

AN EXPLORATION OF THE INSTRUCTORS' TEACHING PRACTICES IN SAUDI EMERGENT UNIVERSITIES

Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature and status of instructors'¹ teaching practices in an emergent university in Saudi Arabia. The study begins by investigating current teaching practices as reported by the instructors and their students, as well as the instructors' perceptions of 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices. It goes on to explore the challenges involved in teaching practices from the perspective of the instructors, and the factors affecting these teaching practices. It identifies intrinsic (or micro) factors based in the institution, such as institutional regulations, physical environment, professional development programmes, teaching materials and assessment requirements, and extrinsic (or macro) factors including socioeconomic conditions, cultural values, and regional influences of geographic location, tribe, family, and extended family.

The study utilized exploratory case study methodology to collect and analyse data from university instructors and their students. It used a mixed methods approach involving both qualitative and quantitative data in order to obtain a holistic understanding of the instructors' teaching practices. For the quantitative element, two questionnaires were developed and administered to 48 instructors and 628 students in the same university. The responses were analysed using descriptive statistics. The main corpus of data was obtained via semi-structured interviews for both instructors and students. The data obtained were analysed using a general inductive approach through the 'indexing' technique proposed by Ritchie et al. (2003).

The study found that an instructor-centred² teaching approach dominated teaching practices, where students' learning was perceived as in the ownership of their instructors. More importantly, drawing on a holistic understanding of the instructors' teaching practices, the study found that these practices arose from the instructors' location in a matrix of relations of power, or their 'socio-academic' position. Specifically, while the instructors held a privileged position in their universities and local community, the students lacked this status and were often

¹ I use the terms 'instructor' and 'university instructor' throughout the thesis to describe anyone who teaches at university level; to describe instructors' teaching positions in Saudi Arabia, "Faculty members' are only those who hold a doctorate and have the post of assistant professor, associate professor or professor. However, there are other teaching positions, namely lecturers and language teachers who hold a master's degree, and teacher assistants who hold a bachelor's degree".

² I use the terms 'instructor-centred' and 'teacher-centred' throughout the thesis interchangeable.

disadvantaged in their own learning. Both, however, were subject to major challenges related to the local socioeconomic context.

Drawing on these findings, I argue that the context-specific nature of the current university has produced a sort of 'culture' where several forces operate to shape and determine teaching practices. I conclude the study by proposing some theoretical tenets that I suggest are useful for understanding the status of teaching practices at the university level and for responding to the diverse challenges involved; these theoretical tenets are collectively referred to as '*contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices*'.

Since the study is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia, it is expected to provide insights for local researchers to further investigate the several questions the study raises. It should also raise the awareness of instructors, policymakers and social actors of the current status of teaching practices as well as the challenges involved, especially in Saudi emergent universities.

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful "Praise be to Allah, to Whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth: to Him be Praise in the Hereafter: and He is Full of Wisdom, acquainted with all things" (The Qur'an: Saba, 1).

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DEDICATION

To my precious ones

Saud and Shumukh

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Nowadays, Saudi Arabia is experiencing a revolution in higher education represented by unprecedented expansion of colleges and universities across almost all regions of the country. In 2003 there were only eight universities but the number has rapidly expanded to over a hundred, and \$15 billion a year is now spent on higher education (Romani, 2009). The rationale behind this growth is to increase educational opportunities for students, especially in remote regions of the country. This expansion is associated with another revolution, represented by King Abdullah's initiative of sending tens of thousands of students abroad for postgraduate studies, most of whom are intended to be instructors to teach in these universities. The programme began in 2005 with 2,800 scholarship recipients and now counts 80,000 scholarship recipients sent to leading universities around the world (Osman, 2010).

A closer look at this surge in higher education in Saudi Arabia requires us to reflect on this new educational trend by focusing on these emergent³ universities as well as considering the roles of actors figuring in this current academic and educational boom. Specifically, I put under investigation the instructors' teaching practices in one of these universities. The ultimate aim of this expansion in higher education is to improve the conditions leading to increased learning opportunities for the students in these regions. This, in part, depends on the quality of teaching offered to these students, and the instructors' teaching practices play a central role in the dynamics of the educational practice in these universities. While several features of this phenomenal growth have received the attention of policy makers and researchers (see below), the topic of instructors' teaching practices in these universities remains a strikingly under-researched area, as well as receiving little attention by the instructors themselves. As an instructor and a graduate student coming from one of these emergent universities, I sensed the need to probe into another aspect of this educational evolution through exploring the nature and the status of university instructors' teaching practices in these

³ I use the term 'emergent' throughout the thesis as a literal translation of the Arabic word *nashe'ah* used to refer to these new universities.

universities. In addition to the absence of research on this topic in Saudi Arabia, I realised the need to explore these issues because, when Saudi instructors return from their scholarships and embark on their teaching, they face a plethora of challenges such as the lack of professional training programmes in addition to numerous other challenges at various levels.

In fact, this surge in higher education in the country represented by the establishment of these new universities is not paralleled by necessary growth in professional development initiatives. Such programmes as exist do not satisfy most of the immediate and context-specific needs of either the instructors or the students. The Saudi higher educational sector has relegated this academic or professional growth in favour of concentrating on the perceived finished products to uncritically increase the number of students receiving higher education. This results in creating a distinctive challenge to improve the quality of education to those students through focusing on what really takes place in the classroom (or promoting appropriate and relevant teaching practices that lead to proper learning output). The challenge for these universities now is to tune themselves so that they become more responsive to the needs of a different era and a different socio-economic landscape.

For an exploration into the instructors' teaching practices in these emergent universities, I perceived the task as an inclusive and a more sophisticated one. I approached the problem very much like a tentative exploration of the topic to identify and examine the various aspects involved in determining and influencing the nature and the status of the instructors' teaching practices in one of these emergent universities. I explored the existing instructors' teaching practices including issues such as the nature of these practices; the instructors' perceptions of good teaching practices; the challenges involved; the students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching practices, as well as how these dimensions are realised in the educational contexts represented by the regional location of these emergent universities. I deem the importance of the study as contributing to the broader educational debates and discussions underling the country's policymakers and actors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the higher educational sector. Although the area of teaching practices is a fundamental aspect of success in higher education, it has received very little attention from the policymakers in the country. The inadequacy of Saudi higher

education relative to the fulfilment of the instructors' professional needs has been disregarded since the early establishment of the sector. Poor research in the area of teaching practices; the unavailability of professional training for the instructors; overemphasis on the breadth of these universities; and the myriad challenges relating to teaching practice are among the structural problems associated with the establishment of these new universities. Specifically, since the growth in higher education has a critical role to play in the national and regional socioeconomic restructuring in the country, the long term success of this initiative will rest, to a large degree, on the ability of these universities to sustain good teaching and learning practices through exploring and responding to the challenges imposed by the demands of this changing world.

1.2 An Overview of Research Literature in Teaching Practices in Higher Education

In the last few decades, teaching practices in higher education have occupied considerable space in the educational research literature and, as a growing field of inquiry, the topic has stretched out to cover innovative directions and diverse perspectives. Literature on teaching practices has therefore become replete with practices described as 'good' or 'effective' as well as with dynamics that are perceived as involved in shaping and determining the nature of existing teaching practices in contexts under investigation. Nonetheless, research on teaching practices in higher education has promoted two diverse arguments: on the one hand, a research tradition that seeks to establish teaching practices as 'universal activity' defined through a corpus of teaching practices perceived and argued as 'good' or 'effective'. The result of this research tradition is the provision of extended lists of teaching practices prescribed as requisite for promoting students' learning and academic success (e.g. Alauddin & Kifle, 2014; Delaney et al., 2010; Hussin et al., 2009; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Suarman et al., 2013). On the other hand, an innovative direction of research argues that teaching practices can be better realised when addressed in a context-based inquiry, and as responding to specific educational contexts (Lynch et al., 2001; Lynch & Harnish, 2003; Ramsden et al., 2007; Shamsid-Deen, 2006; Smith, 2010). For the later argument, the concept of 'context' is used to refer to broad areas of inquiry including: context as reflecting the regional or national socioeconomic and cultural values (e.g. Alves et al., 2006; Campbell, 2004; Devlin, 2012; Devlin &

Samarawickrema, 2010; Djojopurto et al., 2005; Hofstede, 1991, 2001a, 2003, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; House et al., 2004; Slastenin, 2007); contextual teaching practice as relating teaching practice to real world situations (Berns & Erickson, 2001; Shamsid-Deen & Smith, 2007); and context-specific teaching practices as related to specific academic subject matters (e.g. Klem, 2000; Martine et al., 2003; Ramsden et al., 2007).

In addition to these two arguments (or perspectives), a good body of research explores the instructors' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of teaching practices, and how they are related to actual classroom teaching practices (e.g. Devlin, 2006; Marland, 1995, 1998; Marouchou, 2011; Howard et al., 2000). Other researchers probe further to examine the possibility of promoting and changing instructors' beliefs to achieve best teaching practice (e.g. Ho et al., 2001; Lindblom-Ylance et al., 2006). Although contestable (Reinking, 2007), a further research practice argues and reports examples of teaching practices perceived as 'good', 'effective' or 'best practice' (e.g. Adey & William, 2003, 2006; Stes et al., 2007, 2010; Hativa et al., 2001; Samples & Copeland, 2013). Another research tradition explores the students' perceptions and evaluation of good teaching practice (e.g. Hussin et al, 2009; Delaney et al., 2010; Hativa et al., 2010; Suarman et al., 2013; Alauddin & Kifle, 2014) as well as investigating their role in determining or influencing their instructors' teaching practice (e. g. Denson et al., 2010; Nasser and Fresko, 2002).

In Saudi Arabia, related research focuses on quantifying: the expansion of higher education and the numbers of students in higher education (Al Saud, 2009); and the number of programmes added and organisational reforms (Al Aqili, 2009). In addition, one study has broadly related students' scholarships and returning students to these emergent universities (Al-Mousa, 2009). Beyond the context of these emergent universities, there is also a study that directly addresses the instructors' teaching practices (Al-Sobaie, 2006). Al-Sobaie's study, entitled *Teaching Techniques Applied by Faculty Members in King Saud University and Means of Its Effectiveness* [this title is translated by the author of the study originally written in Arabic], statistically reported the differences in 'teaching techniques' applied by the university instructors depending on the variables of teaching experience, specialisation, and academic rank. The study concludes its discussion of the findings by numerically reporting the classroom teaching styles

(e.g. lecturing 66%, intuitiveness and improvisation 25.5%; strict following of the textbooks 20.8%, etc.). Other studies in Arabic conducted in old universities addressing related topics include: the instructors' use of technologies in their teaching (Al-Nqyann, 2005; Brayes, 2009); evaluating the performance of university instructors (AbdualRaziq, 2005; AlNajaar, 2006; Al-Sherbini, 2005); a critical review of the Unified Organisational Book (Alqarri, 2007) and suggested methods to promote instructors' performance (AlQarni, 2007). I will elaborate on some of these studies and others in Chapter Three. Based on my reviews of the studies conducted in the country, it is my argument that the topic of university instructors' teaching practices has not received a satisfactory level of attention from local researchers. It is also important to mention that no Saudi Arabian MA or PhD studies have been conducted in this area, and no wide scale research projects.

1.3 Locus of Enunciation; Locating Myself in the Study

As an instructor in one of these emergent universities, I deem my professional experience and knowledge of the research context an important aspect in this research as this qualifies me as a 'researcher from within'. In fact, the trajectory of my undergraduate and graduate studies, as well as my professional career, has profoundly influenced my choice to embark on this research. I graduated from one of these universities (formerly a community college) majoring in Physical Education. The College of Education was known as a teachers' college at the time, which was under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. However, when the structural reforms took place, like many other colleges, mine was promoted to be a branch of a university. As the newly established university was in desperate need of instructors, I was granted a scholarship to pursue my graduate studies abroad. I perceive this might be a typical case for a huge number of students sent abroad at the height of the King Abdulla Initiative, which offered thousands of scholarships across the country.

Going back to the 1990s when I was a student at the Teachers' College, the building consisted of three floors, all class sizes were the same, there were just two laboratories, a mosque, a theatre, a café, a library which was a single room with old and very traditional books, and a sports field. In those early days, I realized that our region was a disadvantaged area since, compared to the existing ones in major cities, my place college lacked most of the facilities found in the

major and established universities. My study plan as a Physical Education specialist consisted of 149 credited hours (US system) distributed as follows: 68 hours to cover subjects such as (Arabic and English languages, Quran and Religious Education, Art Education, Physical Education, Mathematics, Sciences); 39 hours in (Education, Curriculum and Pedagogy), and only 42 hours for my major. Ironically, although my study path was classified as humanities and social sciences, I had to study 21 hours (nine modules) in (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology) which I believed to be irrelevant courses and which I struggled to pass.

Upon my graduation, I was offered a teaching position in this college only few months after obtaining my BA. This quick shift of roles (from student to instructor in the same department) had a profound influence on me as it enabled me to compare my earlier perceptions of my instructors' teaching practices as a student with my current realisation of the multitude of challenges associated with my profession as an instructor, including my own teaching practices. During those days, my colleagues (most of the instructors held BAs and few MAs) and I used to talk about our teaching conditions, and the obstacles imposed on us by working in a 'remote' region which received minimum attention from the government. For example, our classrooms were always dusty with only a narrow space to move in front of the students. The capacity of the classrooms ranged between 30 and 35 but students had to bring extra seats since the number of students could reach about 50 in some sessions.

To probe further, I recall my first days of teaching as stressful and frustrating because I was prepared as a sports teacher for elementary schools. Coming to the classroom without any kind of guidance or previous experience, I started to think about the many challenges I was about to face, such as preparing the teaching materials, selecting suitable teaching strategies, and class management among others. The Physical Education Department nominated me to teach two preparatory courses: one was a theoretical course and the other was a combined course of theory and practice. Since I had no previous experience in teaching either of these two courses, I relied on some teaching (learning) materials that I had studied when I was a student. Once I entered the classroom for the first time, I was worried and nervous facing adult students and lecturing for an hour. I started the lesson by taking the attendance slowly, to give myself more time to calm

down. I wrote the title of the course in the blackboard then started talking constantly, and from time to time, I asked students about what I said “is it clear, understood?”, and the students’ answers were affirmative. As when I was a student, I have no clear answer as to why we used to answer ‘Yes’ even though in some cases we had not understood what was being explained.

With time, I gained professional experience, depending on my own pursuit of both subject knowledge and teaching methods. I deem my case similar to my colleagues who passed through the same experience. In my educational context, instructors were left to themselves, to develop their teaching materials and select proper teaching practices on their own with just a slight exchange of experience between colleagues. Most of the instructors supplied the students with handouts (printed and mostly hand written) including myself. These handouts were loaded with information, and the students were required to memorize them for the exams. Concepts such as a ‘study guide’, ‘feedback’, ‘assessment rubrics’ among others were totally strange to me. The only type of assessment was the use of ‘written exams in classes’ distributed as 40% for midterms and 60% for the final exam. During my years of teaching before I left the university for my graduate study, I never saw an instructor using any kind of technology in their classrooms. That was my first encounter with teaching at the higher education level.

