as “those who pay towards the cost are more likely to say they want more” (OECD, 2009, p. 73). This suggests a need not just for better support for teachers to participate in professional development but for policy makers to ensure that the development opportunities available are effective and meet teachers’ needs in a way that enhances their attitudes towards taking part in these opportunities. Besides, participants also believe that policy makers need to pay attention to the staff commitments and make sure that they make good use of the opportunities provided.

### 6.4.3. Limitation of teachers' involvement in decision-making

Academic staff who participated in the current study mentioned that teachers' involvement in decision-making with regard to their professional development seemed be limited to those who fill in the quality assurance survey with the extent of their needs of already determined set of needs in relation to their English Language Teaching. This is not unusual at the CoTs in Oman:

*"[The CoTs] belong to an establishment where management is centralized. In such environment important decisions, for example, those decisions about the content, organization and duration, teacher and student recruitment, finance etc, are centrally taken by the highest rank of administrators" (Al-Husseini, 2004; p.23)*

Their disengagement in taking such decisions may explain some of the academics' negative views and attitudes towards the PD provided and their reluctance to attend some of the sessions. Through empowerment teachers can discover their potential and limitations for themselves as well as developing competence in their professional development (Balyer, Özçzn, & Yildiz, 2017, p. 1).

The results of the current study lend support to those of other international (Balyer, Özçzn, & Yildiz, 2017) and local (see Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009) studies, which reveal that, although administrators empower their teachers by providing opportunities for shared decision-making, they still do not adequately support their teachers' professional development by employing them in certain managerial roles. The Omani context is no exception. This ultimately affects the attitudes of these teachers towards taking part in the PD opportunities. Thus, teachers need further opportunities to decide their PD. Short (1994) states that teachers' full participation in critical decisions impacts their quality of work and enables their voice to be heard.

## **6.5. ELC staff suggestions for PD enhancement at the Colleges of Technology in Oman**

This study also revealed the participants' multidimensional conceptions of PD enhancement at the CoTs. These dimensions were on a macro-level, where they proposed a reform in which clear PD plans and strategies are applied. They argue that it is necessary to have professional development programmes which encourage teachers to reflect on their beliefs and make connections between their beliefs and the proposed change process.

The participants called for reform in the current PD system as a result of the ambiguity of the PD process applied in the CoTs. For instance, there is a lack of transparent criteria for selection of participants for various PD activities outside the ELC context. In this respect, both teachers and administrative staff agreed about the lack of transparency in decision-making related to their involvement in PD. This study stresses the need for a transparent system through which the PD policy and guidelines are outlined in written documents that are made accessible to the people concerned. The above-mentioned ambiguity was also found in previous studies, including Al-Balushi (2017) and Al-Lamki (2009).

Several consequences of this lack of clarity in the current PD system were manifested in this study. For example, the findings suggested a lack of coordination between different departments dealing with PD, which indicates the existence of communication gaps within the system. "Coordination amongst the people involved in any PD process is considered vital in order to achieve the desired results" (Al-Lamki, 2009, p168). As mentioned earlier, there are two parties responsible for the PD of English teachers in the CoTs, namely the supervision departments in the Ministry and the administration of each Center. The data showed that various PD roles are carried out by some departments in the Ministry, such as the Human Resources Development Department. At local level, CoTs represented in the ELCs seem to develop their own system of PD in the form of Professional Development Committees. The participants believe that, unfortunately, the absence of a documented framework poses difficulties in finding sufficient information about the roles each of these parties plays in promoting PD. Al-Lamki (2009, p.169) believes that while the involvement of different departments in supporting teachers' PD can

be regarded as “potentially positive, as each one may complement the other, it may cause problems if different departments plan PD without an awareness of one another”.

Within this macro-level, participants suggested that the reform should include, but not be limited to, the following micro-level approaches:

- Alternative PD models for staff PD
- Effective PD opportunities
- Ongoing support for staff
- Technology as PD resource
- Awareness raising towards life-long career development

Participants anticipated that understanding of such multidimensionality may help Technical College leaders and policy makers to better promote and facilitate PD in these institutions.

#### **6.5.1. Alternative PD models for staff PD**

Over the last two or three decades, a collection of what are presented as models of professional development has accumulated. These models tend to be either conceptual or processual in focus, relating respectively to the conceptualisation of professional development (i.e. what it is), and to the process(es) of achieving it (i.e. how it occurs) (Evans, 2014, p. 182). Some of these models consider developing teachers and helping teachers improve their teaching competence to be like the ‘integrated professional development model for effective teaching’ presented by Kuijpers *et al.* (2010), Glickman’s ‘developmental supervision model’ and Lovett and Gilmore’s (2003) ‘quality learning circle’ model of professional development. These models highlight “features missing from many current professional development programs” and offer “a promising alternative that teachers can use to help themselves” (Evans, 2014, p. 193). Locally, Al-Balushi (2017) proposed a participatory PD model in which she found a channel of communication and on-stage negotiation between teachers and policy makers to design PD activities and tasks.

However, Evans (2014, p.182) believes that these models offer limited clarification of the process(es) whereby people develop professionally. They fail to tell us anything about how teachers are likely to “end up knowing more, increasing their skills, and

changing their attitudes and beliefs, which is then likely to lead to changes to how they teach, which, in turn, is likely to improve students learning” (ibid). In Evans’ opinion, this has created an imbalance in the knowledge base that implies “an over-simplified interpretation and grasp of what professional development involves” (p. 183). Guskey (2002) argued that we need models that take into account what motivates teachers to engage in professional development and the process by which change in teachers typically occurs. This study was no exception as my participants reported that PD could evolve to involve a wide range of ongoing opportunities other than training. They emphasised the need to create PD opportunities that promote teachers’ collaboration. Such models should involve effective PD opportunities that may enhance practices of teaching and learning in the ELCs.

### **6.5.2. Effective PD opportunities**

The data revealed that respondents experienced different PD opportunities through participating in formal structured activities such as conference sessions and workshops as well as informal PD activities such as peer observation. Rich *et al.* (2014) reported that such opportunities in Oman are supposed to be an important support mechanism to encourage EFL teachers to remain professionally invigorated. The participants of this study, nevertheless, have suggested that these professional development tasks may well be designed to facilitate change but they are not teacher specific and do not focus on the day-to-day activities of the profession. Al-Balushi (2017) similarly believes that, while such formal structured activities are needed for Omani teachers, especially those new to the profession, these activities do not always respond to all teachers’ needs. A major problem in these efforts is that they are generally looking for one right answer; in addition, they “offer little guidance to practically minded reformers who want to know precisely what to do and how to do it” (Guskey, 1994, pp. 5-6). Thus, as this study’s data indicated, more systemic approaches that illustrate effective PD are necessary.

There have been local efforts to identify the elements of successful PD in Oman (for example Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009), yet there is still no unified agreement on terminology. Al-Balushi (2017), for instance, argues that the reason behind this is that despite the fact there is significant investment in such formal and informal PD practices by the Omani government, there is still an

uneven picture of how effective or efficient in economic terms many of these initiatives have been. Buchner and Hay (1999) go further in maintaining that national training courses are often forced and not planned; they are not presented in response to the needs of teachers, resulting in the teachers experiencing the training as demand- instead of needs-driven (Makgato, 2014). The situation in the CoTs is no exception in this regard, as policy makers in this top-down system tend to underestimate the contextual realities in their planning of these PD practices. Accordingly, as the participants of this study suggested, to identify the elements of successful PD there is a need to focus on opportunities of effective PD such as, for instance, participatory models that include both teachers and policy makers, using technology as a PD resource and raising teachers' awareness towards enhancing life-long careers. Such opportunities may reveal future possibilities in terms of the purpose, function, design and delivery of these PD initiatives (Day and Sachs, 2004).

- **Participatory models**

This study's participants called for the introduction of participatory models as the way towards effective PD. Several researchers have suggested that participatory models should be considered in the Omani context (Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Ghatrifi, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014). However, it has been argued that collaborative forms of PD offer a limited contribution to Omani TESOL teachers' professional learning and development. Al-Hakamani (2011), for instance, investigated the participatory opportunities available for teachers in Oman, such as team teachings, peer observation and staff-meetings, and found that such activities have limited impact towards Omani TESOL teachers' development. Thus, PD has continued to appear through more traditional ways instead of encouraging collaborative endeavor (Kennedy, 2011). Despite this, Al-Balushi (2017) claims that "in the Omani context, socio-culturally, collaboration as a concept is well activated in society, with family members, neighbours, teachers and students working together, and that this should also be reflected in the teachers' sessional development since these concepts are part of their daily social-life" (Al-Balushi, 2017, p:233).

It is expected that teachers will participate actively with others such as teacher educators and policy makers in their PD process (Reilly & Literat, 2012). According



to Al-Balushi (2017), these professionals should “work together in a cyclical process to contribute to the success of teachers’ PD” (p. 239), suggesting that teachers take part in selecting, designing and reflecting upon the PD activities that are effective for them. According to Hustler *et al.* (2003), such a contribution can be achieved when the institutional and individual needs of teachers are taken into consideration through applying different forms of PD such as communities of practice and study groups. Such practices were also mentioned by the participants of the current study: they claimed that they are more likely to be aware of their needs, abilities and circumstances as teachers; thus they believe that they deserve a chance to plan their PD practices. These claims and beliefs related to teachers' involvement in the PD process seem, indeed, to contradict the overall top-down approach currently being followed in the management and delivery of PD in the Omani technical education system.

Involving teachers in initiating PD activities can facilitate the process of teacher learning (Vangrieken *et al.*, 2017). Al-Balushi (2017), however, argued that participatory models should not be perceived merely as independent or distinct forms of PD; rather they are approaches that can be applied within existing provision. She based her argument on the fact that such models are not new to Islamic societies like the Omani one; the instructions of Islam, represented in the verses of the Holy Quran, speeches of Prophet Mohammed and other religious practices of democracy (i.e. Shuraa), have conveyed a message of the necessity to have participatory and collaborative atmospheres among these societies.

In addition to the participatory models, practitioners suggested other opportunities of PD such as applying technology as a PD resource, as outlined below.

- **Technology as PD resource**

The participants of the current study suggested research as a fundamental pillar in the in-service education of ELC’s teachers. One promising area of research involves the study of technology integration in the classroom by these teachers. Thus, “teachers are viewed as the transmitters of up-to-date knowledge and can effectively link theory into practice” (Abu Al-Ruz & Khasawneh, 2011, p. 77). There is no denying the fact that technology is a part of our students’ future and that, as a result,

teachers must steer away from the traditional models of teaching and move towards utilizing the technology that exists today. Technology can offer teachers access to content, curriculum, colleagues and a variety of learning experiences. Thus, it is essential that we prepare teachers with the skills and tools that they need to live in this digital age. In addition, the ability of in-service teachers to integrate technology into the curriculum is needed to guarantee their future success and the success of their students (Abu Al-Ruz & Khasawneh, 2011). Using technology with pre- and in-service teachers has often been motivated by a desire to create a space where they can interact and ultimately learn with and from classmates, peers, language learners and experts in the field.

It is well documented that teacher-education programmes play a key role in in-service teachers' overall use and integration of technology into their classroom practice in both the international literature (Arnold, 2017; Brun & Hinostroza, 2014; Abu Al-Ruz & Khasawneh, 2011; Collier, Weinburgh & Rivera, 2004; Pope, Hare & Howard, 2002) and the local literature (Al Riyami, 2016; Al-Aufi, 2014). Brun & Hinostroza (2014) claim the existence of a link between teacher training programmes and teaching skills with technology. Thus, the current study contributes in strengthening the processes related to the integration of technology as a PD resource (ibid).

According to Al-Lamki (2009), PD in Oman was not only traditional but was narrow and lacked logic. The term PD has emerged to encompass a broader idea of systematic professional development (Al Lamki 2009). New standards were issued by the Omani Academic Accreditation Association (OAAA) in order to standardize and promote the informationalization of education and to establish solid foundations for technologised teachers' PD (Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths, 2018). These standards are believed to positively contribute in changing teachers' skills of teaching (i.e. from using old fashioned approaches to employing technology more in their teaching practices). According to Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths (2018, p.82) "change in skills of teachers is necessary but not sufficient to make practices and pedagogies change .... as teachers encounter a variety of obstacles when trying to make use of what they have learned in PD programmes."

The situation in the CoTs is similar and there are several reasons for this, one of which is “the heterogeneity of teachers in terms of their initial preparation and their dedication to the teacher profession” (Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths, 2018, p. 83). Approximately 15 % of the teachers in the CoTs are graduates of international UK and US universities or of SQU, the institute with the highest status in the field of teacher preparation in Oman; the rest come from private Omani institutions with variable standards and from institutions abroad. As the World Bank Report (2012) says, it is a commonly known fact in Oman that the level of subject knowledge and teaching skills of teachers greatly depends on the institution from which they graduated. Thus, all Omani teachers have to obtain a university degree in Education or a university degree in another subject together with a diploma in Education. They also need further specialised training in which technology is employed as a PD source, as the participants of the current study suggested. Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths (2018) suggest that such technologised PD can primarily consist of “wikis and online forums that encourage collaboration and discourse to evaluate innovative teaching methods” (p.89).

- **Awareness raising towards life-long career development**

Awareness raising is considered to be essential for the success of any reform (Handal & Herrington, 2003). This study shows a lack of such awareness-raising regarding both the importance of PD and the various possible PD activities. Consequently, some PD activities may be less valued by teachers if they have not been promoted sufficiently in the system. Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen & Griffiths (2018) suggested that raising teachers’ awareness is usually affected positively and negatively by certain enablers and barriers respectively. The enablers included, but were not limited to, personal desire and motivation and higher authorities’ support, whereas workload and time constraints were the most often mentioned obstacles.

In contrast to Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen and Griffiths’ study, the findings of this study highlighted the ways in which teachers’ views may not necessarily correspond with the higher authorities’ proposals regarding PD in CoTs’ ELCs. Thus, generally speaking, this was a barrier in the current study more than an enabler. As a result, it was not surprising to find that the majority of the current study’s teachers

demonstrated positive attitudes towards reform in PD. These attitudes were reflected in the data, mainly through the teachers' contributions in both the questionnaire and in-depth interviews. In both of these, teachers' descriptions of PD reflect willingness to participate in better PD systems and a desire to be aware of the varied PD activities that they need for career enhancement and self-development. This desire was also mentioned by Al-Balushi (2017), Al-Ghatrifi (2016), Al-Aufi (2014) and Al-Lamki (2009).

This result may indicate that there is a good level of awareness among the ELC's academic and administrative staff regarding their PD. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done as PD awareness is an ongoing process and should not be limited to a certain time. Such awareness raising, in my opinion, could overcome issues of discrepancy between teachers' stated beliefs and the PD system (Al-Balushi, 2017). Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, and Griffiths (2018) believe that, to ensure the positive impact of awareness raising, field visits need to be organised in which PD trainers conduct a short meeting with the principals, senior teachers and supervisors to emphasise the importance and role of raising teachers' awareness in their career development. In addition, as Rajasekar and Khan (2013, 48) concluded, there is an urgent need to draw up a training framework for all Omani government organizations that "will foster flexibility, creativity, team learning and collaboration among their employees". Colleges of Technology would clearly benefit from such a framework.

### **6.5.3. Provide staff with ongoing support**

The last factor of PD enhancement that the current study's participants mentioned was providing staff with ongoing support. It is argued that, in top-down education reforms, the lack of success of various aspects of the reform is often attributed to the fact that teachers fail to implement the reform in the way intended by the reform planners (Al-Lamki, 2009). The Omani technical context provides evidence of this since, if a reform is to be applied in this context, aspects of this reform are likely to confront similar obstacles. Thus, in addition to raising awareness and training, ongoing support is required to ensure the success of the suggested reform as a method of enhancement.

In this respect, Al-Balushi (2017, p.248) raised the issue of the role of teachers themselves in the provision of PD. She suggested that the way teachers are currently seen as “grateful recipients of PD” is not conducive to promoting an “intelligent and responsive teaching profession”. Thus, she argued that “in order to make a meaningful shift, we need to first go beyond the transmission models of teacher support” (Al-Balushi, 2017, p.248). Kumaravadivelu (2012) identified forms of PD that “seek to transmit a set of predetermined, preselected, and pre-sequenced bodies of knowledge” from teacher educators to teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p.8). Beach (2017) described such models as ones that help support teachers to be more self-directed in their own professional learning and growth.

Other forms of support suggested by the participants of the current study relate to the higher authorities, for example, supporting teachers to attend local and international conferences and workshops. Such support could be financial, or through enabling teachers to attend and then appreciating their participation in such activities. Similar forms were also mentioned in multiple local studies (Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, & Griffiths, 2018; Al-Mandhri, 2015; Al-Azri, 2016; Al-Riyami, 2016 among others). There should also be personal or self-support among teachers themselves. According to Al-Jabri, Silvennoinen, and Griffiths (2018), to improve student outcomes and build the capacity in teachers’ skills and knowledge, it is estimated that all educators must dedicate at least ten percent of their working time to professional development. It is also anticipated that teachers should take greater responsibility for their own development so their skills and confidence can be raised (ibid). These aspects were also mentioned in the current study. Thus, teachers need to bring new attitudes, knowledge and skills to their workplace for the development of the school community at large (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova 2014). Al-Balusi (2017, p.256) stated that PD should be “a personal path towards greater professional integrity and human growth” and not just about “gaining certificates and/or attending in-service training courses”, which are the most dominant forms in the current PD system in ELCs as the data confirmed.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the main findings of the research were discussed in the light of the research aims, the review of the international and local literature, and different

contextual factors. The discussion illustrated how English language teachers in CoTs hold different perceptions about their PD. To further understand these various understandings it was necessary to discuss how these staff members perceive their PD needs and the current PD provision. Regarding the needs, the current study participants classified their needs into teacher-related needs, where pedagogical content knowledge needs were discussed, and student-related needs, where the teachers expressed their desire to understand concerns related to their students' psychology. Regarding the current provision, the ELC staff perceptions of the current PD provision at the CoTs were outlined. Finally, the participants' multidimensional conceptions of PD enhancement at the CoTs were revealed. These dimensions were on a macro-level, where they proposed a reform in which clear PD plans and strategies are applied. Within this macro-level, participants suggested that the reform should include, but not be limited to, micro-level approaches of alternative PD models for staff PD, effective PD opportunities, the provision of ongoing support, technology as PD resource and awareness raising towards life-long career development.

The discussion shows how the findings of the present study can contribute to a fuller conceptual understanding of the professional development of English Language Center staff in the Omani higher educational context. Nevertheless, interestingly, although there are a number of research studies regarding PD conducted in Oman and Arab Gulf countries separately, they seem to produce approximately corresponding results. This supports the idea that the problem does not lie in the type of PD approaches, or with the teaching staff who take part in these opportunities, as usually indicated in these studies, but rather it is related to other topics such as the policy of PD itself. Taking into consideration the repetitive nature of the findings from researchers in different but similar contexts, it is my belief that this calls for the issue to be tackled from a different perspective. In the next chapter, the practical and theoretical implications of the findings will be presented.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter draws together the conclusions and implications of the research findings. It starts by presenting a summary of the main findings; within this summary, a brief overview of the research aim and the methodology used for the data collection is outlined. This is followed by a statement of the main theoretical and practical contributions of the study and its recommendations for theory and practice and for further research with regard to ELC staff PD in the Omani technical context and other Higher Educational institutions in Oman. Finally, the study's limitations together with a reflection on my experience of conducting this research are presented.