After six years of teaching experience, which I would describe as a self-building academic and instructor, I was granted a scholarship to pursue my Masters in the US. This stage of my academic experience had a great influence on my professional knowledge in relation to my subject matter as well as in teaching methods. During my study in the US, I received full support from the English teachers where I studied language and research skills and similar support when I joined the department of Physical Education, which was a very encouraging educational environment equipped with rich learning resources. I felt the huge gap between what I had seen as a student and an instructor in my university back in my region and what I was experiencing in this new educational environment. It was the first time I had received a study guide, had different kinds of assessment and different kinds of teaching methods such as a cooperative learning and study groups. It was my first experience of giving presentations, individually and in a group; my first experience of different types of classroom settings, such as having a “theoretical” class outside the classroom, in a green yard. It is impossible to

forget one learning experience that required the students to apply the theoretical knowledge they had acquired to practical, real life situations. That course was 33 days of outdoor activities (hiking, kayaking, and climbing). Although I faced tough times on that course, it was the most informative learning experience I had received in my life; it was a teaching practice that was entirely learning by doing. For me, it was a 'holistic enhancement of a whole person'; it prepared students to live and work in a complex and unpredictable world.

When I returned home with a Masters degree and new experiences, I re-joined the instructors in my university. I was very enthusiastic to transfer the experience and knowledge which I had acquired in the USA to my students and colleagues. Almost everything remained the same since I had left three years previously; the same learning environment, limited resources, strict study plans and assessment rules and the classrooms without any further facilities or equipment. Then, my major concern was how to apply my acquired academic and professional experience in my local educational environment. I struggled to make my desired changes through taking individual initiatives to enhance my own teaching and to contribute to the department. For example, I translated and edited a book to cover two preparatory courses instead of the old handouts used for these two courses. I did my best to make my lectures interesting by using various teaching styles. The students were struggling with university compulsory courses and often deemed them as irrelevant to their future career. In the introductory classes of these modules, I discussed the importance of such courses and their relevance to students' personal lives and their health, and how they could use the knowledge that they acquired in these courses to improve their performance in their majors. My best achievement however, was that I managed to establish a good relationship with students by opening the channels of dialogue inside the classroom and outside it. In fact, the students had become my first priority during those days, especially when I started to feel the positive change in their attitudes towards the courses and learning in general. Before closing this account, it is important to mention that I did not receive any training courses or workshops to enhance my teaching practices. It is also important to say that, during this stage, I had become more sensitive to the absence of clear aims and regulations on the part of my university. This part of my professional life ended once I was granted another scholarship to pursue my doctorate studies in the UK.

When I joined the PhD programme at Exeter University, I was required to study the New-route PhD, which includes as its first year the Master of Science in Educational Research. The MSc consisted four modules in research methodology finishing with a dissertation, then directly transferring to the PhD programme for three years. As for my research, I was initially aiming at studying within the field of Physical Education teachers at pre-university level. I later modified my research plan to target Physical Education's instructors at university level. The rationale underlying this shift in focus is that university instructors' teaching practices required more attention, especially with the paucity in research in this area in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, since the university instructors are the ones who prepare students to be the future teachers, it could be more relevant to explore the university instructors' teaching practices for a better future of the educational sector in all its phases.

In addition to this, and for practical reasons, I expanded the study to include instructors from various departments as a result of the very small number of Saudi instructors who are specialised in physical education. As being part of the social sciences, the physical education instructors were included among several others including those of Islamic studies, Arabic, social sciences, among several others in humanities and social sciences. The small number of instructors in physical education, made it impossible to carry out an exclusive doctoral research in the current university. Furthermore, the broadening of the scope of the study was very helpful, since, in addition to targeting instructors from the physical education specialisation, it offered a holistic understanding of the status of teaching practices in humanities and social sciences in an emergent university.

As I commenced my research, I had one principal aim in mind, which was how my educational environment could be enhanced through exploring the teaching practices of its instructors. With this overreaching aim, I embarked on my research journey with the belief that what I was doing would serve the well-being of my country. As Albert Camus, a Noble Prize winner, said: "Each generation probably believes that its destiny is to re-form the world. Yet, mine knows that it will not re-form it. Its task however is perhaps greater. Its task is to prevent it from coming undone" (Fanghanel, 2012, p.7). This cannot be achieved without developing teaching and learning environments based on relevant and informed

pedagogical approaches and teaching practices which will prepare students for the world of tomorrow.

1.4 Stating the Research Problem

Drawing on the above reflections and reviewing relevant research literature, I realised the need to explore university instructors' teaching practice in an emergent Saudi university as a vital aspect of success in higher education. Although the topic of teaching practices in higher education has been receiving the attention of researchers as well as policymakers around the world, in Saudi Arabia the topic of teaching practices is still an under-researched area. Specifically, in Saudi emergent universities, the instructors' teaching practices remain an elusive area due to the lack of research, the absence of professional training programmes, the stringent regulations and unclear policies. Furthermore, these universities are mostly located in regions that could be described as rural and nomadic areas where social and tribal values are influential factors in determining teaching and learning practices. In addition to sharing the common challenges that face instructors in other universities, the educational environment of these emergent universities could be assumed as imposing further challenges represented by the fact that they are still in a growth phase. Drawing on these assumptions, the main intent of the present study was to explore the nature and the status of university instructors' teaching practices in one of these universities. Specifically, it explores the instructors' perceptions of their own teaching practices, the challenges they face, the role of regional and socioeconomic context in determining these practices, as well as the students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching practices. Within the tradition of the exploratory case study methodology, the principal promise of the study was to explore and identify the status of the existing instructors' existing teaching practices as a base for promoting better practice which could ultimately enhance the students' learning opportunities. In so doing, the study addresses an essential but under-researched aspect of higher education dynamics.

More precisely, the research questions in this study are the following:

1. What is the status of the current instructors' teaching practices in an emergent Saudi university?
2. What perceptions or beliefs do instructors hold regarding 'good'/'effective' teaching practices in their context?
3. How do instructors actualise their perceptions of 'good'/'effective' teaching practices in their context?
4. What are the factors that facilitate or hinder instructors from actualising or consummating 'good'/'effective' teaching practices?
5. How do students in the same research contexts perceive instructors' teaching practices and how do these practices affect their learning?

In light of the answers to questions above, based on the emergent findings of the study:

6. How can context-specific teaching practices be understood?
 - a. What roles do current socioeconomic and cultural (or macro) factors have in fashioning and moulding the instructors' teaching practices?
 - b. How can the relationship and interplay between these factors and institutional (micro) factors can be understood?
 - c. What possible suggestions can be forwarded to enhance the instructors' teaching practices?

1.5 Significance of the Study

I deem the significance of this study to be as follows. The study addresses an area that has received very little attention from local researchers or policymakers, and therefore will increase knowledge about several aspects of teaching practices in Saudi universities, especially emergent ones. The need for this study arises from a professional desire to make available a description of the current status of the Saudi instructors' teaching practices in addition to the challenges that they face. Through investigating diverse issues involved in constructing the current instructors' teaching practices, the study hopes to offer new insights into two sets of factors that influence teaching practices. On the one hand, it explores the institutional factors affecting the university instructors' teaching practices

referred to as micro (or intrinsic) factors and including classroom environment, interpersonal relations, university regulations, issues related to teaching materials, assessment strategies, teaching methods, etc. On the other hand, the study probes further to address the other set of no less influential factors referred to as macro (or extrinsic) including those related to the family, region, social values, economic and cultural factors, etc. Within these broad perspectives the study could be taken as an attempt to foreground and make knowledge available to an area that has been largely overlooked by many actors in the higher educational sector. With the assumption that teaching practices are the principal endeavour through which students' learning is achieved, the study extends its scope to include the diverse perspectives of the students' perceptions and worldviews of their instructors' teaching practices. Therefore, among its key aims was to make available further knowledge and theorisation of the students' estimations of effective and relevant teaching practices in addition to their role in influencing those practices. Within this generic scope, the study targets broad categories of actors that are deemed influential in explaining the nature of the teaching practices in the current context. Additionally, through its focus on a particular research context (Saudi emergent universities), the study aims to explore the context-specific elements and factors of differentiated and responsive teaching practices. Lastly, the overreaching aim of the study was to respond to the evolutionary trend in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia represented by the establishment of new universities which aim to expand learning opportunities to a greater number of students to contribute to the well-being of the country.

1.6 Outlining the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I describe the context of the study including the country, Saudi Arabia; its higher educational system; the existing universities and the evolutionary expansion of the sector of higher education. I also provide a detailed description of the context of the emergent universities focusing on the research site represented by one of these emergent universes.

In Chapter Three, I explore the knowledge base of the topic of the instructors' teaching practices in higher education. I review related research literature from around the world represented by research trends, scopes and perspectives. I identify diverse perspectives of the topic: for example, one that seeks an

accumulation of examples classified as good teaching practices, and another addresses the special nature and status of a given context or related problems among other perspectives. Additionally, in my review of the selected research literature, I argue that the field of teaching practices still struggles to locate itself in theoretically informed practices, and researchers quite often approach the topic with an amalgam of factors perceived as influential in understanding the nature of teaching practices in higher education. I also argue that the topic lacks a clear and instructive corpus of concepts, common terms for what could be seen as 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices. In a related argument, I identify the debates informed by diverse arguments regarding the definition of the concepts of instructors' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and epistemologies, and how these differences inform the instructors' actual teaching practices. To focus on the specific nature of my research context (the particular nature of the regional, socioeconomic and cultural values), I highlight literature that addresses the concept of 'contextual teaching practice', and identify three different approaches (or employments of the concept). I elaborate on this argument as it is closely related to the principle findings of the present study, and which I deem useful to theorise my own findings. In addition to reviewing literature that addresses the topic from the perspective of the instructors and, occasionally, policymakers and those assuming leadership positions, I review research literature that addresses the topic from the students' perspective. I also identify the debates around the roles of students' evaluations of their instructors and students' share in influencing their instructors' teaching practices.

In Chapter Four, I describe the research design and methodology used in the study. I locate the study in its philosophical paradigm and approach to knowledge. I justify my adoption of constructivism as an epistemological stance that underpins my claim for knowledge. Drawing on this, I locate the study in qualitative research approaches and adopt exploratory case study for this research. Following this line of research design, I describe my research context, participants, data collection and analysis methods, etc. I also provide my account of the trustworthiness of the research findings as well as the ethical considerations.

In Chapter Five, I report and discuss the findings of the study. By dividing the chapter into two sections, I report the quantitative findings represented by the instructors' and the students' responses to the closed-ended questionnaire items. I also compare and contrast the responses of both the instructors and the students to identify the areas where they provide consistent or inconsistent responses. In Part Two, I provide a detailed discussion of the qualitative findings represented by the instructors' and the students' narratives in the semi-structured interviews as well as their comments on the open-ended questionnaire questions. In this part, I develop an argument towards an understanding of the current university instructors' teaching practice with a contextually differentiated practice. That is, I argue that for a better understanding of teaching practices. I argue for a holistic perspective through which myriad personal, academic, professional, social and cultural dynamics are examined, along with how they inform each other.

In Chapter Six, I summarise the key findings of the study and introduce the practical implications of these findings. I expand my discussion on the contextual understanding of teaching practices and suggest some theoretical tenets on how these practices could be addressed in their immediate context. I propose 'contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices' as a perspective and an umbrella term through which the provision of 'good'/'effective' (or, more precisely, 'relevant') teaching practices could offer workable solutions to understand the nature and status of the existing teaching practices as well as identifying and responding to the challenges involved.

Chapter Seven presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. It expands the model previously introduced in Chapter Six by way of practical recommendations to address the dysfunctionality of the education practice in the current context. In Chapter Seven, I present some practical recommendations to three types of concerned categories: instructors, policy makers and researchers. I close this thesis by accentuating the fact that this present study is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia and, therefore, it is expected to open a door for further research on this topic.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.1 Background

Chapter Two presents a detailed background of the context in which this study was conducted. It presents information about the country and its people, then an overview of higher education in Saudi Arabia, followed by a discussion of higher education including its aims and policy of appointment and promotion of university instructors. Lastly, I will present detailed information about Saudi emergent universities.

2.2 The Country and its People

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is the official name of Saudi Arabia, henceforth I will use the latter (Saudi Arabia). Saudi Arabia is a vast country in the 'Middle East' occupying the major part of the Arabian Peninsula. It is located in Southwest Asia, and is bordered by Yemen in the south, Oman and the United Arab Emirates in the southeast, Qatar and Bahrain to the east, Kuwait to the northeast, Jordan and Iraq to the north, the Red Sea to the west and the Arabian Gulf to the east. Its capital is Riyadh. The official and spoken language is Arabic with minor varieties in spoken dialects. All Saudi Arabians are Muslims where the majority are of the Sunni sect. In addition to this, the official calendar of the KSA is the "Hijri" calendar (referring to the migration of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his companions from Makkah to Medina in AD 622). Since the unification of the country by King Abdul Aziz, the Saudi Arabian political system has been a monarchy, and the legal and judicial system is drawn from Sharei'ah "the Islamic Law".

The geography of Saudi Arabia is of particular importance to the study since, as I will indicate below, the multiple campuses of most emergent universities are separated by large distances, including the university under study in this thesis. The country covers a vast area of 2,149,690 square kilometres, and is divided into thirteen provinces. Most of this area is unpopulated or, more precisely, it has scattered towns and villages that are separated by great distances. Major cities and towns are, however, connected by a modern network of roads and local airlines that provide frequent flights to 27 local destinations. The country has a variety of landscapes that form a pattern of plains that extend from east to the

west with gradual highlands in the middle to high mountains in the west. Such geographical variation provides the country with different climate patterns that range between desert climate in the east and the middle to a moderate one in the west, especially in the mountainous regions.

The population of Saudi Arabia is estimated to be almost 20 million (CDSI, 2012), concentrated in major cities like Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. Traditionally, these major cities include most of central governmental bodies, large companies, factories, as well as many higher education institutions. For example, in the city of Riyadh alone, there are four large universities in addition to 15 university colleges and six private universities.

Historically, King Abdul Aziz bin Saud established the modern state of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Before this, the whole society was almost isolated from outside influences. It had a nomadic structure where tribal wars, diseases and ignorance were the predominant features. There was only one type of education available to people, traditional Islamic schools that taught Qur'an, basics of religion and literacy (Wagner & Lotfi, 1980). Education was limited to boys because it was socially unacceptable for girls to leave home and seek knowledge (ibid). However, the education of girls has been taking place since the 1960s when the first official girls' primary school was opened in Riyadh (AlMunajjed, 1997, Hamdan, 2005).

In 1938, oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia and, since that date, Saudi Arabia has become a major oil producer. Oil has largely assisted Saudi Arabia to achieve remarkable progress both in its economy and society within a very short time (Royal Embassy, 2012). Saudi Arabia is considered one of the fastest growing economies of the developing world (Niblock & Wilson, 1999, Royal Embassy, 2012). In parallel, the higher education system in the country has expanded in terms of quantity and diversity and, as discussed later in this chapter, the number of Saudi universities has doubled three times over the last eight years.

The social and, to a large extent, cultural background of the country has shaped the nature of the educational system in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the people's way of living, their traditions, religion, social habits and values are among many other elements that are of crucial relevance to the current study. As this study concerns

itself with the teaching practices of the university instructors and their students, it would be necessary to discuss the social and cultural nature of Saudi society since it has a strong impact on Saudis' attitudes, perceptions and practices of what it means to be a professional instructor, as well as on how learners perceive efficient teaching practices. As Samovar et al. (2009) observe, "There is a strong link between culture and learning that is reflected in how people prefer to learn and how they tend to process information" (p. 338).