### **7.2. Summary of the main findings**

This study focused on the ELC staff professional development (PD) at the Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman. It explored staff perceptions of PD and their PD needs. It also investigated their perceptions of the current PD provision and their insights on how to enhance PD at the CoTs in Oman. In order to provide a detailed and rich account of this phenomenon, a mixed-methods research design was adopted in the study to gather data from multiple sources. These sources varied and involved questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Overall, the major findings of the study as detailed and discussed in the previous two chapters (5 and 6) provide a conceptual understanding of and practical suggestions for ELC teachers' PD in Oman generally and in the technical context in particular.

With reference to the findings pertinent to the first research question (What is the ELC staff understanding of professional development (PD)?), it was found that academic and administrative staff members hold different perceptions about their professional development experience throughout their work life and about the factors shaping this experience. There is a lack of shared understanding of PD among the participants of this study. These participants consider the current PD to be a directed model of practices that is organised through a top-down approach and in which one or a group of experts decides on the content to be delivered, with the participants

thus being perceived as passive recipients of this PD. Such a top-down approach was seen by the study participants as imposed by administrators who focus on the skills that they (the administrators) think teachers are in need of. According to Al-Balushi (2017), such a “centralized top-down system has moulded teachers’ way of understanding PD in that they relate it to attending courses, (conference sessions) and workshops and that it should be offered to them by the higher authorities and should be delivered by experts” (p. 260).

For the findings pertinent to the second research question (What are the ELC’s staff perceptions of their PD needs?), the current study participants classified their needs into teacher-related needs and student-related needs. With regard to teacher-related needs, the participants considered improving and maintaining their English Language proficiency as essential and they seek PD that helps them to do so. This is attributed to the fact that the designated English curriculum and syllabus in CoTs ELCs have shifted from the traditional grammar-translation approach and are now premised on more communicative and learner-centred competency. Teachers also look for PD that will help them improve their ESP knowledge as they teach technical communication to students from different specializations, thus requiring them to widen their CLIL knowledge as well. Curriculum and material development, together with assessment, were also a concern for the participants.

Concerning student-related needs, the teachers expressed their desire to understand issues related to student psychology including (but not limited to) how to motivate students, how to interpret their behaviours and attitudes, and how to deal with special-needs students’ various emotional and physical requirements.

The findings pertinent to the third research question (What are the ELC staff perceptions of the current PD provision at the college?), the ELC staff perceptions were outlined. The findings suggest that in the PD system in Oman, structured formal training courses seem to be the most dominant form of development. The results also clearly indicate that factors such as (1) the limitation and discontinuity of the PD workshops and courses, (2) the inappropriateness and irrelevance of some of the workshops provided for the ELC staff members, and (3) the workload, lack of support, and differentiation seem, among other noteworthy issues, to discourage the teachers from seeking PD. Thus, teachers expressed their need for further



opportunities to decide their own professional development rather than having it imposed on them. Short (1994) states that providing teachers with opportunities for full participation in making critical decisions impacts their quality of work and enables their voices to be heard.

Finally, the findings pertinent to the fourth research question (What are the ELC staff suggestions for PD enhancement at the CTs?) revealed the participants' multidimensional conceptions of PD enhancement at the CoTs. These dimensions were on a macro-level, where they proposed a reform in which clear PD plans and strategies are applied. Within this macro-level, participants suggested that the reform should include micro-level approaches of, but not limited to, applying alternative PD models for staff PD, employing further effective PD opportunities, providing staff with ongoing support, adopting technology as a PD resource and raising awareness towards life-long career development.

Having summarised the main findings of the research, the following two sections consider the main contributions and recommendations of the study respectively.

### **7.3. Main contributions and recommendations for practice**

This section addresses the main knowledge, practical and research contributions to existing literature this study makes in relation to staff PD in the CoTs and related contexts. The following three sub-sections focus in turn on these contributions .

#### **7.3.1. Contribution to knowledge**

The current study makes a major theoretical contribution to knowledge not only in the Omani context but also internationally, since it deals with how both academic and administrative staff members in the technical institutions define PD. It contributes to the literature on teachers' conceptualizations of PD, especially as there is a paucity of empirical studies related to staff perceptions and the aims and purposes of PD in the Omani technical college context. This study, like previous studies (e.g. Al-Balushi, 2017; Al-Aufi, 2014; Al-Lamki, 2009), revealed indefinite and partial definitions of PD, limiting it to practices of training and attending conferences and workshops based on the participants' experiences. Such a restricted view could

result in teachers' unsuccessful implementation of PD. Given this situation, this study highlighted the necessity of consistent work at the level of raising both teachers' and administrative staff awareness of PD by providing them with more guidelines of what PD can constitute and how more accessible and affordable practices can lead to effective PD. This could assist them in understanding its wider meanings, central tenets and aims. Accordingly, this study exemplifies an attempt to strengthen understanding of the concept of PD in ELT by scrutinizing PD in the Omani ELT higher educational context and exploring staff experiences of PD, which are rarely covered in the current literature. This scrutiny may contribute to deepening the understanding of PD and how administrative and teaching staff perceive it, especially since few studies have attempted to explore PD in the context of the Technical Colleges in Oman and from the perspectives of both groups of staff members. In addition, and through such a study of PD, it is possible to find a balance between the difficulties and various requirements that teachers face academically and their needs to be professionally developed in order to cope with such difficulties and requirements.

This study has also filled a void in studies related to PD in the Omani HE context in general and the technical context in particular. Most of the previous studies in the Omani context that have been conducted to investigate PD have dealt with theoretical aspects such as its tenets (Al-Ghatrifi, 2016) and the rationale behind the necessity of policing it (Al-Laki, 2009). Furthermore, others have concentrated on introducing PD models, such as the participatory model of Al-Balushi's study (2017), and discussing the impact of such models in responding to the continuous needs of teachers. However, perceptions of staff in the tertiary education towards PD, their specific PD needs and their experiences, and suggestions for enhancement have not been sufficiently considered. Therefore, from my investigation of the literature, the present study is the first study conducted in the Omani Technical Colleges (CoTs) context that has investigated these areas from both administrative and teaching staff perspectives. It has touched on potentialities and challenges in implementing PD in English Language Centers (ELCs) in the Colleges. It is also the first of its kind that has attempted to discuss the issue of PD in ELCs in the Omani CoTs and to criticize the mainstream PD approaches popularized in these centres. In addition it provides an opportunity for staff members to be heard and to express directly what particular

pedagogical, personal and psychological aspects they want to focus on and the challenges they face with regard to the PD needed. The study also aimed to bridge the gap between the administrative and teaching staff perspectives of PD and thus presented the views of both groups with regard to how they believe PD practices, in their context, can be enhanced.

This study also makes a number of practical contributions to PD practices in the Omani technical context as the following section highlights.

### **7.3.2. The practical contribution**

The current research also contributes practically to the future design, administration and evaluation of PD practices. There is a growing realization among EFL lecturers in the CoTs of the need to make a meaningful shift in the current PD system from considering it as a platform that considers the role of these lecturers to be passive knowledge absorbers to a more constructivist view that sees them as self-directed in their own professional learning and growth (Stanton, 2017). Such a shift is necessary since the current system follows a top-down system that is based on transmission models of professional development. The participants reported that PD could evolve to include a wide range of ongoing opportunities other than training. They emphasised the need to create PD opportunities that promote teachers' collaboration as well. Such models should involve effective PD opportunities that will enhance the practices of teaching and learning in the ELCs. The findings of this study also shed light on the significant role of teachers in their own professional development by being keen to take responsibility for the continued development of their teaching skills and thus for their life-long career development. Involving teachers in initiating PD activities can facilitate the process of teacher learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Thus, as this study's data indicated, more systematic approaches that illustrate effective PD are necessary. Teachers also need further specialised training in which technology is employed as a PD source, as suggested by the participants of the current study.

The current study also practically and actively engaged a group of both ELT academics and professionals in CoTs. This engagement resulted in suggestions for certain enhancements to the current PD programmes to include more post-

transmission models when designing PD courses. The engagement was achieved through two innovative aspects in the design of this study: the first one relates to the fact that the data collection was not limited to the involvement of teachers of English but also involved the ELCs administrative staff, which helped in providing a wider insight into the area under investigation. The second innovative aspect is related to the scope of the investigation itself, which targeted teachers' stated understanding as well as their reported practices of a wide range of elements of PD. Additionally, the study was not limited to investigating one element of PD, such as the PD activities, but covered other relevant elements as well. This design, accordingly, was based on the socio-constructivist paradigm as participants were able to construct knowledge of their own when engaged in evaluating and enhancing the current PD system (Vygotsky, 1978). This study, therefore, makes a practical contribution in this area since it encourages the involvement of both academics and professionals in sharing knowledge and expertise while designing PD activities. Now is the time for PD course designers to reposition themselves in their university curricula and ask for teachers' support. These designers should respond to the authentic needs of PD in a targeted manner. There is accordingly much to be done to ensure that the knowledge delivered through these PD courses is relevant and applicable in real life, as such knowledge "not only helps individuals thrive at work and become assets to their employers, but they can also improve abilities to enhance careers, while saving businesses money" (Wiwczarowski, 2015, p. 8).