Saudi Arabians are strongly influenced by Islam as the country is considered the homeland of Islam where the two holy cities, Makkah and Medina, are located. Islamic teachings, laws and morals are very influential in the Saudi society. Yet, Saudi society has also been influenced by the discovery of oil and the importation of different social practices which may conflict with the core of the Islamic teaching. For example, people usually spend a lot of money attending to their appearance, including dress and grooming, because it gives an indication of their social status. People with senior positions, including university professors, hold a privileged position in the milieu of social relations. They are quite often referred to and invited to share in important social occasions such as settling tribal conflicts, participating in *jaaha*⁴, and participating in reception parties for important people visiting the regions such as princes and senior governmental officials. In other words, it could be claimed that the role of university instructors in Saudi Arabia surpasses their teaching and academic practice inside their universities. They have influential roles in their immediate social regions.

Women's issues provide another salient example of how Saudi society has tensions with the teaching of Islam as well as the advancement of education in the country. Women in Saudi Arabia still struggle for their rights at many levels, and education is no exception. Although university education is available to them, they are still denied the right to join certain specializations such as engineering, journalism and agriculture (AlMunajjed, 2009). AlMunajjed (2009) perceives that these social ills are such an integral part of the society's tribal structure and epistemological perceptions that neither education nor religion has an influence

⁴ *Jaaha* is a social tradition in Saudi Arabia and some other neighbouring countries where very important people in the region are gathered to formally participate (or assist) the groom's family to convince the bridegroom's family of approving the marriage. In some other occasions, the term used to refer to the assembly of people who are gathered to share in settling conflicts between extended families.

upon them. She further contends: "education alone cannot improve our lives. If local customs and values are deeply ingrained in the life of a person, then a long time is needed before the mentality changes and new things are accepted. We need more enlightenment and awareness about what constitute social traditions and what constitute Islam" (p. 10). As can be noticed from the above example, it could be claimed that, for social reasons, the role of the majority of women in Saudi Arabia is still limited to specific educational areas, as AlMunajjed states: "Women's degrees are concentrated in education and teaching, human sciences, natural sciences, and Islamic studies. Of all female university graduates in 2007, 93% had degrees in education and teaching or human sciences," (p. 16.17). In sum, social behaviours and manners are influential in the way teaching practices are addressed in this study, I, therefore, will revisit them in the course of the coming chapters in this thesis.

2.3 Pre-University Education Sector

The first Directorate of Education was established in the country in 1925, which has laid the foundations of a centralised national educational system. The real development of the educational system in its modern sense began in 1953, when the first Ministry of Education was established. Since then, the Ministry has guided the expansion and modernisation of the educational system, with new schools being opened and public education starting to expand throughout the country to fulfil the demands of the growing population. In fact, the expansion of the educational sector was rapid and reached diverse and remote parts of the country. In 1958, the school system took its final shape with 6 years for the elementary stage, 3 years for the intermediate stage, 3 years for the secondary stage and a separate higher education programme.

Elementary schooling is compulsory from the age of six (grades 1–6). Each school year has two 15-week semesters. Grades 1 – 4 have continuous assessment by their teachers, while grades 5 and 6 have two weeks of examinations. Intermediate level schooling, for grades 7 – 9, is also compulsory, with the same semester structure but with midterm and final examinations. Passing a final examination to achieve the Intermediate School Certificate is necessary for entry to the next level, the secondary school. English is a compulsory subject at intermediate and secondary levels.

The secondary level, for grades 10 – 12, is divided into two tracks: regular and vocational. The regular track offers a general curriculum for one year, followed by a choice of three special areas for the next two years: Administration and Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, or Sharei'ah and Arabic Studies. Students with high achievement in mathematics and physical sciences are encouraged to pursue Natural Sciences. The school year consists of two semesters lasting for twenty weeks including two weeks of examinations. There are up to 25 teaching periods per week of 45 minutes each. A Secondary School Certificate, is awarded to students who earn the necessary credits and score at least 50% in their examinations. The vocational secondary track includes three sub-tracks: industrial, commercial, and agricultural. Students join special schools (often called institutions) for three years where they receive theoretical and practical training in addition to basic general subjects including Arabic and Islamic Studies. The students undergo a national exam and often leave with a certificate that allows them to enter technical institutes for two years before they join the job market.

2.4 The Development of Saudi Higher Education

The Saudi higher education system was established in 1957 when the first public college for teachers was transformed into King Saud University. The Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1975 (Abdulhalem et al., 2009). In addition to this, there were several government agencies managing and offering higher education to Saudi students, such as teachers' colleges which remained under the Ministry of Education and colleges of health sciences which were under the Ministry of Health for a long time. In 2005, with the recent expansion in the number of Saudi universities, most of these colleges have been transformed into universities under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education alongside the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (ibid). In addition to this, many Saudi universities signed partnership contracts with world-class universities (Abdulhalem et al., 2009; Royal Embassy, 2012).

Table (2.1) Growth in Numbers of Public Universities					
Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
No. of Universities	3	7	8	8	25
10 years Growth rate %	-	133.3	14.3	0	212.5
Growth rate % , compared to 1970	-	133.3	166.7	166.7	733.3

As Table (2.1) illustrates, since 2000 the higher education system has expanded very rapidly in terms of quantity. Such expansion was introduced as a governmental initiative to respond to the increase in the population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This response was, however, still limited to the opening of new universities in most of the towns and minor cities in the country. In addition to this, in the last few years, the Government has taken an exceptional initiative of expanding and decentralising higher education from being concentrated in major cities to other dispersed towns in almost all the regions of the country. The Government perceives its initiative as a necessary step to decentralise its services from being concentrated in major cities to other parts of the country.

In 2005, the Saudi Government launched the King Abdullah Programme of Scholarship for qualified students of both genders who graduate from high schools and from all higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia to study in the United Kingdom, other Europe countries, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and East Asia (Lamine, 2010; Ramady, 2012; Royal Embassy, 2012) and to experience foreign cultures (Royal Embassy, 2012). The Government sponsors all those who have been granted scholarships abroad by paying all tuition and living expenses, including the students' transportation and medication (Ramady, 2012). The King's Programme of Scholarship, as it is referred to, is the largest in the world (Lamine, 2010). The number of students who have joined the King's Programme since 2005 is 148,229, studying at different levels (bachelor, master and doctorate) across many different subjects (Aleqtisadiah, 2013). The Programme prepares students for the Saudi employment market and to be university instructors, as all public colleges and universities recruit instructors from neighbouring Arab countries and depend on large numbers of Saudi teaching assistants with bachelors and masters and a small number of Saudis holding PhD qualifications to teach most of the courses (ibid).

This initiative encompasses both genders as the Ministry of Higher Education confirms that “women in higher education in the Kingdom are witnessing an unprecedented development quantitatively and qualitatively in terms of development programs, initiatives and strategies. This development provides educational opportunities to women and plays an important role in realizing equity between the two sexes in job opportunities and overseas scholarships” (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, p. 10).

In the same year as the Programme for Scholarships was introduced, the Ministry of Higher Education launched an initiative project “AFAAQ”. In English, this means “Horizons”. It was a Long Term University Strategic Plan for the period 2006 to 2030, intended to meet the challenges that the country will face over this time, such as rapid population growth and the need of the labour market for highly qualified graduates (AAFAQ, 2005; Abdulhalem et al., 2009). The main objective of the AAFAQ Project is:

“To promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the Higher Education system in Saudi Arabia, through the preparation of an ambitious, futuristic, practical, and long-term plan that identifies vision, value, standards for performance measurement, and resource requirements. It additionally aims to improve adequate utilization of human and financial resources; and encouragement for universities to allocate more resources for R&D [Research & Development] and community service. The project is geared to produce a detailed implementation plan for Higher Education for the first 5 years and proposes a mechanism for institutions of Higher Education for continued strategic planning and implementation of strategic and operational plans” (AAFAQ, 2005, p.2).

In recent times, during the first Higher Education student symposium held in March 2010 (Ministry of Higher Education Portal, 2010), the speech of the Minister of Saudi Higher Education emphasized movement towards transforming Saudi society into a knowledge society and knowledge economy:

“The premises of Higher Education development adopted by the Ministry are based on specified fundamentals, most important of them is supporting Saudi society to be transformed into a knowledge society. One of the most important means to achieve this transformation is to develop and employ a view of knowledge economy where knowledge is produced, disseminated and ultimately consumed at various community products and service works. Toward this there was collaboration with universities to build real and realistic partnerships with production and services sector, both governmental and private whether local or international. Such a move is justified in view of a university or educational institution’s role as a manifestation of a balance struck between producing knowledge and utilization of this produced knowledge, education output that is fit for national development needs and those needs of the labour market. Such balancing highlights the real role and the positive reflection of universities and Higher Education organizations in serving their communities, not forgetting too their pioneering role in educating and conducting research We see as a result of building on these fundamentals the beginning trend of universities and organizations developing their programs and instruction methods toward equipping their students with knowledge and also skills for lifelong learning. These institutions yet empower graduates to enter and compete in the local labour market and the world arena that is moving to employ knowledge economies”.

In the discourse, as well as in the practices of the Saudi Government, the Saudis are deemed as the most essential element of the nation’s development; the Government allocates large budgets to meet the growing demands of education at all levels, including higher education. Saudi Arabia is, without doubt, a country that aims to develop its educational system, institutions and teaching-learning quality. It expends a large amount of its annual budget (25 % of the total budget of 2013 “\$54.4 billion”) in building new schools and universities, vocational training and funding scholarships abroad to achieve this purpose. With the belief that education is the means for economic development that achieves the welfare of individuals and society, it has never avoided any attempt to actualise these aims. Among these initiatives, as mentioned above, is the recent opening of new universities in small cities and towns scattered across the vast area of the country. The philosophy of the country is to make higher education opportunities affordable to all citizens.

2.5 General Aims of Saudi Arabia Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for supervising, planning and coordinating all aspects of higher education, including the budgets of institutions, educational policies, recruitments, and university instructor training, among many others. With these centralised responsibilities, a major aim of the Ministry is to

position Saudi Arabia as an advanced country. Specifically, the Government discourse revolves around its key aim to develop a skilled workforce in the fields of science and administration, to reach national development goals. To achieve this aim, among others, the Government claims that universities have academic and administrative independence (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). However, all decisions that are approved by any university council must be validated by the Council of Higher Education (HEC).

Among these aims is a special interest in the development of research in the higher institutions. As the Ministry of Higher Education indicates, academic research should remain one of the priorities of the universities to achieve scientific and social development. It is, therefore, taken up as an essential part of the functions and tasks of universities. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for supporting and financing research projects in specialized research institutes and centres. It also conducts scientific symposiums and conferences, and encourages university instructors to take part in activities in their specialized fields in order to keep up to date (ibid).

In 1970, the Educational Policy Charter for General and Higher Education was launched. Since then, it has been preserved without any substantial changes. The aims and goals included in this charter represent the cultural values and beliefs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people. The following is a translation of the Educational Policy Charter and the objectives of Saudi Higher Education:

- *“Creating sound and complete understanding of Islam through dissemination of the Islamic faith and values to its students*
- *Preparing both academically and intellectually a pool of qualified and highly trained citizens capable of participating in building the nation*
- *Enabling talented students to pursue postgraduate degrees in different disciplines and programmes*
- *Carrying out high-level research that will help to advance human knowledge in different sciences and arts and will positively push forward the country’s development*
- *Supporting scientific production and publication that will help the nation to better present its culture, ideology and development to the whole world*

- *Supporting Arabisation and translation of different types of knowledge in science and arts*
- *Providing special programmes for graduates needing further or modern training while in-service” (Al-Hamid et al., 2002; p. 141).*

The above objectives have been set for the whole higher education system in Saudi Arabia, but each university has the right to add its own specific objectives that do not conflict with the national ones.

2.6 Higher Education Policy of Appointment and Promotion

2.6.1 Higher Education Policy of Appointment

The Higher Education Council (HEC) sets regulations and conditions of appointment in the Saudi universities. These regulations and conditions are applied in all Saudi universities but allow for specific additions at the local level by each university. The conditions for the appointment of instructors “a teacher assistant, a lecturer, and an assistant professor” are presented below (HEC; 2007):

- *The conditions for the appointment of a teacher assistant according to Article 4, 1997 are as follows:*

1. *University degree from any Saudi or other reputable university*
2. *Obtain at least very good grade in his/her university degree*
3. *Any other conditions and requirements issued by the university council*

- *The conditions for the appointment of a lecturer according to Article 5, 1997 are as follows:*

1. *Master’s degree from any Saudi or other reputable university*
2. *Obtain at least very good grade in his/her university degree*
3. *Any other conditions and requirements issued by the university council*

- *The conditions for the appointment of an assistant professor according to Article 6, 1997, are as follows:*

1. *A PhD degree from any Saudi or other reputable university*
2. *Obtain at least very good grade in his/her university degree if it is estimated*
3. *Any other conditions and requirements issued by the university council*

As might be noted from the above regulations regarding appointments, both bodies responsible for establishing these standards ignore any reference to teaching or educational qualifications that university instructors should have. Therefore, universities recruit university instructors without providing them with

necessary professional training programmes. Unlike old and established universities, which offer some professional training programmes, emergent or new universities lack these programmes. For example, King Saud University, King Abdul Aziz University and Imam University offer orientation programmes for newly appointed university instructors but they are not compulsory programmes⁵.

2.6.2 Higher Education Policy of Promotion

Acts 21 and 22 of the Higher Education Regulations set by the Higher Education Council (HEC, 1999), for example, state that instructors who hold a doctorate “get promoted on basis of the number of research studies and publications” (Al-Kobaisi & Kamber, 2001). University instructors in Saudi Arabia are commonly concerned with research because most of the higher education regulations focus on the quality of research. In addition to this, academic promotions of university instructors mainly depend on their research and publications. University instructors can apply for promotion when they meet the requirements; a teacher assistant can apply to be a lecturer after obtaining a master’s degree in his/her major. A lecturer can apply to be an assistant professor after obtaining a doctorate in his/her major. However, assistant professors and associated professors can apply for promotions when they have served for at least four years at a university, and have published at least four papers. There are a total of 100 points to an appraisal of university instructors, these are divided into; 60 point for the research production, 25 for teaching, 15 for serving the university and society. Every assistant professor and associate professor must obtain at 60 points. At least 35 points for scientific production is required for assistant professors to be promoted; 40 points for scientific production is required for associate professors to be promoted; teaching weighs only 25 points in the promotion scale. However, there are no required points that any assistant professor or associate professor must obtain for teaching practices where national standards for the quality of teaching are absent. The tradition is that all university instructors are granted these points with minor reports presented by the deans regarding their teaching. In addition to this, the Higher Education Council sets out additional acts which were approved by the Saudi Arabian Council of Ministers in April 2008 to pay rewards and allowances for university instructors in Saudi universities who prove

⁵ This is based on consulting the websites of all Saudi universities as well as personal communications with human resources departments.

themselves as outstanding academic researchers in their fields. The Council of Higher Education, however, has the right to terminate these rewards and allowances without providing reasons for this termination (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). These rewards and allowances are distributed as follows:

- Rewarding excellence in research as follows:

- 1. Allowance of (10 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor who wins a local prize in research*
- 2. Allowance of (20 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor who wins a regional prize*
- 3. Allowance of (30 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor who wins an international award*
- 4. Allowance of (40 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor who holds a patent on an invention*

- Rewards for leadership positions as follows:

- 1. Payable to the deans 2500 Saudi riyals per month*
- 2. Payable to the vice-deans 2000 Saudi riyals per month*
- 3. Payable to the department chairmen 1500 Saudi riyals per month*

- Allowance of (25 percent) of the basic salary for all university instructors as an education allowance

- Allowance of (40 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor who teaches in an emergent university and must have a doctorate, and (20 percent) for any university instructor who does not hold a doctorate

- Allowance of (25 to 50 percent) of the basic salary for any university instructor whose major is in high demand

As the above regulations indicate, rewards are mainly given for academic research and other administrative tasks. The fact that teaching practices are still ignored by the policy makers produces an educational 'culture' that takes little interest in the actual teaching in the classroom (AlQarni, 2007). As such, it might be claimed that the Ministry of Higher Education reinforces the gap in policy between teaching and research through neglecting this essential aspect both at training and financial levels. This ultimately leads to a lowering the quality of teaching; a crisis that UNESCO (1991) warned universities in developing countries about. Yet, since 1991, no action has been taken by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education to improve the quality of teaching practices in higher

educational institutions. Also, the Saudi Higher Education policy seems to ignore the need to promote programmes of “professional development” that others argue enhance the teaching practices of the university instructors (Al-Sobaie, 2006).

2.7 Saudi Emergent Universities

Since the year 2003, the higher education sector has witnessed a structural revolution represented by an unprecedented upsurge of universities established in almost every part of the country. The number of these universities reached 25 by the year 2014 when the late King Abdullah ordered the opening of three more universities in the Southern area of the Kingdom. These ‘new’ universities could be classified into three types in terms of their emergence. First, most of these universities were upgrades from community colleges, which used to offer two-year diplomas in social and educational sciences. In fact, the majority of these community colleges focused on educational studies and mainly prepared school teachers. These colleges were small in size with only one building and mostly lacked the necessary educational facilities. Additionally, these colleges used to be under the supervision of the Ministry of Education rather than the Ministry of Higher Education. The second type of emergent universities used to be small branches of the main universities, and they were a single college branch only offering majors in social sciences. With the period of expansion, these colleges became independent from the mother universities and were named according to their regions. The third type, which is the smallest in number, is the establishment of new universities per se. These universities are located in major cities and neighbouring areas, such as Princess Nora University (Riyadh) and King Abdullah University of Technology (Jeddah). In fact these two universities are now the largest in the country (probably in the world) with all the facilities one can find in any modern university. Princess Nora University occupies 8 million square meters, and cost 20 billion Saudi Riyals to build. It consists of 23 colleges and currently the number of the students is around 60,000. It is important to mention that this university is only for female students (Princess Nora University Website).

As for most of the other emergent universities, in regions far from the city centres, they are still using the old buildings (college buildings). In his essay, entitled “*Public Emergent Universities: Frantic Race*”, Al-Qahtani (2014) critically engages with evaluating these universities. Exempting emergent universities in large cities, Al-Qahtani explores the status and the challenges that these

emergent universities face on different levels. He states that all these universities lack distinguished Saudi and non-Saudi instructors as they do not have the potential to attract well qualified instructor. As for the Saudi instructors, Al-Qahtani states that qualified Saudi instructors are directed to leadership and administrative positions with zero credited hours of teaching load. As such the priority is transferred to administrative work rather than teaching. As for the qualified non-Saudi instructors, they are not attracted to these universities as they exist in regions that do not offer them the services they need. In addition, the established Saudi universities offer them more attractive contracts. Among the other challenges that the second type of these emergent universities (the ones upgraded from community colleges) face is, according to Al-Qahtani, the fact that these universities are still run in the same old manner. They lack the potential of universities such as promoting academic research and social participation. Among the other shortcomings of these universities, according to Al-Qahtani, are the following: first, most of these universities offer programmes that are irrelevant to the Saudi workplace, such as focusing on social sciences. He criticises the spread of what is called “College of Science and Art” in these universities, and concludes that these colleges “are spreading and trading unemployment in the country”. In so doing, they are repeating the failed experience of old universities of “exporting” unemployment, but with far less quality of its graduates. For over 10 years, Al-Qahtani contends that these universities have failed to meet the demand of the Saudi marketplace by lacking balance in their admission policies, and lacking the ability to offer important specialisations for the Saudi job market. Second, Al-Qahtani expresses his concern that the future of these universities is embodied in the frantic rash to expand without achieving the lowest level of quality. He also warns that in their pursuit to “knock on the doors of graduate studies” these universities will be accumulating and doubling the existing problem of unemployment among the young in the country. In his critique of the graduate programmes offered by these emergent universities, Al-Qahtani states: “I was stunned when I attended the International Higher Education Conference and saw the ambitious programmes offered by these universities without having the minimum qualifications needed to maintain quality assurance demands” (p. 6). Third, Al-Qahtani proceeds, most of these emergent universities focus on formalities such as exaggerated dependence on technology, administrative protocols such as having department chairs with three or more secretaries for

departments that have just five instructors. Al-Qahtani concludes that these universities need reform based on research at different levels so as to avoid such challenges and to actively participate in the well-being of the country.

In a similar vein, a local journal named *Administrative Development* dedicated a special issue to address several aspects of these emergent universities, entitled “*The File of Emergent Universities: Its Existing Status and Prospective*”. Although the essays included are not based on research, several Saudi scholars express their thoughts and experience regarding these emergent universities. For example, Al-Raqeeb (2014) expresses his dissatisfaction with the status of these emergent universities. Among the charges he states concerning this expansion are the following: a) lack of response to the demands of the job market; b) the inability of these universities to attract qualified instructors and human resources, especially female instructors; c) lack of research; and d) lack of professional training programmes. Al-Malky (2014) contends that the most acute challenge these universities face is the absence of strategic planning. He insists that these universities still practice traditional output for its strategic planning, represented by copying the experience of old universities. Another aspect of this failure is the fact that planning is not transferred into practice: “I am afraid that these plans are written to be archived rather than executed” (p. 45). Some other challenges reported by other Saudi scholars in the same issue include the following aspects. Al-Saleh (2014) contends that the lack of infrastructure and facilities of these universities are real challenges for the advancement of these universities. She also points out that these universities require special and relevant regulations that are suitable to their particular nature rather than having the same regulations that are applied to the old and established universities. She insists that such freedom would yield positive results where these universities respond to local development projects in their areas. Al-Qadhy (2014) argues that increasing the number of these universities would be an important step to meet the demands of the growing economy of the country. He, however, warns that these universities should make a real move from offering ‘theoretical’ subjects into ones that meet the demands of the job market. He also focuses on attracting qualified female instructors in different subjects rather than concentrating on traditional humanities. Probably one of the most important observations in this issue is Al-Yahya’s (2014) call for partnership between these universities and established

ones whether inside the country or abroad. He states that: “opening channels with established universities and research centres around the world and exchanging experience with these institutions would contribute to the development of these universities” (p. 78).

Drawing on the above observations, it can be noted that Saudi emergent universities, including their instructors and students, are subject to myriad challenges, and university instructors’ teaching practices are no exception. Although the scholars in the above report did not address this issue directly, it can be inferred from their observations that these universities lack qualified instructors. This issue is therefore one major challenge. Although all of these articles are a form of essays that did not depend on empirical research, such observations, especially coming from Saudi scholars who serve in these universities, is informative regarding the status of these universities. In this regard, these observations represent a statement of the problem for the present research. However, with this multitude of challenges, which are not possible to address in one study, I find it useful to address one aspect of these challenges: instructors’ teaching practices. With this aim in mind, I perceive the other contextual factors represented by the regional locations of these universities, with their tribal, socioeconomic and cultural values, to be essential aspects which require an all-inclusive study.

In conclusion, as I have attempted to describe, the social and educational context of this study is a dynamic and fast growing one. In a period of around eighty years, the sectors of public education and higher education have passed through substantial reforms, developments and changes. Nonetheless, this fast growing aspect has not been without challenges and, to some extent, failures, especially with the recent surge in the sector of higher education represented by the massive expansion and spread of new universities across the country. Saudi Arabia is classified as a rich, but ‘developing’ country, and this contradiction requires us to reflect and work hard to explore and address the reasons for this paradox. Since higher and education universities, in particular, remain at the centre of the country’s development, these new universities require a range of research studies to address this gap on diverse levels. In short, I deem this study to be a contribution in this direction since teaching practices are at the core of university success.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of the current research is to understand and explore university instructors' teaching practices in an emergent university in Saudi Arabia. As a novice researcher in the field, I conducted the research in parallel with reviewing relevant literature on issues surrounding the topic. My review of literature therefore informed all stages of the research starting with collecting data and ending with analysing and discussing the obtained data. The aim of this strategy was to explore what was already known about the topic and how the existing knowledge could inform and direct my research in several directions. I also aimed to review research literature for the purpose of identifying possible gaps and exploring avenues for how my own research might contribute to the topic. In all research stages, I have maintained a self-reflexive endeavour, including my engagement with others' research, to sustain a scholarly approach to my research. On the one hand, I have credited others' work and their contribution to the field, and, on the other hand, I have placed my own work in its knowledge base. After Silverman (2005), I have engaged with the existing literature in a 'dialogic' manner, reading others' work in the context of the current research represented by my inquiry and research questions. Such a manner, as Silverman argues, offers an outlook for a continuing dialogue for future research.

Drawing on the aims of the study and the research questions, I will review the literature that deals with the following themes: a) understanding teaching practices in higher education; b) teaching practices and theory; c) contextual teaching practices (or context-specific teaching practices); d) national teaching practices; e) instructors' conceptions of teaching practices and how they are relevant to their actual classroom practice; f) 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices; and g) teaching practices from the students' perspective.

3.2 Understanding Teaching Practices in Higher Education

Research in higher education teaching practices has explored the concept of teaching practices, its nature, boundaries, features and characteristics. Earlier studies including Skilling (1969), Postlethwaite (1972), and Wankat and Oreovicz (1993) have established the general features of teaching practices and since then

research has directed its attention to what is often referred to as 'effective' or 'good' teaching practice, for example, Bain (2004), Bartram and Bailey (2009), Biggs (1989), Carnell (2007), Cashmore et al. (2013), Cunningham (1999), Debowski (2012), Gibbs et al. (2008), Little and Locke (2011), Yates (2005), and Young and Shaw (1999), among many others. Research literature on university teaching practices denotes an amalgam of various lines of investigation including broad topics. Among these topics are instructors' conceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Carnell, 2007; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Sandretto & Heath, 2004); conception of teaching practices as perceived by students (Bartram & Bailey, 2009; Brown, 2009); organisational structure and institutional practice (Mckeown, 2009; Zhu & Engels; 2013); instructors professional development programmes (Hubball et al., 2005; Pratt, 2002) among several others.

In addition to the various topics addressed under the umbrella of teaching practice, it seems that researchers do not bother using unified language and concepts while addressing the concept of teaching practices. Literature is therefore replete with definitions and loose boundaries of teaching practices, and the research concerning the concept continues to expand. In some scenarios, the concept addresses the characteristics of and practices of instructors while conducting their teaching (Samples & Copeland, 2013). Others expand to include the planning of teaching practices, learners' interaction with these practices, institutional policies, instructors' personal beliefs, attitudes and epistemologies among others (ibid). Samples and Copeland (2013), reviewing copious literature, argue that establishing teaching practice as a 'universal activity' is not possible. This impossibility partly emerges from the fact that researchers exploring definitions and examples of teaching practices seem not to agree on a 'unified' corpus of characteristics and practices that deeply affect students' learning.

For the purpose of the current study, I will navigate between the two concepts of teaching practices and 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices as both inform the research in several directions. Most of the reviewed literature refers to the term in two different contexts: the first is in the context of pedagogy and teaching methodology, which is beyond the scope of the current research, and the second addresses the concept in the context of teaching professionalism, good practice and effective practice. For the latter perspective, I highlight several themes in this section including an international versus contextual conceptualisation of

'good/effective' teaching practice in higher education, instructors' perceptions of teaching practices and how these relate to their actual practice.

To eliminate confusion regarding the use of terminology in this chapter, I use the concept of teaching practice to denote the equivalent concept of 'good/effective' teaching practice. Reinking (2007) invites attention to the use of qualifying adjectives *good*, *better*, and *best* as preceding the concept teaching practice, and contends that, from a grammatical and semantic point of view, these adjectives call one to pass judgments about the value of something that can be assessed or compared. Reinking argues:

“A statement in the absolute comparative form would be “Engaging children in critical reading is good practice”. In other words there isn’t any claim that critical reading practice is better practice than any other practice and certainly no claim that it is best of all practices. Nonetheless, there is a quiet dignity and subtle power in knowing that something is inherently good. It is a foundation upon which many things can be built. It provides confidence that we are on firm footing when engaging practice that is aimed at achieving important and valued instructional goals” (p. 75).

The use of *better*, as Reinking argues, indicates that “one practice is better than the other”, and for *best*, “makes little room for doubt, for alternatives for contingencies, and for qualifications” (p. 75). This argument provides a good starting point to think of terminology regarding teaching practices versus good teaching practice as directs our attention that, logically speaking, no one wishes his practice to be *bad*, and therefore, the qualifying adjectives of whether *good*, *better* or *best* would provide little or no substantial meaning in the current context. In addition to this, the tradition of scholars and researchers is one of using qualifying terms that precede the concept of teaching practices, such as the quality of teaching practice, perceptions of teaching practice, and evaluating teaching practices among several others. In other words, I did not come across a single study that uses the term teaching practice(s) as such. For the purpose of this research, which concerns itself in exploring the nature and challenges of teaching practice in a Saudi university and to place this research in its knowledge base, I find it practicable to use the term “teaching practices” as signifying “good or effective teaching practices”. Drawing on this argument and throughout the thesis, I use the two concepts “good/effective teaching practice” and “teaching practice” interchangeably to refer to those practices attempted by university

instructors while conducting their teaching, including the planning stage, course preparation, communication and interpersonal relations.

3.3 Teaching Practice and Theory

Prior to reviewing research concerning the status of theory for teaching practices, it is important to elucidate the fact that theorising teaching practice is an overarching notion. It is part of educational theory in general, which includes several other topics such as pedagogy, curriculum, learning, and educational organisation. Theory in education is also informed by several other disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology and psychology (e.g. behaviourist, cognitive, constructivist theories). Educational literature also speaks of cultural theory of education including religious, social and institutional perspectives. Based on my review of a large amount of relevant research, it could be safe to conclude that the theory of teaching practice is bracketed with other sub-theories, like the ones mentioned above. It is therefore difficult to set precise theoretical limits round the topic of teaching practices as more and more other disciplines have thrown their shadows across the topic. Furthermore, the topic of teaching practices has responded to the revolving nature of educational theory. In other words, I argue that a theory of teaching practice responds to the general evolution of theories of education and learning. For example, in the years when the behaviourist school of learning prevailed in education, the practice of teaching robotically responded to the outlines of the behaviourist school, and when the theory fell apart in favour of the cognitive school, teaching practice inevitably responded.