The study highlights the importance of clarity in disseminating PD reform through outlining the intended principles, guidelines and practices needed for the concerned people at various levels. As a result, the study revealed a level of discrepancy between the current PD system on the one hand and teachers' understanding and practices on the other as well as a number of potential consequences of the lack of consensus, such as frustration and lack of motivation amongst teachers. Since teachers proposed a reform in which clear PD plans and strategies are applied, it is important that the principles of such a PD reform are communicated clearly to the people concerned at various levels in the system. According to Al-Lamki (2009) "it is vital that documentation relevant to any reform is made accessible, as appropriate, to the people in charge, the stakeholders and the practitioners" (p.197). Thus, to

successfully implement such a reform these principles should not merely be stated on paper but also reflected in reality.

Furthermore, the non-teaching staff (i.e. the administrative staff), who take a leading role both in the ELCs and in the Ministry, should be considered when planning PD, as they also need to be professionally developed. Simply removing these people from the ELCs and reassigning them to the Ministry in order to plan PD is not beneficial, as these people are originally teachers and need proper training for their new roles and positions. In addition, policy makers in the Ministry can work with the sponsors of the Colleges in order to prepare and provide staff with PD opportunities as their links with industry facilitate this task.

### **7.3.3. Contribution to research**

In this section, I will address the main contributions to existing knowledge this study makes in relation to teachers' PD in the Omani and the Gulf context as well as internationally. I will be focusing in turn on the theoretical, practical and methodological contributions of the study.

Most PD studies that have been conducted in the Omani context, although adopting an interpretivist paradigm, have focused on proposing alternative approaches to enhance PD practices. Some studies, such as that of Al-Balushi (2017) and of Al-Riyami (2016), went further in integrating critical theory and postmodernist paradigms, aiming to critique the current PD *status quo* and envision new possibilities (Creswell, 2013) in the belief that such paradigms offer a more comprehensive vision of what is going on in the ELT realm. Troudi (2015), however, succinctly maintains that "critical [and postmodernist] research in TESOL and language education is still in its infancy and is considered as a newcomer in comparison to more established traditions" (p. 89) such as positivism and interpretivism (Al-Riyami, 2016). I believe that, before proposing changes and suggesting models to implement such changes, we need to understand the current situation and to thoroughly investigate the beliefs held by different parties and stakeholders in the PD field. Thus, the current study moves towards establishing a framework to guide such an investigation and other future research on PD in Oman. Gaining an up-to-date understanding and carrying out innovative research on PD in

the Omani context may help to form a comprehensive picture of the daily processing patterns of PD and how it could be related to the evolving international context.

The practical contributions of this study are related to teaching as a profession and the PD of English language teachers in the Omani HE context in general and the CoTs context in specific. The current study asks for the development of systematic and successful policies and practices regarding teacher PD in these contexts. More specifically it calls for new policies and practices to improve the quality and professionalism of the HE teaching force. This can be achieved, for instance, through helping teachers meet their PD expectations and needs and improving their work environment and conditions by, for example, lightening their workload (Weiqi, 2007). With regard to novice teachers, the current study suggests that teacher preparation programmes should aim at the balanced development of the teacher's personal and professional competencies in order to be effectively prepared for the job. Al-Balushi (2017) claims that PD should focus not only on "the technical knowledge that student-teachers need to know and the theories underpinning the philosophy of education and teaching" but also on the "ethical and moral dimensions of the job of teaching" (p.268). Therefore, the study suggests that teacher preparation programmes in Oman should be holistic to deliver all of these aspects.

Methodologically speaking, the current study adopted a mixed-methods design with both academic and administrative participants to achieve the research aims and as such it has a methodological contribution in the area of investigating PD in that there is currently a lack of such multimethods work and researchers are calling for more practical guidance in designing and developing these kinds of approaches. The current study has sought to go some way to filling this gap as it adopted a variety of methods (questionnaires, semi-structure interviews and focus groups). The sequential mixed methods approach provided both me as a researcher and the participants, especially the academics who participated in at least two or three of the phases, with the opportunity to express opinions on and give detailed accounts of the issues discussed. The phases and methods followed in this research can provide useful guidelines for educational researchers both in Oman and internationally on how to develop multi-method designs to achieve a richer understanding of the investigated area.

#### **7.4. Study limitations and directions for future research**

Potential difficulties when conducting research studies are inevitable and have to be dealt with and thought of in advance. Given the scope of the current study, there were inevitably several limitations that could have affected the findings. However, these limitations together with the overall findings suggest directions for future research in a number of areas within the Omani technical and occupational education contexts and in other contexts.

Some limitations of the study were related to designing the instruments, especially the questionnaire items. For instance, merging some of the scale items like conflating 'no need' with 'low need' in the third section of the questionnaire and considering them as one of the options to choose from. It is strongly advised in the literature not to treat two distinct scale items as if they were one since such procedure produces errors or misunderstandings. A fusion of distinct subjects tends to obscure analysis of relationships which are emphasized by contrasts, yet if the distinctions between the two items appear to be superficial then intentional conflation may be desirable for the sake of conciseness and recall. This was applicable to the current research study as conflating 'no need' with 'low need' scale items in the third section of the questionnaire. Such confluations enabled the research practitioners to decide their choices with less confusion whereas for me, the researcher, it helped me come up with more straightforward findings and that helped a lot in accelerating the analysis process. Yet, it could have become as a limitation more than an advantage for the study. It might have been more accurate if they were separated as two options instead of conflating them as there is a slight distinction between both in meaning, which can make a difference in the data interpretation of the staff views. In the same vein, it is usually claimed that some options in a Likert scales (e.g. unsure, don't know), can be confusing borne out of the statements in the scale itself. Thus, clear statements and distinct opinions are of essence to avoid ambiguity. However, in the context of this research study it was inevitable to use 'unsure' as one of the scales items to minimize the unanswered statements. It provides practitioners with a chance of indifference or neutral perspective to express themselves rather than leaving the statement with empty choice. It was noted, in previous Omani studies

(see for example Al-Mahrooqi, 2012) that when the neutral position is omitted, there is a greater tendency to give no response.

Besides, although the questionnaire generally aimed to understand the ELC staff perceptions of their PD, yet I believe that there was a possibility of making more use of some of the demographic aspects. For instance, comparing and contrasting the perceptions of the different categories of the participants like for example Omani and non-Omani teacher's perspectives or the males and females'. Applying such technique might lead to variations in findings and deeper understanding of the dilemma.

Moreover, as discussed in the methodology chapter, a case study approach helps researchers to explore a given setting in depth and can generate comprehensive and rich data. However, one of its drawbacks is the inappropriateness of generalising the findings. The sample for this study was limited to the Higher College of Technology, which was considered representative of the other six technical colleges, as explained in Chapter two. However, it cannot be assumed that the findings will necessarily apply either to the other colleges (though all have the same curriculum, regulations, textbooks and assessment procedures, and students come from the same backgrounds) or to other academic institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. This study did not aim to generalise its findings to other contexts; rather it is hoped that other researchers or decision makers in other settings will be able to make use of this study and explore the extent to which its findings may also apply to them.

Another limitation was that the current study focused on the college's English Language Center (ELC) staff members. Staff in other college departments may have perceptions of PD different from those in the ELC as well as other PD demands and challenges. In addition, previous studies and this study did not include students as participants; it would be advantageous to have interviews with the students as well to explore their perceptions of what they expect from their teachers and teaching in general as well as how they think their teachers can be more innovative. This could help in suggesting the content or themes when planning staff PD.

The abovementioned limitations suggest that the current study paves the way for future research. Similar studies can be conducted through widening the population by incorporating samples from other technical colleges or by covering more



academic departments, as that would result in a more comprehensive picture of the issues related to PD and implications for the technical colleges. Involving samples from other colleges could also produce more diversity in the findings as there are various cultures within these colleges, especially in the interior parts of Oman. It would also be worth conducting a systematic training needs assessment in the technical colleges for each of the departments to identify the staff training needs and the gaps in the current provision. Besides, as one of the issues that seemed to play a crucial role in the staff PD process is motivation, as illustrated by the findings in Chapter 5, it would be interesting to carry out a study on how staff can be motivated to pursue PD and accordingly promote institutional and individual development. Another possible area for further research would be the quality of the staff development programs and the impact of these programs on teaching and learning inside the classroom.

### **7.5. Reflection on this research experience**

Prior to enrolling in this programme, like most of the teachers in Oman, I was convinced that PD is represented by forms of training, attending conferences and participating in seminars and workshops. Thus, and as a result of undertaking this research, my understanding of PD concerns in the Omani technical context has changed since my research questions were formulated. My original assumptions and personal perspectives have changed as the more literature I exposed myself to; the deeper my understanding about teacher development became. The research's participants also raised many unpredictable issues with regard to their professional development, as this research was a chance for them to express themselves and to convey their unheard voice. My research questions may seem to be naïve in comparison to the depth and the variation of the findings' elements, yet the knowledge I gained throughout this PhD journey is important. It has made me realise that PD is a holistic concept, which is not limited to the abovementioned practices. This realisation will surely be a foundation to construct a better PD understanding and a better PD practice.

With regard to my experience as a PD researcher in the University of Exeter, it was at first a challenge since it was the first time that I was introduced to the concepts of ontology, epistemology and paradigms in education. Thus, this journey of

investigating people's understanding of PD, their needs and their views on enhancement has provided me with new ideas concerning the scope of educational research, and provided me with knowledge that has allowed me to understand and conduct research in a sound practical way. Today, at the end of this journey, I realise that my contribution is considerable and that carrying out this PhD study has been a highly rewarding experience.

The reflection of this experience will be through the contribution to developing teaching and learning English for technological purposes. Thus, I will follow up the outcomes of this study by both trying to convince the higher authorities in Oman to implement its recommendations and by conducting further research within similar contexts. Achieving this might be a complex task, as there are a number of dependent and independent variables to control, such as teachers' perspectives and attitudes, the colleges' visions and missions, policy and decision makers' previous experiences, and future plans to develop the technical colleges. Yet, the experiences and knowledge I have gained I believe can ease such responsibility. Thus, this study is merely the beginning of an academic quest to make a dream become true.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire



College of Social Sciences

Graduate School of Education

**Dear English language lecturers,**

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. The main purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of your perceptions as EFL teachers of your professional development (PD) needs at the technology colleges in Oman. I would like to find out your views on what PD means to you, your current PD needs, and whether the present PD provision meets your needs. I would also like to know your point of view regarding what factors could enhance your PD programs and encourage you to participate more in PD activities. The study forms part of my doctoral programme and can effectively provide reliable information about the technical college EFL teachers' PD needs and demands. The information, if taken into account by the decision and policy makers, could contribute effectively to improving the EFL teachers professionally, and that, in turn, could eventually play a major role in promoting quality in the Foundation Programmes in the technical colleges in Oman.

Please kindly answer all the questions following the instructions given at the beginning of each section. That should not take more than 20 minutes of your time. Please be informed that your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason and without prejudice. All data will be treated confidentially. Information obtained about you and the views you express in your answers will not be shared with your college; neither will your identity be disclosed in the research report.

Once more, thank you very much for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Reem Al Hosni  
PhD researcher  
School of Education  
University of Exeter - United Kingdom

## Questionnaire

This questionnaire comprises five parts: demographic information, technical college EFL Teachers' perceptions and knowledge of professional development, technical college EFL teachers' PD needs, the extent to which the available PD provision meets technical college EFL teachers' needs, and factors that enhance PD activities and encourage teachers' participations. **Please answer each part accordingly.**

### Part one: Demographic Information

Please circle the appropriate answer:

1. What is your gender?

Male	Female
------	--------

2. In which age group are you now?

Under 25	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-60
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3. What is your highest qualification?

Initial Certificate or Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate
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4. How many years of experience teaching in higher educational institutions do you have?

(0-4) Years	(5-9) Years	More than 10 years
-------------	-------------	--------------------

5. In which section do you teach?

Foundation program	Post-foundation program
--------------------	-------------------------

6. How many years of experience do you have at the language center?

(0-4) Years	(5-9) Years	More than 10 years
-------------	-------------	--------------------

**Part Two: Technical colleges EFL lecturers' perceptions and knowledge of professional development**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please tick the box that most matches your level of agreement.

**3= Agree**

**2= Not sure**

**1= Disagree**

Item	Statements	3	2	1
1.	Staff development always takes the form of <i>in-service training</i> (the provision of organized programs planned systematically to support teachers development.)			
2.	PD for English language teachers should be a continuous process after their pre-service training.			
3.	PD opportunities are crucial for the long-term development of the EFL teachers.			
4.	PD programs are responses to the constant changes in the knowledge base of teaching.			
5.	Achieving personal growth and improving departmental performance can go hand-in-hand when planning PD programs			
6.	Professional development programs are usually based on a top-down approach planned and executed through a higher authority.			
7.	Training is the most common approach of EFL teachers professional development			
8.	Current PD for language teachers has evolved to include more open-ended or flexible choices.			
9.	Providing EFL teachers with opportunities to develop professionally is necessary for the success of the program in which they work.			
10.	EFL teachers can take charge of their own professional development through the continuous examination of their own teaching.			
11.	PD can happen inside or outside the teaching environment			

12	PD is necessary for teachers' career advancement and promotions.			
13	PD programs in any institution should respond to both the institution's needs and the teachers' perceived needs.			
14	Staff PD is necessary for the institutional development.			
15.	PD can involve engagement with materials, ideas, or colleagues in intellectual, meaningful, purposeful and even emotional way.			

### Part Three: Technical college EFL teachers' PD needs

#### PD aspects

3.1 The following table gives a list of the possible content areas for the EFL teachers' PD activities. Please indicate the extent to which you need them for your current role as an academic teaching English language in the context of Omani technical colleges. Please use the three-point scale below to indicate the level of your needs:

**3= High Need:** I certainly need appropriate professional development activities to develop it.

**2= Moderate Need:** I have some idea about the subject, and I reasonably require appropriate PD activities to develop it.

**1= Low/ No Need:** I have an adequate idea about the subject, and I don't need any PD activities to develop it.

Item	Professional Development Needs	3	2	1
<i>Areas related to the teacher</i>				
16.	English Language courses			
17.	Teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes)			
<i>PD related to teaching methods and approaches</i>				

<b>18.</b>	Adopting a 'student-centered' approach			
<b>19.</b>	Using appropriate teaching method(s)			
<b>20.</b>	Matching teaching methods to the students' learning styles			
<b>21.</b>	Realization of innovative teaching methods			
<b>22.</b>	Becoming familiar with the strategies for teaching language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening)			
<b>23.</b>	Strategies for teaching grammar			
<b>24.</b>	Strategies for teaching vocabulary items			
<b>25.</b>	Becoming familiar with the strategies for teaching pronunciation			
<b>26.</b>	Using an appropriate assessment method to evaluate student learning			
<i>Students needs, wants and learning styles</i>				
<b>27.</b>	Dealing with special needs students			
<b>28.</b>	Developing students' problem-solving skills			
<b>29.</b>	Communicating interactively with students			
<b>30.</b>	Providing feedback to students about their learning progress			
<b>31.</b>	Developing students' critical thinking skills			
<b>32.</b>	Identifying students' needs before and during the course			
<b>33.</b>	Motivating students to learn English			
<i>Awareness of materials and technology</i>				

<b>34.</b>	Being familiar with curriculum development/ syllabus design			
<b>35.</b>	Preparing for lessons and subject matters			
<b>36.</b>	Using information technologies to support teaching and learning processes			
<i>Time management</i>				
<b>37.</b>	Improving the time management techniques of the class			
<b>38.</b>	Improving the time management techniques of the course			
Other PD needs? ..... ..... ..... .....				

**PD Practices**

3.2 How effective do you think each of the following PD practices is for you as an EFL teacher to develop professionally? Please tick one of the four numbered choices

- 4= Very effective**
- 3= Effective**
- 2= Neutral**
- 1= Not effective**

Have you experienced any of them? Please tick one of the two choices

- 1= Yes**
- 2= No**

Item	PD practices	In your opinion, how effective is it?				Have you experienced this PD approach?		Comments
		4	3	2	1	1 (Yes)	2 (No)	
39.	Workshops							
40.	Seminars							
41.	Teacher support group (teachers collaborating to achieve either their individual or shared goals)							
42.	Supervision							
43.	Collaborative learning among members of a work team							
44.	Group lesson plans							
45.	Colleagues' discussions of work							
46.	Case analysis (involves collecting information over time about a teaching situation and using that information to help better understand the situation and to derive principles from it)							
47.	Team teaching (team planning, teaching, and, finally, follow up stage)							
48.	Peer coaching and mentoring							



<b>49.</b>	Peer-observation							
<b>50.</b>	Self-assessment reports							
<b>51.</b>	Reading educational books or articles							
<b>52.</b>	A teaching portfolio (a collection of documents and other items that provides information about different aspects of a teacher's work that can be used for reflection and review)							
<b>53.</b>	Pursuing higher education degrees							
<b>54.</b>	Conducting action research (teachers themselves engage in research study to find out more, change, or improve aspects of their profession).							
<b>55.</b>	Critical incidents analysis (involves the documentation and analysis of teaching incidents in order to learn from them and improve practice)							
<b>56.</b>	Journal writing							
<b>57.</b>	Self-reflection							
<b>58.</b>	Collaborative reflection							
<b>59.</b>	Attending English language conferences							

60.	Presenting in English language teaching conferences.							
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**Part Four: Current PD provision**

4.1. This part of the questionnaire gives you an opportunity to indicate whether the PD provision meets your needs. Please tick the box that best indicates your agreement with the statement.

**3= Agree**

**2= Not sure**

**1= Disagree**

Item.	PD provision at the ELC	3	2	1
61.	The number of PD activities planned for me annually is satisfactory.			
62.	I am supported administratively to seek PD.			
63.	I am supported financially to seek PD.			
64.	The choices of the PD activities' themes or subject areas are based on the teachers' needs.			
65.	The provided PD activities match with the quality assurance plan of the college.			
66.	The timing and the dates of the PD activities fit with my workload schedules.			
67.	There are variations in the topics used in the provided PD activities.			
68.	There are variations in the approaches used in the provided PD activities.			
69.	I can transfer the experiences obtained from the attended PD activities to my classroom.			
70.	Teachers' feedback about the PD activities is taken into accounts by the PD provider.			
71.	My participation in PD activities is decided by the center's administrators.			

To what extent does the available PD provision meet your needs?

.....

.....

.....

**Part Five: Factors to enhance PD activities and encourages EFL lecturers to participate more in PD events.**

According to your experience as an EFL lecturer in higher education institutions, please indicate how important you think each of the following factors is in improving the PD program’s provision in your context and in encouraging you to participate more in PD activities and events. Please use the four-point scale below to mark the answer that best fits your real response.

**4= Very Important:** I think the factor is extremely important to enhance PD programs in the college.

**3= Important:** I think the factor is somewhat important to enhance the PD activities.

**2= Slightly important:** I think the factor is slightly important to enhance PD activities.

**1= Not Important:** I think the factor is not important to enhance PD activities.

No.	Factors to enhance PD	4	3	2	1
72.	Including PD goals in a college’s mission				
73.	Setting up directed and realistic plans for staff PD				
74.	Planning PD activities that reflect the academics’ needs				
75.	Choosing a suitable period/time for the PD activities				
76.	Varying the PD options for the academics, so they can choose what best fits their needs				
77.	Facilitating the conduct of the PD				

	activities by administrative support				
78.	Facilitating the conduct of the PD activities by financial support				
79.	Providing appropriate facilities and resources for conducting the PD activities				
80.	Encouraging academics' participation in the PD activities by using a reward system				
81.	Reducing academics' workload to enhance their participation in the PD activities				
82.	Implementing supervision and evaluation procedures during and after conducting the PD activities.				
83.	Giving the academics control over their participation in the provided PD activities.				