For the sake of understanding theory concerning teaching practice, I recall Lindgren's (1959) argument regarding the tension between theory and practice. Although more than half a century separate us from Lindgren's views, I argue that he has provided seminal and grounding arguments concerning theory in educational practice. Lindgren opens his argument with the statement: "the plain fact of the matter is that all practice – in education, as well as in other fields – is based on theory" (p. 333). For him, this statement means that "theory is not consciously stated", it is rather an "implicit theory – a theory that may be inferred from behaviour" (p. 333-4). This seemingly plain fact, according to him, refers to the confusion and contradiction resulting from a practitioner's unwillingness or inability to identify statements underlining classroom behaviour. The reason

underlining the inconsistencies between theory and practice is that most practitioners are unwilling to probe into the concepts basic to their behaviour.

Lindgren claims that there are three main resources from which practitioners in education draw and develop their classroom practice and behaviour: tradition, personal experience and research. Most of the practitioners however depend on the first two sources. Many practitioners experience being taught by instructors who do not use the teaching methods themselves that they are advocating. Lindgren narrates the following true example:

“Timothy Leary tells of a psychology professor who was advising his class of the importance of getting students to solve their own problems. “Don’t let them get dependant on you,” he said, “make them think for themselves”. After the lecture, a graduate student came up to ask a question. He said that in the section of undergraduate students he was supervising as [an instructor], he was continually plagued by requests for answers to problems that could and should be solved by the students themselves, “What should I do?” he asked. The professor cleared his throat and said that students were always trying to trap instructors into solving their problems for them – problems that themselves should work out. “Now what I would do, if I were you”, he went on, “is to ---” (p. 334).

Commenting on this incident, Lindgren points out that the aim of bringing this narrative to attention is not to underscore the inconsistency of the psychology professor, but rather to show how difficult it is to break away from attitudes and beliefs, since the most influential source among the three mentioned above is tradition, an autocratic or authoritarian approach to teaching.

The other two sources of practice, according to Lindgren, also play major roles in determining teaching practices when combined with traditional theory. For those who depend on personal experience, some attempt to combine traditional theory with theory based on research, and others depend more directly on personal experience, since as they are more and more engaged and involved in the teaching/learning process, they learn that certain practices are more effective to them than others, or may be “certain practices are particularly expressive of [their] personalities and attitudes towards life in general” (p. 335).

Research into the relationship between theory and practice has focused on the question of how practitioners can integrate theory and practice and how the design of the learning environment can contribute to that integration. There is,

however, no straightforward and linear agreement on how theory is perceived and applied. This is partly because of the ambiguous conception of theory and of practice as well as the relationship between the two (Verloop, 1992). Recently the tension between theory and practice has intensified rather than settled down. On the one hand, theory is perceived as providing 'practical' knowledge, on the other hand theory is argued to have little influence on the way practitioners conduct their teaching (Boerst & Oonk, 2005). The result of such a situation is a practice-oriented teacher and/or a practice-oriented approach. This status has also led to focusing on the practitioners' beliefs, attitudes and thinking processes. This argument originates from the assumptions that practitioners' behaviour can be understood and evaluated only when we understand the underlining beliefs of these behaviours. (I will discuss the instructors' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs on teaching practices below).

Indeed, the problem of theory versus practice has been the concern of early educators since the times of Dewey (1933) who distinguished between 'reflective action' and 'routine action'. Schon (1983) revived interest in this matter and argues that practitioners do not simply apply theory in their practice, but rather they decide how to determine what works on the basis of all kinds of situation-related components. Thiessen (2000) distinguishes three theoretically oriented behaviours that encompass practitioners' teaching practices: impactful behaviours, reflective practices, and development of professional knowledge. As for impactful behaviours, they represent the failure to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, hence, the practitioner takes cognition as the dominant role for classroom behaviour. Reflective practices, which emerge in response to the failure of impactful behaviour, focus on developing the skills of thinking about what they have done and what they might do differently in the future. Zeichner (1994) distinguishes between five types of reflective practice: the academic, the social efficiency, the developmental, the social re-constructionist, and the generic reflection tradition. Reflective practice is, however, not free from criticism as its conceptual rigour and empirical foundation are not yet developed. Although reflective practice has been applauded for its success, Eraut (1995) points out that practitioners are often faced with a lack of time to reflect in action. Oonk (2001) also warns that reflections may remain superficial through lack of adequate theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, the concept of 'reflection' requires

further clarification and analysis of theory-practice integration. Brookfield (cited in Hubball et al., 2005) calls reflection a 'premature ultimate' since, once the concept is invoked, it stops any critical debate. Similarly, Smyth (cited in Hubball et al., 2005) warns that the term reflection "runs the real risk of being totally evacuated of all meaning" (p. 60). Brookfield (as cited in Hubball et al., 2005) argues that:

"One problem with the reflective practice idea is that it has become a catch-all term ... The terms reflection and reflective practice are now so overused that they are in danger of becoming buzzword denuded of any real meaning – of taking the status of [a] premature ultimate, like motherhood or democracy" (p. 60).

According to Thiessen (2000), the development of professional knowledge emphasises using both practical and propositional knowledge at the same time, which is different from impactful behaviours and reflective practices. Thiessen argues that practitioners experience the concurrent use of knowledge in a certain context by focusing on propositional knowledge which has practical relevance informed by purposeful practice. Thiessen contends that development of professional knowledge balances theory and practice.

It seems that theorising professional teaching practices has not been the major concern of research over the past decades, and most research which is empirically oriented has one foremost dominant aim - that is to establish standards or criteria that regularise the profession (Ramsden et al., 2007). Nonetheless, in recent years theory has started to emerge and develop to substantiate the ways university instructors approach teaching practice. Fundamentally, theory regarding teaching practices has one basic assumption which states that, if there are variations in students' approaches to learning, and if approaches are context-dependant, then it is supposed that an equivalent phenomenon should apply to instructors (Ramsden et al., 2007).

Drawing on the work of Ramsden (2003), I understand theory in the context of teaching practices within an underlying structure of evidence-based practice of university instructors who wish to improve their teaching practice. In other words, theory that is confirmed by empirical research evidence states that there are systematic variations in how university instructors approach their teaching, and how their practices are related to the way they perceive and experience the

context of teaching (ibid). “If a student adopts qualitatively different approaches in different contexts, might then a university [instructor] experience teaching as simply transmitting information in one context, but as helping students to develop their understanding in another? Might the outcomes of these different approaches to teaching then be reflected in students’ approaches to learning?” (p. 141). The answer Ramsden and his colleagues provide is affirmative; they contend that “confirmation of the theory was later provided through empirical research evidence that variations in how university [instructors] approached their teaching were systematically related to the way they experienced the context of teaching” (p. 141). Ramsden et al. (2007) argue that a multitude of contextual factors influence and inform instructors’ approaches to teaching. When, for example, they perceive their class to be small enough, they are more likely to report using a more student-centred approach, while when the class size is perceived as too large, they are more likely to use a traditional transmission model with a teacher-centred approach. Ramsden and his colleagues identify similar relations between contextual factors and instructors’ use of qualitatively different approaches. For example, instructors are more likely to use a student-centred approach emphasising conceptual change when they experience control over the content, when their department provide support, when they have an appropriate academic load, and when they are familiar with students’ learning characteristics and prior knowledge of the subject matter.

In general, it seems that for a theory of teaching practice to develop, the particular nature, context and environment of learning and teaching should be taken into consideration. That is to say, university instructors perceive their task so as to respond to a multitude of variables associated with their teaching. Identifying the relationships between students and context, and the role of the instructors, may count as theoretical tenets that guide teaching practices. In short, and through engaging with the literature above, it may be possible to conclude that a theory for university teaching practice is contextual and evolutionary in nature. Drawing on the existing literature and the findings of the current study, I discuss issues related to theory of teaching practice more fully in Chapter Six. In the coming section, however, I review studies that address the issue surrounding contextual teaching practices, which help in understanding the particular institutional, personal, social and cultural stipulations of the current context.

3.4 Contextual Teaching Practices (Context-Specific TP)

Before elaborating the theme of 'contextual teaching practice', it is imperative to define the concept of context-based teaching practice and to draw boundaries around the concept as used in this study. Based on literature, the concept of context-based teaching refers to three broad categories: firstly, a context-based teaching practice refers to the institutional 'culture' (or what I might call intrinsic or micro contextual factors) including: the academic discipline, academic workload, the characteristics of students, the classroom environment, etc. Secondly, context-based teaching can refer to extrinsic or macro factors such as social and cultural values that can shape approaches to teaching (Akhmetova et al., 2014). Thirdly, based on literature, another understanding of the term context-based learning and teaching is where it is defined as "a conception of teaching and learning that helps [instructors] relate subject matter content to real world situations" (Shamsid-Deen & Smith, 2007, p. 14). Berns and Erickson (2001) explain that contextual teaching and learning is an innovative process that assists students to associate the content and subject matter to a real-life context. I perceive this third type as a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that operate both at the institutional and social levels. For the sake of understanding the relationship and the role of context in modelling and informing the instructors' teaching practices in the context of my thesis, I review studies from different contexts; e.g. Australia and the United States, as broadly representing these different types of contextual teaching practices. For the second understanding of context related teaching practice (i.e. context-specific that focuses on social and cultural particularities), I highlight the processes of harmonising national and culturally-specific teaching practices with established ones like that of the European Higher Education Area. I also review relevant studies on interpersonal relations as a dominant factor influencing instructors' teaching practices.

Ramsden and his colleagues (2007) explored the associations between university instructors' experience, their perception of a micro context, and their approaches to teaching. They examined the role of specific academic teaching contexts represented by different subject matters, the teaching environment (e.g. class sizes, workload, department role and academic leadership and collaborative management), and students' different approaches to learning in determining the variation of instructors' teaching practices. Ramsden and his

colleagues addressed several contextual issues in their wide scale research project. They looked at university instructors' perceptions of the teaching environment and their approaches to teaching, as well as their students' approaches to learning and students' corresponding perceptions of the learning environment. The researchers were interesting in the way these perceptions may determine instructors' approaches to teaching. Specifically, the key aim of the study was to investigate how university instructors' experiences of teaching were linked to their perception of a specific academic context and their approaches to teaching in particular subjects. Ramsden et al. adopted a quantitative approach, using a sample of 439 instructors from 11 Australian universities across four academic fields. The participating instructors completed surveys of their experiences and approaches. Similar to the present study, Ramsden's study invited instructors and students involved in the same courses, which "provided an opportunity to examine associations at course level between the context of learning as perceived by students, their approaches to studying, and their [instructors'] approaches to teaching" (p.153).

Constructing their findings into four models, the researchers provided evidence for different dimensions of teaching approaches which depended on the academic context: a) evidence substantiating the existence of different aspects of academics' experience; b) evidence supporting the institutional culture represented by departmental support; c) evidence of the many dimensions of instructors' perceptions of the immediate classroom context ; and d) evidence of the latent constructs of aspects of instructors' experience which were related to the immediate teaching context rather than being consistent with theory. To elaborate on the role of academic leadership and collaborative teaching in determining instructors' teaching approaches, Ramsden and his colleagues report that:

"Experiences of academic leadership for teaching and collaborative management predicted perceptions of a collegial commitment to students learning, which in turn predicted the experience of the context of teaching; [instructors] who perceived stronger commitment were more likely to agree that large class sizes and students characteristics such as mixed abilities did not hamper [good or] effective teaching, and to say they were more in control over what they taught. The context of teaching also predicted approaches to teaching in the way proposed by the theory" (p. 152-3).

Ramsden and his colleagues claim that these findings support the findings of previous studies (Martine et al., 2003; Ramsden, 2000) which investigated in a qualitative way the relationship between approaches to university teaching and aspects of the contexts of classroom environment and students' learning characteristics. Through open-ended interviews with academics in a case study, they reported that university instructors demonstrate more inclination and commitment to produce different approaches to teaching (mainly a student-focused approach) when they have good perception of students' learning characteristics and small classroom sizes. In a similar study, Klem (2000) reported similar results when investigating the relationship between the teaching environment and leadership, which included their colleagues' commitment to learning and teaching. The results demonstrate that academic leadership influenced instructors' approaches to teaching, but this was mainly through subject coordinators, not heads of schools.

Relevant literature has shown that the values, attitudes and behaviours of both learners and instructors are influenced by cultural factors (Alves et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1991, 2001a, 2003, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; House et al., 2004; House et al., 1999), including expectations of the way things 'ought to be done'. Socio-cultural factors substantially influence the behaviours of individuals (including learners and instructors), and also the organisational behaviours of these individuals in the workplace (Alves et al., 2006). In fact, there is a considerable body of research and literature that has addressed issues which could be classified as socio-cultural factors in their relation to higher education and learning and teaching practices in particular. For the sake of brevity, I provide an overview of the major corpus of studies and highlight some others which I deem more relevant to the present research. I also attempt a dialogic reading between the different socio-cultural contexts of these studies and the current one.

To start with learners' behaviours, Djojoputro et al. (2005) and Campbell (2004) identified various different cultural backgrounds that students bring to their classroom prior to learning experience that substantially shape their learning approaches. For example, Djojoputro et al. (2005) found out that students coming from a cultural background that is characterised by collective thinking and strong social bonds and 'high power distance' (e.g. Chinese and South Korean students) find it difficult to adapt their pre-university learning style; they tend to

show a modest disposition to classroom interaction. They experience feelings of intimidation when invited to engage in classroom interaction. Likewise, the same study reports that instructors from these countries tend to detach themselves from students. Although many studies around the world have explored socio-cultural differences, it is apparent that further research is needed in Saudi Arabia and the surrounding area in order to broaden the knowledge base regarding this dimension. Western research is copious in addressing similar matters and most of the theories and models that have emerged from Western educational contexts are simply adopted in 'developing countries' like Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the rapid pace of globalisation has led higher education institutions urgently to pay more attention to cultural sensitivity regarding learning and teaching practices. Among the several studies that address the impact of socio-cultural peculiarities is that of Hofstede (1991). Hofstede provides a compelling argument of the various aspects of socio-cultural values and attitudes that influence workplace behaviours. Hofstede claims that culture is 'learned, not inherited' from one's social surroundings. The collective thinking distinguishing members of social groups stimulates simultaneous practice; it is associated with educational opportunities and with individual professions. Hofstede argues that there exist five dimensions of culturally specific characteristics: power distance (signifying human inequality); individualism versus collectivism (describing how closely individuals are integrated into the primary group); masculinity versus femininity (related to perceived gender roles of men and women); uncertainty avoidance (related to stress in the face of the unknown); and long-short term orientation (related to whether people focus on the future or the present). He contends that these five dimensions, based on national cultures, expound key differences in people's ways of thinking, and hence, characterise professionals in workplace organisations. In fact, Hofstede's views have been received with considerable criticism as it is argued that they stereotype social groups. In keeping with his previous views, and drawing on the work of the literary critic Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Hofstede (2005) claims that culture is a "refinement of the mind" shared by social groups living in the same environment. This seemingly updated view broadly represents his early notion of the 'collective programming' of people's minds that distinguishes each social group from another.

I deem these views as representing a 'timeless' view of culture and a monolithic view of social groups which, in the post-modernist era, are better described by globalisation, fragmentation of identities, social mobility and cyber cultures. Although in previous years Saudi Arabia could be described as a closed society with bounded social relations, in recent years, especially with the initiative of sending thousands of students (both males and females) to complete their higher education abroad, Saudi society could be deemed as more open to different cultures across the world.