***Thank you again for your assistance***

**As part of my study, I will be conducting** follow-up focus groups with teachers who would like to participate further. The purpose of the interviews will be to discuss the questionnaire results and to gain a deep understanding of EFL teachers' perception of their PD needs, current PD provision and suggestion for improvements at the Colleges of Technology in Oman.

❖ **If you are willing to take part in the interviews please contact me via any of the following contact information:**

Reem Al Hosni

- Email address: [rzsa201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:rzsa201@exeter.ac.uk)
- Contact no: +96898545457/ +447776496477

## Appendix 2: Interviews schedules

### 1. Focus Groups interviews (Academic staff)

#### ❖ Categories of Inquiry:

##### a) Your perceptions and understandings of professional development (PD).

1. What does the term professional development mean to you?
  - (Probe. What do you understand by PD?)
  - (Probe. in your context: how do you see it? Is it a bottom-up process? a teacher-centred activity? Or more as a chance to 'train' teachers in more specific aspects of their teaching?)
2. What is the importance of PD?
3. What factors can contribute to a successful PD?
  - (Probe. what are the qualities of a successful PD program?)
4. What is your role and the institution's role towards your PD?

##### b) PD needs.

5. Please describe your main professional development needs referring to your context and the outcomes you hope to achieve.
  - (Probe. e.g. what content areas would you like your PD to cover? Do you suggest any PD activities to overcome any current challenges? )
6. What kind/s of PD activities would you prefer your institution to provide? Why?
  - (Probe. e.g. preferable PD approaches/ Do you prefer individual PD or collaborative PD activities?)
7. Are you asked about your PD needs from time to time?
8. Does the current system meet these needs?

##### C) PD offered at the Institution

9. Can you tell me about PD provision in your institution?
  - Quality/ Quantity/ prioritizing PD
10. How do you feel about it?
  - (Probe. is it convenient? Is it necessary to follow?)
11. What support do you expect from your institution in terms of PD?
  - (Probe. Administrative/ financial support?)
12. How can it be improved?
  - (Probe. What do you suggest to improve the current system? )

### 2. Semi-structured interviews (Administrative staff)

❖ Categories of inquiry:

**a) Their perceptions and understandings of PD.**

1. What does professional development mean to you? Is it essential?
2. What contribute to a successful PD?
  - (Probe. what are the qualities of a successful PD program?)
3. What is the administration role in planning, organizing and implementing PD in your institution?

**b) PD needs.**

4. What do you think are the main PD needs for the language teachers in particular and the English language center in general?
5. Does the current system meet these needs?

**c) PD offered at the Institution**

6. Can you tell me about PD provision in your institution?
  - (Probe. How frequent PD opportunities are provided / how are they offered?)
7. How are the PD activities planned and how is the content chosen? Who gets involved in the process?
  - (Probe. how is the content of the PD training courses/ themes decided upon? How are they evaluated?)
8. What policies do exist on PD, in the college? What do they say about professional development, particularly for academics?
9. As regards PD, does the Ministry convey the importance, aims, and availability of PDs to the teachers?
  - (Probe. is PD planned merely through a top-down approach?)

**d) Suggestions for improvement**

10. How do you maintain quality in the PD offered in your college?

- (Probe. e.g. monitoring/evaluating)

11. Do you think the current PD provision needs improvement? How?

### 3. Individual semi-structured interview (Academic staff) :

- 1) What does professional development mean to you?
- 2) How important is professional development to you? Why?

Probe:

- In what ways it is important?
- An example of a PD activity which was helpful and why?
- What do you think is the purpose of PD? Have you experienced that?

- 3) How often do you attend the PD sessions offered at your institution?

Probe:

- What is your role towards your professional development?
- Do you think years of experience can affect staff views towards professional development?

- 4) From your perspective, how would you describe a successful PD sessions?

Probe:

- Would you describe me one of the best/ worst sessions you had?
- What are the strength, what are the weakness?

- 5) Drawing on your experience, what do you regard as the main professional development needs for the ELC staff?

Probe:

- What needs to be improved?
- What skills should the academic staff develop in order to fulfill their job requirements and response to the technical colleges' students' needs?
- Are you asked about your PD needs from time to time?
- Do you think the provided PD opportunities address your needs?

- 6) In what ways can more experienced and less experienced colleagues help each other?



Probe:

- Do you seek support from your colleagues?

7) Can you tell me about PD provision in your institution?

8) How supportive is the management with regard to your PD?

Probe:

- In what ways does the center's management encourage you?
- What do you think the role of the management should be?
- How can teachers' development be promoted?

9) What can be improved with regard to PD provision in the ELC and the Technical Colleges in General?

Probe:

- Your ideas for improving:
- Improvements with regard to people involved
- The role of management
- Support with regard to time/ money
- Collegiality
- What matters do you think should be taken into account when designing a professional development program for the Technical Colleges Academic staff?
- e.g. General English, ESP, Low-level students, large numbers classrooms, ...

## Appendix 3: Consent Form



**Title of the Research Project:**

**Professional Development (PD) at the Technical Colleges in Oman: English Language Centers' Staff Perceptions of their PD, PD Needs, Current PD Provision and their Suggestions for Improvement**

Thank you for allocating time to take part in this research project. Before you start, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it involves. Please take some time to read the following information.

**The purpose of the project**

The aim of this research is to identify and explore the English Language Centers' Staff Perceptions of their professional development (PD), PD needs, current PD provision and their suggestions for improvement at the colleges of technology. The research study will investigate both the EFL lecturers and the English Language Centre's management's understanding of PD. It also explores the EFL lecturers' PD demands and needs based on their assigned duties, which are mainly improving their students' English language, and preparing them for their English-medium courses in their subject areas. The results of such investigation should help raising the ELC's management and the PD providers' awareness of the EFL lecturers' real-life PD demands. They may also provide suggestions to enhance the current applied PD programs and raise the standards of the current PD practices in harmony with the institution's vision and to better reflect the EFL lecturers' needs at the Technical Colleges in Oman.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, so please do not feel obliged to take part. You may withdraw from the study at any stage for any reason and without prejudice. You should be aware that all the personal information is entirely confidential. The information collected will be anonymised and will be analysed thoroughly to come into some findings. Accordingly, your identity will not be disclosed in the research report at all.

**I confirm that I have read and understood the abovementioned information. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.**

**Signature:** .....

**Date:**    /    /

Once again, thank you for taking part in this study.

Sincerely,

Reem AL Hosni

PhD researcher

College of Social Sciences and International Studies

Graduate School of Education

University of Exeter - United Kingdom

## Appendix 4: The permission request letter from the DGTE

**Sultanate of Oman**  
**Ministry of Manpower**  
Directorate General of Planning and  
Development



**سلطنة عُمان**  
**وزارة القوى العاملة**  
المديرية العامة للتخطيط والتنمية

Ref. No. :

Date :

الرقم : ١٨.٢٥٣

التاريخ :

الموافق : ٢٠١٥/١٠/١٤

إلى من يهمه الأمر

تشهد وزارة القوى العاملة بأن الفاضلة/ ريم بن زايد بن سيف الحوسنية تعمل لدينا اعتباراً من تاريخ ٢٠١٥/١٠/٢ م، وقد تم إيفادها في بعثة دراسية على نفقة وزارة التعليم العالي إلى جامعة (Exeter) بالمملكة المتحدة خلال الفترة من ٢٠١٣/٩/٨ م وحتى ٢٠١٧/٩/٣١ م لنيل درجة الدكتوراه في التربية موضوع الدراسة

EFL Lecturers Professional Development (PD) Needs at  
the Technical Colleges in Oman

لذا نأمل التكرم بتقديم التسهيلات اللازمة التي يحتاج إليها الباحث لإجراء الدراسة الميدانية.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام

  
رashed بن إبراهيم بن عبدالله المطروشي  
مديرية تنمية الموارد البشرية  


نسخة إلى :  
دائرة تنمية الموارد البشرية  
خ ج

ص ب : ٤١٣ مسقط - الرمز البريدي : ١٠٠ - سلطنة عُمان - هاتف : ٢٤٣٤٤٣٩٨ - فاكس : ٢٤٣٤٤٣٢٠  
P.O Box : 413 Muscat - Postal Code : 100 - Sultanate of Oman - Tel : 24344398 - Fax : 24344320

**Sultanate of Oman**  
**Ministry of Manpower**  
Directorate General of Planning and  
Development



سلطنة عُمان  
وزارة القوى العاملة  
المديرية العامة للتخطيط والتطوير

Ref. No. :

Date :

180254 الرقم

التاريخ  
14/10/2015 الموافق

### To whom it may concern

This is to certify that Ms. Reem Zaid Saif Al Hosni is an English Language Lecturer in the Higher College of Technology - Ministry of ManPower since 2/01/2010. She has been awarded a full scholarship by the Ministry of Higher education to pursue her higher studies to obtain a PhD in Education from University of Exeter, U.K. for a period of four years starting from 8/09/2013.

Research title: EFL Lecturers Professional Development (PD) Needs at the Technical Colleges in Oman

We kindly appreciate your cooperation and assistanceship needed to conduct her research's field-work. For further information, please feel free to contact us on Phone No. 00968-24344354 or E-mail : [hrd-dept@manpower.gov.om](mailto:hrd-dept@manpower.gov.om).

Best of regards.