To probe further into considering national values in shaping teaching practices, and hence students' learning, I review research in the field of comparative education to explore how the perception of learners on the part of instructors could influence their teaching practices from a socio-cultural perspective. Indeed, research literature underscores the fact that the quality of instruction is fundamental to students' learning. Scheerens and Bosker (1997), for example, argue that the characteristics of instruction and the university environment have a major effect on students' achievement. Research, however, agrees that there is no one way of teaching that is the best in all circumstances. "The effectiveness of classroom practice is domain-specific as well as goal-specific; it depends on the cultural context and professional traditions" (OECD, 2009, p. 17).

Although addressing teaching practices at pre-university levels, Hiebert et al. (2003) in their 'comparative education' study conclude that countries with similar cultural backgrounds and pedagogical traditions are likely to have similar profiles in their teaching approaches. They identify three types of classroom teaching practice: structured teaching practice, student-oriented teaching practice and enhanced teaching activities. The study surveyed 23 countries from different regions of the world, (Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Malaysia, Turkey, Poland, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Korea, Slovak Republic, Estonia, Spain, Slovenia, Belgium, Lithuania, Portugal, Italy, Bulgaria, Malta, Hungary and Ireland). They found that structured practice, including the explicit stating of learning goals, presenting summaries of previous lessons, reviewing homework, and checking students' understanding, were common in most of the listed countries, but was most pronounced in Bulgaria and Slovenia. Enhanced activities and student-centred practice were least common in Brazil, Korea, Malta and Mexico and most common in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway. Hiebert and his colleagues conclude

that teaching practice could be a culturally-bounded activity. Although the study by Hiebert and colleagues focused on schools and not universities, I deem the relevance of including such a study stems from the assumption that educational practices in all sectors of education are informed by the cultural values of the country. Additionally, pre-university education is highly related to university education, and learners might carry forward their learning practices when they move from school to university.

In addition to the influence that cultural attributes may have on student learning and instructors' teaching practices at a national level, social values within the nation-state are also important in influencing teaching practices. In this respect, I elaborate on my terminology and refer to these factors as socio-economic as both dimensions, social values and beliefs, as well as economic concerns, influence learning and teaching practices. It is often believed that Saudi Arabia is a wealthy country. This is true, but, the truest fact is that not all of Saudi society is wealthy. There exist social groups who are economically poor, and irrespective of the fact that higher education in Saudi Arabia is free, the students' economic circumstances, as well as that of the instructors, play a significant role in determining their learning and teaching approaches. As I discuss in the next section, this economic aspect could be manifested through a third type of contextual factor that relates learning and teaching practices to real life and the marketplace. For the time being, it is useful to review a published guide regarding providing instructors with practical strategies to contribute to the success of students whose socioeconomic status is different. The guide, developed and published by five influential professionals in the field and sponsored by established universities in Australia, draws from relevant literature and from interviews with 26 academic and professional staff, as well as 89 interviews with students from three Australian universities. Devlin et al. (2012) claim that the guide is based on the views of instructors and students. The guide warns against stereotyping cohorts of students and it develops a conceptual framework that does not adopt a deficit conception of students. They claim that "the notion of sociocultural incongruence is adopted as a way of conceptualising the differences in cultural and social capital between students from low socioeconomic status background and the high socioeconomic institutions in which they study" (p. 1).

Prior to elaborating on the recommended strategies for teaching as drawn from the sociocultural factors, Devlin and his colleagues warn against two oversimplified deficit conceptions, which are that either it is the students who are the problem or it is the institution that is the problem. For the first deficit, the claim is “university success is primarily the responsibility of individual students [who] can presuppose a level playing field in relation to sociocultural and background characteristics” (p. 3). In other words, the deficit would mean that, as long as non-traditional students are clever enough, and if they try hard and believe in their own ability, they should be able to succeed at university. Devlin and his colleagues suggest that these expectations are inherent in university practice and are based on the views of those in higher socioeconomic levels, but are detrimental to students from lower socioeconomic levels. It is rather the unfamiliarity of the latter with the norms and discourses of universities which causes them difficulties. As for the second deficit, where institutions are perceived as the problem, the institutions are seen to be responsible for the success or failure of students of lower socioeconomic background, and institutional culture should be adapted to better fit the needs of those students. Devlin and his colleagues summarise the views of authors who blame the universities for not meeting the needs of the diverse students’ body as follows:

- *There are situational and dispositional barriers created by institutional inflexibility (Billingham, 2009),*
- *The role of the educational institution itself in creating and perpetuating inequalities should be taken into account (Tett, 2004, p. 252),*
- *It is unfair to expect the burden of change to fall solely on the students, and institutions should make changes (Bamber & Tett, 2001), and*
- *Universities should make changes in terms of heralding the expectations they have of students (James, Krause, & Jenkins, 2010).*

Devlin and his colleagues argue that sociocultural mismatch can be addressed through providing an empathetic institutional context that respects students of all backgrounds and focuses on student learning outcomes and success. It should encompass a comprehensive institution-wide approach that is coordinated throughout the curriculum. It should institute learning environments and strategies which are inclusive and, especially, it should empower students by making explicit what was formally implicit. In addition to these suggestions,

drawing on the instructors' and students' interviews, Devlin and his colleagues suggest that empathetic institutional context should employ inclusive teaching characteristics and agencies, enable students' agency, facilitate life and learning support, and take into account students' financial challenges. This has potential relevance in my study, where the socio-economic environment of my university is less privileged than those of the older universities in larger cities.

Contextual learning and teaching is an innovative instructional approach that helps students transfer their learning to the real-life contexts in which it could be used (Berns & Erickson, 2001). Lynch et al. (as cited in Smith, 2010) perceive that "contextual teaching and learning addresses the issue that some students do not see the connection or application of the content of schools to their lives now or into the future. Therefore, they do not see purpose in school" (p. 23). Smith claims that contextual teaching and learning "enable[s] [instructors] to relate subject matter learning to settings where it is used in real world life at home, work, and the community" (p. 23). It also helps students to transfer their knowledge and skills to real-life contexts and thereby prepares them for careers, citizenship and continued learning.

Research identifies several teaching practices as useful to achieve contextual learning and teaching including: "Problem-solving, self-regulated learning, teaching anchored in students' diverse life-contexts, learning from each other and together, authentic assessment, and the use of a variety of contexts such as home, community, and work sites" (Shamsid-Deen & Smith, 2006, p. 15). Shamsid-Deen and Smith argue, however, that other extrinsic and intrinsic factors are also substantially related to the factors mentioned above (emphasis is mine). Among the other extrinsic factors bringing about contextual learning and teaching are the family beliefs, the marketplace itself, and the socioeconomic factors existing in the country as well as other intrinsic factors, mainly, the curriculum as represented by textbooks and teaching materials. For the latter, Redick (as cited in Shamsid-Deen & Smith) argues that teaching practices should draw upon the context of the situation in order to construct new solutions to real-life problems. For example, fieldtrips provide students with the opportunity to gain valuable experiences by interacting with society. Learning by doing and cooperative learning, project-based learning, and real-world applications are all deemed to have a positive influence on engaging students in a contextual

learning environment (Shamsid-Deen & Smith). For example, Griffin and Griffin (as cited in Shamsid-Deen & Smith) compared contextual and traditional instruction and concluded that the students' performance was remarkably improved when they experienced contextual learning practices.

In the US, Smith reports that a five-year funded project at the University of Georgia's College of Education was launched to examine the demands, nature and requirements of contextual learning and teaching. The project resulted in a corpus of models, strategies and practices that promoted effective contextual learning and teaching practice. Among these teaching strategies, Lynch and Harnish (2002) identify the following as reported by Smith: "problem-based learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, work-based learning, service learning, cooperative learning and authentic assessment" (p. 23).

In fact, although contextual learning and teaching appears to require straightforward and technical strategies, it is a rather more challenging educational trend as its success depends on a number of personal, social and institutional factors. For example, the extent to which power relations between instructors and students influence the ability of students to be self-autonomous in their study. This is something I think will have particular significance in my study. Based on the review of literature, Smith identifies several challenges related to teaching practices, such as building skills of critical thinking and problem solving as well as social skills. From a pedagogic perspective, Smith reports that instructors should give less direct instruction because their role is rather to guide, question, listen, discuss and clarify, while still providing students with clear learning objectives. The instructors, in other words, should be facilitators of knowledge rather than dispensers of knowledge where students are actively engaged in their own education. The students' role in contextual learning is of immense priority as they are invited to explore, investigate, validate, and discuss. I would add that, in the current context, although challenging, contextualising the students' learning is not impossible. Although not explicitly articulated, students as well as instructors in my study have provided innovative ideas towards an adoption of contextual teaching and learning. One identified challenge is, however, the place of the students as the less advantaged category (or component) in an educational environment that is largely informed by relations of power. Enabling self-autonomy in students' academic choices that is backed up

with proper orientation and guidance could help the Saudi educational system to make a positive transition to contextual teaching and learning.

3.5 Towards National Teaching Practices

Regardless of agreement or disagreement over the identification of a common language for teaching practice, researchers have kept themselves busy trying to identify national models of teaching approaches and practices that meet the peculiar national and culturally specific goals and aspirations. Notwithstanding the debates about the convenience and expediency of adopting educational standards borrowed or adapted from other countries, the lack of a national competence-based approach regarding teaching practice remains problematic. Broadly defined, the activity of teaching could represent a special kind of social activity aiming to transfer accumulated knowledge, culture and experience from one generation to another and enable personal and professional development and the preparation of individuals (learners) to meet social rules and demands (Slastenin, 2007).

Drawing on this definition of teaching, there are specific national principles that should guide higher education teaching practice. Increasingly, societies have become more aware of how their national identity is expressed and maintained in socio-cultural and political arenas, and education is no exception. Brennan et al. (2004) argue that societies have become aware of distinctive educational visions for instrumental purposes to do with economic development, social cohesion and national identity, rather than because of a belief in the intrinsic value of education. In Saudi Arabia, educational policies and institutional practices, as structured both in society and in the institution, are drawn from the Islamic law (*Sharei'ah*) (The Ministry of Higher Education website). This is, however, more easily claimed than practised since the Islamic law does not offer a clear vision of how instructors and instructors should approach their teaching practices. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, many countries have worked out initiatives that establish criteria and standards for university instructors' teaching practice.

In contemporary times, teaching in higher education is approached as a multi-faceted and multidimensional reality. Instructors are expected to create a dynamic environment to help students explore, create and understand innovative methods of thinking and learning. In the UK for example, in the nineteenth

century, many universities emerged in response to the demands of the rapidly industrialising society, with a broad civic and social role (Watson, 2008). This role has, however, been subject to substantial changes and the relationship between universities and regional and local communities calls them to develop their own academic identities by locating themselves within wider academic and educational networks (Silvers, 2007). Increasingly, universities are called to develop a national corpus of codes aimed at wider national goals and social transformation. In the post-communist Eastern European countries and in post-apartheid South Africa, for example, universities played a considerable role in transforming societies (Brennan et al., 2004).

I understand university instructors' teaching practices as playing a significant role in shaping the philosophy and mission of the university in general. In this sense, teaching practices may provide the opportunity for a more diverse range of students to meet the specific national goals within local contexts (Little & Williams, 2009). The idea that teaching practices reflect national goals is important because it links academic practice to the social and economic challenges of a society. For example, diversifying teaching practices could create further opportunities for those new to higher education. In Saudi universities, the operation of online teaching⁶ has enabled female students to receive learning opportunities equal to their male counterparts. Indeed, in any country, for a university to play a vibrant social role nationally, it has to develop a corpus of educational philosophy, learning outcomes and inclusive organisational models for teaching and learning, where teaching practice is located at the heart of these models.

In the remaining part of this section, I review three attempts aimed to develop a philosophy and practice of higher education that meets the national and social demands in three countries: UK, Australia and USA. As for the UK model, it emerged from a research project that aimed to identify the role of universities in helping to shape the regional economic and social development of the participating counties. It is important to mention that, in addition to identifying the national role of the universities, the overreaching goal of funding these initiatives was to establish a code of practice, or standards for teaching practice, in higher

⁶ Most Saudi universities operate a TV circuit between male instructors and female students where teaching is delivered online. Universities resort to this method to compensate for the shortage of female instructors.

education. It is also important to mention that rather than presenting a model of standard teaching practices in higher education, the UK study broadly examines the relationship between the nature of the mission, philosophy and practices of universities and their local social settings. As I discuss below, the rationale of including this example is to provide a comprehensive vision of the connection between universities and their local and regional settings. In addition to this, the example could provide an overview of policies that inform teaching practices at sub-national or regional level and how these practices respond to the specific nature of the region in which they are located. As such, I perceive this example is relevant to the present research as the key aim of the current research is to examine the particular nature of the research site which is located in a rural nomadic area in the country.

The ESRC funded HEART (Higher Education and Regional Transformation) project aimed to explore the role of universities in shaping and redefining the economic and social experience of the regions where they are located. The project was structured around four case study institutions in England and Scotland. Through interviews with a range of stakeholders and key players, Cochrane and Williams (2010) claim that they were able to identify how the universities' varied missions may affect their regional engagement. The findings reported could be summarised as follows: 1) "it is clear that the nature of the 'region' with which universities engage varies significantly with the activities on which they are focused and the nature of the institution" (p. 23). As can be noted from this statement, the philosophy, mission and practice of universities respond to their local regional environment. Cochrane and Williams claim that this correspondence is manifested in a number of ways such as the university involvement in the formal regional structures (e.g. regional committees etc.), and "the area most directly affected by a wide range of university decisions" (p. 24). Second, another finding attests that engagement with the community "go[es] hand in hand" with widening participation, leading to increased numbers of students. Cochrane and Williams conclude that "institutional missions are themselves the product of what is possible ... [and] universities are embedded in their regions in particular ways, with long histories that underpin the relationships between regional and local stakeholders" (p. 26). The authors however raise the question of how the university's responsibilities should be perceived in the 21st

century. In response, they claim that although teaching and knowledge production remain fundamental tasks for universities, the more interesting and pressing demand is that of how the communities' role and impact are deciphered in the mission of the university.

To probe further, I review another case from Australia as representing a national framework for teaching practices. In her attempt to provide outlines for national teaching practice across Australian Higher Education, Harvey (2013) acknowledges several challenges to providing a unified paradigm for learning and teaching practice based on the quality standards. Among these challenges is the fact that engaging all academics with systematic quality standards is quite difficult since most instructors, according to her, remain at the periphery of decisions regarding learning and teaching. She argues that the endeavour of establishing such unified standards requires revision of policies of the government and public universities. In her reviews of the Teaching Quality Framework, she identifies four levels across four dimensions including "institutional climate and systems; diversity; assessment and engagement; and learning community" (p. 3). These dimensions are categorised in terms of inputs, outputs, processes and outcomes. This framework has been applauded for overtly establishing and highlighting standards of institutional climate or what she refers to as 'institutional culture'. These categories include instructors participating in training programmes, and monitoring staff in programmes under the responsibility of the instructors. Harvey notes that among the challenges of establishing standardised teaching and learning quality are issues related to Commonwealth funding for higher education and world-class teaching and learning that advances the international standing of a sustainable higher education sector. Other challenges include lack of systematic identified standards of performance management of instructors. Higher education in Saudi Arabia has similar challenges; not only does it lack standardised models of practice at a national level, but also the concept of teaching practice is not yet constructed by a national body.

In Saudi Arabia, the absence of national quality standards to engage the academics and instructors with clearly informed aims and standards of practice has created an enduring (but not necessarily good or positive) relationship between instructors and their institutions (see Chapter 5). As a response to this existing gap in research which could contribute to the establishing of national

standards, the present study addresses this issues by investigating the socioeconomic and cultural values as well as addressing the challenges the instructors face to promote broad principles to achieve this overarching aim.

The Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CTC) published a *Continuum of Teaching Practice (CTP)* in 2012 as an attempt to set criteria for 'successful' teaching practice in California, USA. Although the CTC provides a detailed description of teaching practice, it emphasised that the *CTP* is not designed as an instrument for observation and evaluation. The *CTP* commenced its description by establishing what is referred to as California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) and claimed that the purpose is to provide a common language and vision of the scope and complexity of the profession. CSTP is a comprehensive model targeting all instructors by defining a view of teaching practice and professional roles and responsibilities of instructors, from pre-service to experienced practitioner. The standards are not designed to be regulations for controlling the practitioners, but as a guide for developing, refining and extending their practice. The rationale for funding the CSTP is to respond to the Californian teaching and learning context over the past decade and to address the urgent needs of learners. The CSTP emphasises the need to revise language related to teaching and learning, assessment practices, as well as equitable pedagogy that maintains transforming traditional classroom through innovative technologies and globalised connections. Moreover, the *CTP* is designed as a "tool for self-reflection, goal setting, and inquiry practice. It provides common language about teaching and learning and can be used to promote professional growth within an environment of collegial support" (p. 2). The CSTP is also set in alignment with academic content standards and with providing criteria for indicators of teaching practice. It emphasises providing evidence of practice, such as lesson plans, observation data and valid self-assessment. Among the standards of the CSTP are:

- *Engaging and supporting all students in learning,*
- *Creating and maintaining effective environments for students' learning,*
- *Understanding and organising subject matter for students' learning,*
- *Planning instruction and designing learning experience for all students,*
- *Assessing students for learning, and*
- *Developing as professional [instructors] (p. 2).*

The rationale and use of the CSTP was developed to:

- *Delineate the diversity of knowledge and skills needed to meet the varied and evolving needs of students,*
- *Support the reflective practice and ongoing learning of practitioners,*
- *Support the ongoing process of formative assessment of a practitioners' practice based on standards, criteria and evidence,*
- *Set short- or long-term goals for professional development over time,*
- *Describe practitioners' practice and development throughout their career, and*
- *Support a vision of ongoing learning and development (p. 3).*

In the context of the present study, the CSTP is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the *CTP* emphasised the fact that the CSTP is designed to assist practitioners in setting professional goals and launching a cycle of inquiry, rather than a model against which specific practices can be judged or evaluated. I perceive that such an emphasis assists in establishing standardised criteria which avoid the fear and intimidation of evaluation on the part of the instructors. Establishing a context and language of collaboration among practitioners who belong to the same educational environment will promote success. Second, an overview of the criteria tells us that they revolve around one dominant goal, that is, promoting students' learning. As I will review below, for any teaching practice to be effective, it should directly relate to the students' learning and, for promoting a national language for teaching practices, the principal objective should be directed to learners. Acknowledging the students' ever-changing needs while establishing national standards has become a more challenging demand than ever before. In the 21st globalised century, any successful teaching practice has to prioritise those needs through the use of technologies and the internet, and the CSTP has emphasised the changing aspects of learners in current times. Third, and most important, for promoting national or, to certain extent, universal standards of teaching practice, criteria should be expressed in broad terms and in a common language, and should leave specific practices for individual cases to meet the requirements of local and context-specific needs. Fourth, it can be noted, the CSTP emphasises the practitioners' need for critical self-reflection to reconsider their practices toward continual professional development.

The present study addresses issues surrounding establishing national standards within what I refer to as “the dynamics of context” (see Chapter 6). With the assumption that in our contemporary world the students’ needs are constantly changing and the social and economic demands are fluid, attempts to promote national standards should adopt new understandings through which old narratives could be reconfigured. In other words, the claims that perceived national standards as static should be challenged in our current era where societies are fragmented and values are ever emerging. In the current study, rather than adopting a perception of these standards as static and fixed, I embrace the conceptualisation of them as dynamic, in constant change and in flux.

In Saudi Arabia, initiatives for establishing national standards of teaching practices in higher education have not yet been taken. As I described in Chapter Two, the Ministry of Higher Education has published general rules and regulations as a reference book for university instructors. Although these regulations are published in 340 pages, they lack a unified vision for instructors to establish standards or criteria for their teaching practices. As one expected outcome of this study, it could be possible to put forward calls for the need for such standards, which could be context-specific and culturally bounded alongside the international ones already established.

3.6 Instructors’ Perceptions of Teaching Practices

While it is imperative to develop a corpus of teaching practices that respond to the national and regional demands of the community, the individual’s perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and, epistemological stances remain the concern of research and the focus of studies across the globe. In this section, I review studies and views regarding the nature of instructors’ conceptions and how these conceptions are reflected in their teaching practice, and how teaching practice could be defined by the instructors’ perceptions and beliefs.

Conceptions of teaching practice could be defined as “beliefs [instructors] have about teaching and which underlie the purpose and the strategies in teaching” (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008, p.110). Pratt (as cited in Devlin, 2006, p.112) defines ‘conceptions’ as:

“Conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world, and in so doing, use those abstract representations to delimit something from, and relate it to other aspects of our world. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world” (p. 204).

Drawing on the above definition, Devlin (2006) defines perceptions as “specific meanings attached to university teaching and learning phenomena, which are claimed to then mediate [an instructor’s] view of, and responses to, their teaching context” (p. 112).

Apart from providing a cautiously articulated definition of the meaning of the term ‘conception’ or instructors’ conceptions of their teaching practice, it seems that research cannot yet decide upon a forthright relationship between instructors’ conceptions and their teaching practice in higher education, and the debate is going on. Reporting the key findings of relevant research, Marouchou (2011) concludes that “university teaching and classroom behaviour activities are determined by a set of theoretical frameworks that are belief driven” (p.123). She points out that research over the past decades has provided substantiated arguments and evidence that uncover beliefs (or epistemological beliefs), and how instructors’ beliefs offer insights about their ideas of what teaching is in various educational settings. Quoting Pajares (1992), Marouchou reports that beliefs are influential in forming instructors’ judgments about what knowledge is relevant to a particular teaching setting. Drawing on a copious body of literature (e.g. Brown & Rose, 1995; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kagan, 1992; Marland, 1995, 1998; Marouchou, 2007; Nespor, 1987; Howard et al., 2000; Shommer, 1994;), Marouchou argues that it could be safely claimed that there is a close relationship between instructors’ beliefs and teaching practices, or, in her words, “[instructors’] theoretical frameworks are, indeed, belief-driven” (p. 124). Nevertheless, the views that support Marouchou’s conclusion, views about how conceptions of teaching may improve university teaching, and their significance in doing so, cannot, according to Devlin (2006), be perceived as drawing a linear relationship. According to Devlin, this lack of agreement is partly a consequence of the inconsistencies of definitions of teaching conceptions. In addition to the lack of clear definition that captures the notion of conception, terms also vary; “conceptions’, ‘approaches’, ‘beliefs’, ‘intentions’ and ‘orientations’, are all used

as equivalent. This view of Devlin is supported by a review by Postaref and Lindblom-Ylance (2008) which results in identifying a wide variation in university instructors' conceptions and how these conceptions are related to their practice. Among the reviewed studies are those of Samuelowicz and Bain (1992), Trigwell and Taylor (1994), and Kember and Kwan (2000).

Since it is beyond the scope of this study to probe into details of the ongoing debate regarding the nature of the role of instructors' conceptions, I draw on research papers that have identified similar findings regarding the issue. Schommer (as cited in Marouchou) argues that some personal epistemological beliefs are quite simple while others are more sophisticated. An "[instructor] who holds naïve [sic] epistemologies generally believes that knowledge is simple, clear and specific, whilst the learning ability is innate and fixed and can be transmitted directly to students". As for an "[instructor] who holds sophisticated beliefs will assume knowledge as complex, uncertain and tentative, and can only be gradually constructed by the learners" (p. 124). On a similar ground, Hasweh (1996) argues that instructors who hold a constructivist view of multifaceted beliefs are likely to encourage students' conceptual change. Specifically, Ho et al. (2001) claim that:

"[An instructor] who conceives of teaching as the transmission of information is likely to employ teacher-centred strategies in order to operationalize that conception. She is likely to believe that she, as the [instructor], holds all the knowledge and information and that it will need to be conveyed from them, as experts, to her students. On the other hand, [an instructor] who conceives of teaching as helping students to develop their own understanding of material is likely to employ student-centred strategies so that she can assist her students to come to this understanding" (p. 161).

Drawing on the findings of their study and well as on previous research, Postaref and Lindblom-Ylance (2008) identify two broad categories that describe university instructors' practice as based on their conceptions: the student-centred approach and the teacher-centred approach. The student-centred approach, emerging from the instructors' conception of teaching as a sophisticated activity, is described as a way of teaching that perceives teaching practice as facilitating the students' learning process. On the other hand, a teacher-centred approach - based on the belief that knowledge is clear and simple - sees students as passive recipients of information which is transmitted from instructors to students. In addition to reporting similar descriptions (teacher-centred/content-oriented and

student-centred/learning-oriented, to use his words), Devlin elaborates in identifying sub-categories. As for the first category, it is divided into a) imparting information and b) transmitting structured knowledge. For the second category, it can be categorised as a) facilitating understanding and b) conceptual change/intellectual development. In addition to these four sub-categories, Devlin adds a fifth category/conception that links or bridges the two major orientations, and could be called a student-teacher interaction.

In the course of his argument and elaboration of these categories, Devlin points out that a “teacher/content-centred conception of teaching is one where the [instructor’s] job is conceived of as knowing her subject and then accurately and clearly imparting that knowledge to her students” (p.113). From this conception, it is perceived that it is the students’ responsibility if the learning outcomes are unsatisfactory and they are to blame for their lack of motivation. On the other hand, a student/learning centred approach, Devlin goes on to argue, achieves high quality of learning because it results from the active construction of meaning and might involve conceptual change on the students’ part. As such, this conceptual orientation identifies the role of the instructor as one who facilitates and encourages such construction and development. Gow and Kember (as cited in Devlin) go further by claiming that, based on empirical evidence, adopting a predominantly transmission conception on the part of instructors affects students learning by discouraging them to adopt deep approaches to learning, where a ‘deep approach’ means the students’ attempts to make sense of content.

The rationale of understanding the links between instructors’ conceptions of their teaching and their actual practices is to search for possible instructors’ development programmes to create a positive change in their conceptual teaching frameworks. As reported by Ho et al. (2001), there were significant improvements in the teaching practices of three instructors out of six who participated in an orientation programme and, on the basis of this result, Ho et al. concluded that their study “provides evidence that a development in teaching conceptions can lead to improvements in teaching practices and in students’ learning” (p. 165). They further claim that there has been a “recognition that a genuine improvement in [instructors] has to begin with a change in their thinking about teaching and learning” (p. 145). Although these findings appear seducing to the ear of those who are after an ideal and a comprehensive change of

teaching practices as resulting from change in instructors' conceptions, I contend that these are sweeping claims are not substantiated by empirical evidence.

In addition to the methodological limitations, I understand conceptions as relevant to individuals' epistemological stance which is, to a great extent, not professionally or even academically constructed. In a context such as the current one, academics are part of a society that holds traditions, beliefs and practices that could not be easily changed. The concept of teaching practices cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation from their socio-cultural contexts.

In addition to my critical review of Ho et al.'s study, Devlin challenges several similar studies as having a narrow scope and far-reaching claims. He draws attention to the role of adopted teaching theories and the validity of the empirical research from which this causal relationship is confirmed. Devlin argues that proponents of this causal relationship "assumed teaching practice from *espoused theories of action*, that is, from [instructors'] responses to questions about their behaviour in a teaching situation" (p. 114). He argues that an analysis of instructors' professed views should be supplemented by "an examination of their actual teaching or *theories in use*, and of the relationship between what [instructors] say they do and what they actually do in a teaching setting" (p. 114). As Devlin argues, this is necessary to test the veracity of instructors' descriptions of their teaching practice, of the assumed connection between their conceptions and practice, and of the assumed link between their teaching practices and their students' approaches to learning. On the other hand, the validity of the empirical research is put into question too by Devlin; the methodology and categorisation of conceptions as adopted by some researchers is inadequately described, and researchers often confuse terms such as 'intentions', 'approaches' and 'beliefs'.

Drawing on the above arguments and critiques, in the present study, I use an exploratory case study through which the instructors' and the students' perceptions are set against each other in a comparative mode to verify the narratives of what the instructors claim they actually do (see Chapter 4). Although this approach entails some shortcomings regarding the potential privileging of one perspective over another, it provides me with deep insights into the teaching practices the instructors adopt in their classrooms. These comparisons were also

informative when compared to several other key findings in the literature related to understanding the instructors' teaching practices in the current context.

The second assumption regarding the instructors' beliefs is that to improve teaching it is necessary to have a student-centred conception of teaching. Despite doubts about validating claims regarding the link between the instructors' conceptions of their teaching practices and their actual teaching, some authors go on to claim that a particular conception of teaching leads to teaching improvements and therefore to raising the quality of student learning (Gow & Kember, as cited in Devlin, 2012). This assumption leads to the call that "university [instructors'] thinking must move from a teacher/content-centred conception ... towards a student/learning-centred conception in order that they would be able to improve their teaching practices and students' learning outcomes" (p. 114). For a positive change and development of teaching practices to occur, according to the proponents of this assumption, "some form of change in teaching beliefs, attitudes and/or perceptions must first be initiated" (p. 114). In terms of assessing instructors to enhance their teaching, according to Gibbs and Coffey (2004), teaching development activities and teaching approaches should be directed to encouraging instructors to improve their teaching practice conceptions. In other words, the focus of training programmes should be on shifting towards a student-centred conception of teaching. In short, the assumption holds the idea that "it is necessary for [an instructor] to hold a student/learning centred conception of teaching in order to be an excellent [instructor]" (Myer, as cited in Devlin, p. 115).

I deem these arguments relevant to the present study as they direct attention to the role of beliefs and attitudes in the shaping of practice. One of the aims of the study is to explore the role of the instructors' professional development (or training programmes). An examination of the possibility of changing (or improving beliefs) is therefore necessary, especially when exploring the several social, personal and professional factors influencing the interpersonal relationships between the instructors and their students. In fact, such a review informs the current study in several directions including its attempt to investigate the construction of the instructors' "realities" and how they perceive themselves and their students in the current context. They also invite an investigation into the

construction of the instructors' epistemologies of their surroundings (environment) including their social values, students and institutional behaviours.