Rashid Barman Abdullah AL-Matrooshi ✓  
Director of H. R. Department



ص ب : ٤١٣ مسقط - الرمز البريدي : ١٠٠ - سلطنة عُمان - هاتف : ٢٤٣٤٤٣٩٨ - فاكس : ٢٤٣٤٤٣٢٠  
P.O Box : 413 Muscat - Postal Code : 100 - Sultanate of Oman - Tel : 24344398 - Fax : 24344320

## Appendix5: Certificate of Ethical Research Approval



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus  
Heavitree Road  
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: EFL Lecturers' Perceptions of their Professional Development (PD)  
Needs at the Technical Colleges in Oman

Researcher(s) name: Reem Al Hosni

Supervisor(s): Dr Susan Riley  
Dr Jill Cadorath

This project has been approved for the period

From: 16.12.2015  
To: 30.11.2017

Ethics Committee approval reference: D/15/16/15

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Durrant".

Signature: (Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee) Date: 02.12.2015



## Appendix 6: Analysis of the questionnaire's open-ended questions

### 1. Other needs?

Comments/ Codes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing <b>technology in ELT</b> especially in <b>teaching vocabulary</b>.</li> <li>Teachers should be able to <b>solve the practical problems in the classroom</b>.</li> <li>Developing <b>spelling teaching techniques</b>.</li> <li><b>Communication and enhancing skills</b> to have more <b>dynamic class</b></li> </ul>	<p>Using Technology</p> <p>Improving teaching practice</p> <p>PD in teaching methods and approaches</p>

### 2. Comments on the PD practices:

Comments/ Codes	Categories
<p><b>Group lesson plans, peer-coaching and mentoring, peer-observation and self-assessment reports:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Not applicable in the ELC</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Teaching portfolio:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Time consuming and not effectively used</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Attending ELT conferences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers <b>should be allowed to go</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Workshops:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>effectiveness</b> of the workshops <b>depends on our needs</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Peer coaching:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>need to be <b>objective</b>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Supervision:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is <b>not effective</b> in the college context</li> </ul> <p><b>Peer-observation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It could be effective as long as it is <b>not judgmental</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Reading educational books and articles:</b></p>	<p>PD that addresses staff needs</p> <p>More supportive atmosphere</p> <p>Varied PD opportunities</p> <p>Varied and effective PD Practices</p> <p>Informal PD practices</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is <b>a must</b> for her.</li> </ul> <p><b>Higher degrees:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching <b>doesn't require</b> higher degrees; <b>PD courses can help fill in that gap.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Group lesson plans:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>helps at the beginning of a career.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Colleagues' discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They help <b>exchanging ideas.</b></li> </ul>	<p>Sufficient and varied PD</p> <p>Raising staff awareness</p> <p>Informal PD practices</p>
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### 3. To what extent does the available PD provision meet your needs?

Comments / Codes	Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PD needs to adopt <b>a practical</b> side more.</li> <li>Sometimes the topics and the titles of the workshops are misleading. We end up attending sessions about <b>old topics</b> and <b>things that we know pretty well.</b></li> <li>One attends and hopes to get something <b>practical to use in class.</b> Once in a while one gets something useful, <b>some can not be used</b> because of different dynamics, class-size, lack of technology, infrastructure, etc...</li> <li><b>It doesn't at all.</b></li> <li>Need to have <b>more PD activities</b></li> <li>Partially</li> <li>They <b>rarely</b> meet my needs because <b>teachers are not asked about their PD needs.</b></li> <li>To a little extent, however, it is improving</li> <li>I think <b>there should be more</b></li> <li><b>Needs to be evaluated</b> and have some sort of <b>focus on what I actually need as an individual teacher.</b></li> <li><b>To fairly good extent</b> in providing the critical minimum that helps in a perfect get going situation.</li> </ul>	<p>Addressing the teachers needs through PD</p> <p>Good topics</p> <p>To follow up and evaluate after PD practices</p> <p>Sufficient and varied PD opportunities</p> <p>Limitations of the current PD provision</p> <p>More PD opportunities that address staff needs</p> <p>Follow up and evaluate after PD practices</p> <p>Positive views about the current PD</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very well</li> <li>▪ Sometimes the content is not applicable in the class of 40 students/ lack of resources don't allow to practice some activities.</li> <li>▪ It is helping in making my classroom teaching more interactive and interesting</li> <li>▪ To a great extent</li> <li>▪ It helps to enhance the teaching and helps the teachers to understand the different needs of the learners.</li> <li>▪ It is enough based on the budget given.</li> <li>▪ It has always been very helpful.</li> <li>▪ PD activities help me to improve my teaching in my classroom</li> <li>▪ To a reasonable extent in that many of them can be applied directly in the classroom.</li> <li>▪ I learn new things from them and I can use them in my classroom</li> <li>▪ Doesn't mostly meet my needs</li> <li>▪ PD should not be planned during teaching hours</li> <li>▪ The PD experiences can sometimes only be transferred to the classroom.</li> </ul>	<p>Relevant content</p> <p>PD to motive the students</p> <p>PD in teaching methods and approaches</p> <p>Improving teaching practice</p> <p>Effective and practical PD</p> <p>Address teachers' needs</p> <p>Good topics and practical ideas</p>
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## Appendix 7: Example of an interview transcript

Interviewer: Thank u very much for being willing to take part in this interview, again I am assuring you that your real name will not be used in the research and data to be used for the purpose of this research only. As I explained to you, there are four categories of inquiry, we don't have to go in order; the first part is focusing on your views about professional development then your professional development need, your experience of professional development in the English Language Center and finally about your suggestions of the future enhancement for the current professional programme in the College.

Interviewee: Yes go ahead please.

Interviewer: What does professional development mean to you?

Interviewee: the way I see it is you are doing a job and our job specification is teaching English. It is a language it is kind of changing every day and methods changes every day, they improve things everyday so I think it is keeping in touch with these development especially that involving technology is everyday and everywhere nowadays, so I think it is keeping in touch with that side of it, and constantly improving yourself so you are getting better of what are you doing and you get to a point where you are comfortable doing your job, as a teacher and comfortable making the students pick up the language confidently comfortably without feeling the stress that they are learning, for me is that what I think PD should do for a person

Interviewer: How important is professional development to you? Why?

Interviewee: you cant over-emphasis the importance because if do not do PD in a language classroom and a fast growing technological world, what is going to happen is you are going to stay stuck in some corner and whole or the rest of the world is advancing, you are sitting here so you keep upgrading, you keep in touch, so stay in top of your game so it is just about that, the bottom line is you need to be in the top of your game,, so if you don't go to these professional development opportunities, you don't know what's new in the field... you don't know how others are handling it, what everyone else is doing and you in the same field, it is about being competitive at the end of the day true we love the job, true everyone wants to make a leap, if you cant keep in top, then you cant move, you stuck in one place, so I think it is very important...

Interviewer: From your perspective, how would you describe a successful PD sessions?

Interviewee: when I go for a PD or other things I am thinking of picking up something new that I can implement in class ok!

Interviewer: Do you think years of experience can affect staff views towards professional development?

Interviewee: I think they may affect to a certain extent, you know exactly what you need so you don't have to go every PD you have so you start being critical and selective because you know what you need and when training you know how to

adapt whatever you get from PD to your classroom situation, yah to come in handy but then again, with years you start getting little 'blaze' and you are going like oh, ' I have seen it all, I have done it all' and are getting a little 'complacent' because you are a little like, I have been this long, I know what I am doing, so it is both ways it can either takes you up or puts you in a 'rat' so.....

Interviewer: What is your role towards your professional development?

Interviewee: my role is just to upgrade myself and the institution I think should be helping...I think it should be teachers working hands in hands with the administration, expressing their PD needs and the administration either sending them or making room for them to go, train somewhere or do in-house training or host symposium that are focused only on these needs so I think it should be a hand in hand thing and I think there teachers who never been to PD since I came to HCT and this is my third year going so for them they just saying oh, its Thursday because most of those things are held on Thursdays and weekend I don't want to work on weekends... so most of the time they don't .. and teachers who comes from out of the town a little bit it is difficult for them to come for weekends things, it is hard driving from interiors to Muscat, ... you have to have that will to do it but if the admin was taking this like pat and puzzle in running the center, they should know ok, this one is coming up so lets make a time table, these people can go this time, these can go this time and if you learn something you come back, you should organize something at the college and you bring back what you have learned you share it, that would work, yah so others could know what's going on as well.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about PD provision in your institution?

Interviewee: in the last two years they made an effort, we had the symposium this year and last year at the beginning of each year, it wasn't so bad, each teacher was supposed to attend at least 5 sessions on both years, you go to some good session and some of them they talk about things which are no way related to our field, it is more about them showing off, this we know so it has nothing to do with you or your class, but some had real practical things we could use in class, real practical ways of getting your students talking

Interviewer: What do you think of professional development in your institution?

Interviewee: I think they also do in class observation and I am not going to touch that bit, I will just say I am not very satisfied with it because most of the people who come to do in class observation are teachers like you who just moved to their positions and all of sudden start assessing your classroom teaching so I don't think they are properly equipped to handle this because at the end of the day all they do is point out, you didn't do this, you didn't do that, they just point out the short comings of your lesson but they don't suggest any improvement quarters and they do not, like there is no set up at the college to say ok we came to your class, this what was lacking so we have this class you have to observe this class and that one to make up or emulate what they think is not working.

I think it is a personal thing, you know best, I mean you may say I am a good teacher but at the end of the day you are the one standing in front of the students, you are

the one who knows am I actually delivering, am I actually getting the message across. Am I actually doing it the way it is suppose to be! So if you think you are not comfortable standing there and doing what are you doing and passing the message properly and making the students. Because it is all about making the students 'Learn", using their own creativity, their own initiatives, just pushing them, helping them, counseling them, if you think you are not comfortable, I think professional development is the way to go because there is always something new to learn so I think for me it is a personal thing, for me it is like meeting new people, that is one of the reasons why I go, but the most important thing is to pick up one or two things, it might sometimes they are crazy you just I mean, you wonder why you went there but it happens when you go to one and you are like WOW, because you actually take up practical tips to use in class.

Interviewer: What kind/s of PD activities would you prefer your institution to provide? Why?

Interviewee: In house training, I think it should be part of the system, especially if a teacher comes new. You might have been a teacher somewhere else but the system is not the same or even if the system is the same, you still want to see how things are done!! And there is nothing like too much knowledge.

Interviewer: Does the current system meet this need?

Interviewee: I don't think so I was never giving any training, I didn't ever get a half-chance to observe a single class ... so not! No I didn't go to any class, I didn't have a chance, I came here in the 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> I took over another teacher class, which was a nightmare because I didn't know anything, and he didn't tell me anything.

He just give me the class so it is like they through you to the wolf. Nothing, so you basically drop in the dark. I am telling you it was! and they come and observe you in that situation.

one: you are panicking because you are new and you have this situation that you can't handle because you don't even know what are you supposed to be doing and then they are coming to observe you.

I think training should be the first thing you get at least a week before you start... I mean they have been here long enough to figure out that these people can handle this and this, so when a new teacher comes they should actually have simulating real writing, speaking, reading and listening lessons so the teacher gets a feel of it and gets comfortable, I mean it is only to say oh, I can do this or I can do better or I can do it without this or with that way.. it is kind of reinforces what you know and it is kind of validate what you know so you feel comfortable going to a classroom but it doesn't happen! yah I think that is lacking..

Interviewer: What do you think are the main professional development needs (areas of improvement) for the language teachers in particular and the English language center in general?

Interviewee: as a teacher for now I mostly like to go to sessions that would help me get the students communicating because at the end of the day it is a bout using the language properly in all the skills so if there is anything that would help me with writing, grammar, speaking especially because teaching speaking its very difficult.. because they don't know the language but you just want them to use it and just

teaching them words here and there it doesn't really help, isn't it? So you want to create a room or situations where the students can actually use the language even if it is faulty, they are still using it. the problem we have with our students is expressing themselves in the second language, they are learning ... they forever use the one they comfortable with because they are not confident, I want my students to be able to say ' I am going to use the language whether I am speaking it correctly or not and you want to encourage them to be communicating with each others expressing themselves in the language they are learning,, it is by making these mistakes, correcting themselves and they end up learning so that is what I want to be able to do... confidently, comfortably, and happily, I want my classroom to be active.. I want my classroom to be lively. If I could get my students to broaden their knowledge because that is one area where the problem is leaving out the laziness and lack of motivation and all.. they have nothing to fall back on, they don't have any background knowledge of anything, which is difficult, you want to teach a topic.. no you use a topic to teach a skill, you start explaining the topic itself, you explain the words and you are not in your lesson yet... so it just distracts the lesson and sometimes it is frustrating because we having learning outcomes to cover, we have exams, and all of this puts pressure on you and you really don't do the language teaching the way it should be because it should be about communication, expressing themselves whether orally or writing forms...

Interviewer: any other areas where you think professional development is needed?

Interviewee: we have also that thing of discipline... we are focused in passing the students not teaching them, because if were actually doing language teaching just by passing reading and listening without passing writing it is not enough, and you and I know that speaking at our college is just a 'sham', that is not speaking! the only way you are going to judge their language is from their writing, which is their personal production, they don't do anything because they know they always can pass listening and reading so at the end of the day, I mean the learning outcomes, they actually know them? No, how do we judge it, we cant because using listening and reading is always taking them to next level, there should be such a way, if you don't pass writing, you don't go to next level, in such a way that making it objective because now it is subjective, each person making their class at the beginning,, only at the final exam and even though it is still subjective because you still can know who is paper is that, so you are lenient, nobody is going to check that! exactly since we are focusing on marks, everyone wants their students to pass, that is a fact!! I mean you want to be able to see my students but can they actually use it all, use what you taught them, did you actually teach or did you just give them marks? They should give the marking to different people because some people are spoon-feeding the students, they may do anything to make the students pass, short of helping the students, they don't actually help them!!

You knew we get new books and they just give them to you, there is a lot of technology attached to the books and no one is using it and teachers think it is an option to use the technological side of this thing.. it is not it should not be... they should train everyone on how to use those books, the new listening book we have actually it is interactive, so if we knew how to use the smart boards, so you can put that online section on the board properly.. We are not using it... and oh!! They didn't buy the online content by the way!! We need that; those smart boards are there to

decorate the classes or what! They should make use of these things... technology can help teachers to deliver the materials in more interesting way for the students.. Ok there are like online apps to use, how can you use them if the technology is not there or if they don't know how to use them!

It is the same session every semester, someone comes shows us how to use the pen, how to collaborate the smart-board... I said but that is the beginning, we need to take it to the next level, how do I create a grammar lesson, how do we create a writing lesson on this thing, how may I control the practices here, we should be able do that, I don't know!

Interviewer: Are you asked about your PD needs from time to time?

Interviewee: nobody says anything to you, at the end of the year when the admin does the general staff appraisal forms... because last year I have been trying to do everything the right way like any normal should do,, does everything I am asked to do in the college... at the end of the year, Khalid has nothing to say other than you have not been upgrading yourself!

And I said where is that coming from!! He you didn't go to PD and I said Khalid except semester 1 when I started the e learning thing and I was spending all my weekends here, I was spending basically 2 hours at school, I said a part from that, every single PD thing since I came to Oman, I have never missed one and I even presented in one.. so when you say I am not doing this,,, I don't get it..

So I mean at a point like that you hear about PD, so nobody tells you about it before .. it is just recently last year and this year they organized symposium .. I guess part of it was just for show because the content of it was stupid, last year was stupid, this year it was better because some of them you could actually pick up on or two things out of them, a few of them were really good, again it all pour down to teachers expressing their needs and someone actually sitting down to filter what those presenters are saying not just the big names and the topics, they need to check the content..

Interviewer: Do you think the provided PD system address your needs?

Interviewee what system!! Do we have a system?

at the college they say bring your PD certificate each time you go to PD things, but this is my personal thing why should I give them the certificates, they did not send me anywhere, why should I give them the certificates, have they told me ok.. we are sending you to this professional; development session because we see or you said you need it,, no !! nobody said that, all they interested in is taking my certificate and all of this because of the quality assurance, not because of me as a teacher, it is about the quality assurance... for their files , so they can show the QA that this is what our teachers are doing, but what are they doing to provide me with that, have they said go, have they provide me with opportunities, ok it doesn't ...

Interviewer: How often do the ELC staff attend the PD sessions offered at your institution?

Interviewee: That is on the part of the administration, but also teachers should show the willingness to learn nobody wants to learn, they are like I have been doing this

job forever, and I know what am I doing but then they are not keeping in touch with technology, it is getting ahead.

They didn't want to learn anything, they didn't want to do it, so it is on both parts, administration to provide training basic training for things we need all the time, smart boards, easy lessons, demo-lessons for new teachers or even old incidents once so you recycle and teachers on their part should be willing, they should show willingness to upgrade because most of them don't, I know teachers who have never been to professional development sessions never.

Interviewer: In what ways can more experienced and less experienced colleagues help each other?

Interviewee: we should be having at least twice monthly sessions where teachers sit together, come up with topic, and hold one or two hours workshops in the college, why should we wait for the symposium it is a big center, we should be sharing knowledge and experience. Look at level 3 for examples, we got to teach graphs and charts, they expect everybody to teach graphs and charts true it is writing but this is technical not everyone can do it and what is in the book is way too complex for the students, someone figured out how to do this simply... all the sessions with teachers shows and works with then how to do the graphs,,, right.. it works!! I mean teachers can learn much better from each others , better than those who know nothing about our context..

Interviewer: How supportive is the management with regard to your PD?

Interviewee: I feel frustrated because it is only this symposium at the beginning of each year, during the year we don't have a chance, true we are short of staff but there are times when we are finished exams and we can go, oh but then they tell you only Omanis are allowed to go 10 working days for symposium which is not fair because we are all doing the same job, I mean I wanted to go to a course this semester , I couldn't because it starts few days before the end of the semester but we are done with the exams, they could have let me go but NO, the system doesn't allow that but they need us to be! it is like they want everything, they want to make an omelet but not break any eggs... operate yourself we don't want to know about how do you go about it we just want the results so it is lack of little convening.

When for example the British council and SQU held the professional development things, it costs money, but we don't get any support, we have to pay from our pockets so sometimes you look at it and you say oh for what! And they are getting more expensive over the time... so the college should be able to say ok, this session we are sending this number of people, when you come back you hold a session in the college and share and next this number of people go, and you come back, you hold session in the college and you share.

Interviewer : What can be improved with regard to PD provision in the ELC and the Technical Colleges in General??

Interviewee: ya, we got to know about the symposium and like I said they already organised two but I think they could go a step further and do in-house training in the college, it is all about effective teaching right! so if they do a classroom appraisals, after that if they found out that you are not doing enough, you are not doing well up to what they are expecting, there should be a system in place to take care of such needs, they should be able to train in-house and emulate, there should be a place

where a new teacher gets formal training before they go into the classroom irrespective of how long they have been teaching, there should be a system in place that operates constantly but none of that is there, well I hope we get to that part but for now we just being told, this is going out there if you are interested to go, and if there are symposium during the week, then we are only unless you are presenting a paper you can not go... so we have been missing a lot because we are not presenting so that is a bit difficult but we need training because you need to do tasks, they give tasks, they expect results but they do not furnish you with the necessary training and equipment so that makes it really difficult...

Interviewer: That was the last question, thank you for helping me and giving up your time, is there any thing you want to add?

Interviewee: no, you are welcome.