The third assumption underpinning teaching conceptions in a teaching development framework is the perception that teaching skills have a limited potential for improving teaching and learning. Strong proponents of this assumption are Ho and his colleagues who insist that "providing tertiary [instructors] with prescribed skills and teaching practices will not change their teaching practices and thus improve their students' learning outcomes" (p. 144). They argue that, because of the lack of unquestioning acceptance of new skills, teaching development programmes should go beyond skills and directly address the conceptions of teaching practices. This, according to them, will lead to fundamental changes towards teaching excellence in university instructors. However, this assumption could be contested on the grounds of whether conceptions of teaching or teaching practices themselves should come first. I draw on Devlin's argument to critically reflect on this assumption. Devlin argues that the relationship between teaching conceptions and teaching practice is very similar to the relationship between practice and behaviour. It is widely assumed, Devlin argues, that attitudes drive behaviour, for example, companies advertising for a product focus their commercial messages to a change of the customers' attitude with a belief that this change will lead to their consumption behaviour. This is, however, a complex area: "the enormous and growing body of psychological research indicates that human behaviour is not that simple and that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is a complex one" (p. 115). Psychological research, according to Devlin, suggests that if either behaviour or attitudes change, this will lead to change in the other. It is therefore quite possible that if teaching behaviours (practices) become increasingly student and learning oriented, then teaching attitudes (conceptions) may follow. Therefore, rather than evoking instructors' conceptions of teaching practices, instructors' thinking is likely to be more contextually localised and to adopt models of what they think students are likely to do.

For a rather better means to deal with issues surrounding the relationship between instructors' conceptions of their teaching practices and their actual practices, Devlin (2002) argues that, from a perspective of teaching development programmes, instructors should be encouraged to discover principles for

themselves by implementing teaching practices that are relevant to their context. In other words, “the development of teaching practices and reflecting on thinking about those practices should occur together rather than in strict sequence with either wholly preceding the other” (Devlin, 2006, p. 116).

In fact, Devlin’s argument (regarding instructors’ conceptions of teaching practices and how they are reflected in their actual teaching setting) is informative for this research. From a constructivist perspective, beliefs and conceptions cannot be promoted without some means of operationalising them into real teaching practice. According to Devlin, constructivism underscores the interaction between knowledge and beliefs. In my study, I further examine this assumption to stretch the boundaries of Devlin’s assumptions. I examine the relationship between beliefs and actual practices as *context-driven* where training development programmes can be designed to respond to context bounded issues. That is, in addition to the above views, several contextual matters should be taken into consideration, including: the specific socio-cultural attributes of the educational setting represented by the nature of the interpersonal relations within and beyond the educational setting; the institutional ‘culture’ (i.e. how the relationship between all stakeholders is perceived and practised); the desired learning outcomes; and the students’ conceptions of their instructors’ teaching practices. In my study, I explore all of these perspectives.

3.7 ‘Good’ or ‘Effective’ Teaching Practices

As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, the terms ‘good’ or ‘effective’ (‘good/effective teaching practice’, henceforth) teaching practice could be ambiguous. In addition to my previous argument regarding the language and semantic ambiguity of these terms, the reviewed literature confirms a fact about ‘good/effective teaching practice’; that there is disagreement on what counts as best practice. Indeed, challenging issues often plague research into how to measure ‘good/effective teaching practice’ and authors warn about the absence of consensus about its boundaries and definition because of its multidimensional nature (e.g. Hativa et al., 2001; Young & Shaw, 1997). I, however, find it important to review studies bearing the title of ‘good/effective teaching practice’. This is because, regardless of the language that is used to describe teaching practice in higher education, a good portion of these studies connect ‘good/effective teaching practice’ with other important variables, which is useful to shed more

light on the nature of teaching practices and how they are approached and could be developed in different contexts and from various theoretical frameworks. In addition to this, the theme of 'good/effective teaching practice' is addressed implicitly and explicitly by the participants of the present research.

In this respect, I adopt the tradition of reviewing individual studies using different perspectives (theoretical and methodological) and from diverse contextual backgrounds to augment later discussions about what might be considered as 'good/effective teaching practice', accepted, or context-fitting teaching practice. My rationale for adopting this approach is that the relevant guides and studies present 'good/effective teaching practice' in an accumulative manner, and the act of repeating here therefore could be pointless. Rather than this, I critically engage with selected studies to better reflect and understand the nature of the reported teaching practices in the present study. I seek to understand the claimed 'good/effective teaching practices' in their research context (i.e. in the context of the studies from which they emerge) rather than obtaining them as points clustered in published or unpublished 'guides' labelled as 'best teaching practice'. As I mentioned earlier, it is important to examine *what*, *where* and *how* specific teaching practices are taken up as relevant or effective, rather than providing extended lists of an amalgam of *prescribed* teaching practices labelled as 'good' or 'effective'.

Among the huge body of reported studies addressing the topic of teaching practice, I include three studies in this review. The reasons for the selection of these particular studies are as follows. a) The selected studies are conducted in three diverse contexts, which could inform the present study of the influence of different contexts on the manner the topic is studied and the findings reported. b) I examine and evaluate the relevance of the adopted methodological approaches and whether they provide adequate data to address the stated problem. For the present study, the adoption of the specific methodology is important as it is the first of its kind in the country. c) In addition to their copious citations, the selected studies are up-to-date. d) Following the tradition of the literature review, especially in lengthy texts such as PhD theses, it is quite possible to review whole studies to examine the line of these studies including their aims, perspectives, methodologies, findings and claims for knowledge. e) Finally, I perceive the critical approach adopted to review these studies as being informative to my

present study and to highlight the existing gaps in the selected ones. This being said, I probe into further studies that address the notion of 'good/effective' teaching practices but narrow the scope of my reviews to address their aims and their reported findings and conclusions.

To start my reviews, Yoo et al. (2013), using a similar methodology to the present study, explored the views of 500 students through open-ended questionnaires and one-to-one interviews with 15 instructors regarding their perceptions of post-secondary 'teaching effectiveness'. Using a grounded theory approach, they reported that "effective teaching involves good communication aimed at helping students understand course concepts, strategies that engage students in learning, and close monitoring of students' understanding" (p. 107). As for the first key finding, teaching as effective communication, this result is confirmed by both the instructors and the students. Reporting examples from the students' responses, Yoo and his colleagues underscored the views of students on how instructors lecture effectively:

"I would think [effective teaching] meant that the [instructor] has good communication skills and can teach the material to where the students understand all concepts, including the hard ones.

I would think that maybe the class was rigorous, but ... the [instructor] is able to communicate the information very well, clear and precise".
(Students' interviews as cited in Yoo et al., p. 116)

Drawing on these responses, Yoo et al. report that "students and instructors saw effective communication skills as being crucial to effective teaching" (p. 116). They claim that one basic effective role of effective communication is that it promotes instructors' ability to 'make difficult concepts easy to understand'. Yoo et al., however, do not discuss or probe into answering the question of *how* 'effective communication' is promoted in the classroom setting, and *how* it enables instructors make it easy for students to understand concepts. Placing heavy emphasis on notions that are 'normalised' in education practice does not necessarily mean actualising them in real practice. In other words, the study of Yoo and his colleagues could be criticised on the grounds that it does not provide workable answers to questions such as: what counts for communication skills? How do these skills emerge and develop or change across time and place? And, how do they influence learning or teaching practices? For decades, instructors

have kept themselves busy by rehearsing similar slogans such as ‘promoting communication skills’ without providing necessary techniques to translate these maxims into real practice. It is therefore the responsibility of research to critically address such concepts, rather than merely rehearsing them.

The second theme of Yoo and his colleagues study is that teaching engenders understanding labelled as ‘metacognitive teaching’. Such a conclusion is reached through interpreting the participating students’ responses regarding the role of their instructors in ‘actively’ monitoring “how students learn and change their teaching accordingly” (p. 118). This conclusion is based on one reported view of a student who says “an effective [instructor] knows how to communicate with students and knows what to change if there is something that’s not being communicated very well” (A participant student’s comment as cited in Yoo et al., p. 118). A further conclusion states that the “effectiveness of communication results from an instructor’s reflection on whether students are grasping the material or not” (p. 118). In fact, many other studies report similar conclusions. For the sake of brevity, I will address these ones mentioned in my review in the course of critical response to such sweeping conclusions. Methodologically speaking, this later conclusion could be criticised on the basis that authors have drawn this conclusion from participants’ narratives rather than from actual classroom observation. Even a single classroom observation would not be sufficient to explore the change in an instructor’s teaching behaviour; a longitudinal method is required. In addition to this, as I argued in the previous section (conceptions of teaching practices), the act of a promoted and immediate change in teaching practice as responding to students’ learning is not quite possible to do and here I am referring to the above statement “an effective [instructor] knows how to communicate with students and knows what to change if there is something that’s not being communicated very well”. As the relevant educational literature tells us, learning is a complex process that requires substantial methods and considerable time to assess and quick answers often fail to respond to this complexity. Although, I do not claim, based on the findings of the present research, that there are other ways of promoting communication skills that lead to ‘metacognitive teaching’, which is beyond the scope of the study, a critical engagement with literature is required to avoid adopting teaching practices as ‘*effective*’ based on sweeping generalisations.

The third theme of Yoo and his colleagues study is that effective teaching is labelled as *engaging learners* which is achieved through “maintaining students’ attention and getting learners engaged in the process of learning” (p. 119). Again, empirical data to support this claim is questionable and here I am quoting the authors’ comment: “Interestingly, although this category emerged as a frequent code in the data from both students and instructors, students’ comments remained at a more general level, whereas instructors included what they purposefully did to engage students in the learning process” (p. 118). While the authors provide two examples from the instructors’ responses, it seems that they ignore those of the students. Notwithstanding this methodological inadequacy, I draw my response on the instructors’ included responses. Yoo et al. report:

“An effective [instructor] would be [an instructor] that engages students actively and makes the class interesting as well as informative.

[Effective instructors] are able to engage their students and make them interested in the material”. (Instructors’ comments as cited in Yoo et al., p. 119)

A rereading (or reinterpretation) of the above views does not tell us that the interviewed instructors are talking about what they actually do or what they wish they could do. The argument is that *telling* cannot qualify *doing*, and the comments above could be interpreted as the instructors’ general views of ‘effective’ teaching rather than an actual practice that they perform in their classrooms. The question that remains unanswered is what about the students’ views, do they experience such a practice on the part of their instructors? The existing research trend in a reasonable number of studies is to merely depend on research participants’ narratives in order to draw conclusions about their actual practice. I deem my position as being cautious towards such claims. In response, I initially proposed to take on the role of a participant investigator in my study where I report the instructors’ teaching practices via a class observation method. Unfortunately, I was unable to carry this through, as *none* of the instructors allowed me to observe their classes.

Exploring the dimensions of ‘good’ university teaching in Pakistan, Bhatti (2012) reported a more compelling and inclusive study, yet, not immune from liability regarding its conclusions. Bhatti introduces his study with a critical reflection on the inadequacies and weaknesses surrounding studies exploring ‘good’ teaching practice (I am using Bhatti’s term) at the university level. These inadequacies,

according to Bhatti, are partly due to the fact that ‘good’ teaching practices are often related to “presage factors such as personal skills and subject matter knowledge of [instructors] rather than to activities and processes related to students’ learning” (p. 43). Bhatti also points out that the fact that ‘good’ teaching practices are studied only from the instructors’ and students’ perspective not from academic leaders or from the outcomes of students’ learning – making it inadequate to capture a holistic understanding of what might constitute ‘good’ teaching practices. Within a qualitative research methodology, Bhatti obtained data from 42 instructors and nine department chairs in six Pakistani universities via interviews. The key argument of Bhatti is that “supportive academic leadership [represented by department chairs] can foster good teaching, which in turn is a condition for student learning” (p. 43). In addition to this, Bhatti contends that the term ‘good teaching’ has qualitative connotations as representing the instructor’s intentions, efforts and interaction with students, which facilitate learning and bring about changes in students’ thinking. He also shares Devlin and Samarawickrema’s (2010) argument that ‘good’ teaching is complex and contextual because it must take into account the particular features of the teaching and learning environment. Reviewing a huge body of relevant literature, Bhatti confirms the line of thought I introduced in this review, which states that research on ‘good/effective’ teaching practice represents a fusion of various lines of investigation. Bhatti, however, attempts to capture these numerous perspectives in three generalisations:

“Notwithstanding the shortcomings, we can still formulate the generalization from the empirical literature that good teaching has been characterized in three ways. The first is defining good teaching as being student-centred and involving innovative pedagogical approaches. The second is defining it in terms of possessing a set of prerequisite skills. The third is defining it as having extended awareness about students’ needs and expectations” (p. 45).

Based on his own study, however, Bhatti identifies five dimensions of ‘good’ teaching practice at the university level. The first of these dimensions (conclusions) state that instructors participants viewed ‘good’ teaching practice to be “context dependent, where context included the nature of the course, the level of the students, class size, and whether or not students were majoring in the discipline” (p. 47). As an elaboration of this conclusion, Bhatti reports that instructors responses clustered around the following sub-themes: “transmitting information, supporting students, developing skills, motivating learners, and

personalising the learning experience” (p. 47). Since the announced aim of the present study was to explore and identify the nature of teaching practices or ‘good/effective teaching practice’ as drawn from research literature in the Saudi context, I will elaborate on Bhatti’s study as it deals with a more or less similar research context. I also aim to tackle these findings though contrasting them with my own findings in Chapter Six.

The first sub-dimension (conclusion, henceforth), as reported by Bhatti, is that ‘good’ teaching is transmitting information. ‘Good’ teaching as transmitting information epitomises practices that ‘effectively’ communicate subject matter content to students. Bhatti reports that “ ... [instructors] who subscribe to this view essentially believe that there is a syllabus that students need to master and good teaching is making sure that students have properly understood the materials corresponding to the specific course” (p. 47). In a similar manner to the Yoo et al. study, Bhatti provides samples of respondent comments: “good teaching is one that is able to transmit knowledge”, “good teaching is the ability to convey knowledge ...” (instructors’ interviews as cited in Bhatti, p. 47-8). Indeed, this conclusion is interesting as it provokes discussion regarding how it conflicts with other studies. In the previous section regarding the instructors’ conceptions of teaching practice, the established argument was that the practice of ‘transmitting information’ is classified as representing naïve conceptions and beliefs (see the above section) as it represents a teacher-centred approach. In Bhatti’s study, the same practice is classified as ‘good/effective teaching practice’. This may reflect international differences given that Bhatti’s study was conducted in Pakistan.

The second conclusion states that ‘good/effective teaching practice’ includes a practice that ‘supports students’, which means that the major efforts should be placed on the students’ roles and the instructors’ role is perceived as ‘supporting’ these efforts. Bhatti elaborates that instructors expressed their inclination to “provide feedback frequently and consult and encourage their students” (p. 48). Although encouraging students and providing them with feedback is a positive inclination of the instructors, I understand this conclusion as placing the major responsibility on the students on the ground that the term ‘effort’ stands for learning practices.

The third conclusion is that ‘good/effective teaching practice’ works towards ‘developing skills’: “providing students with necessary tools for use in daily life or in learning that happens in other courses and circumstances” (p. 48). I perceive this as a convincing conclusion, yet, I object to the label ‘developing skills’; Bhatti uses as a general term and does not capture the intended theme of ‘skills that transfer and apply gained knowledge in practical situations’.

The fourth conclusion emphasises the fact that ‘good/effective teaching practice’ should ‘motivate students’. Bhatti interprets this label as “making students appreciate the importance of their learning and the relevance of the topic they are exploring” (p. 48). Indeed, educational literature abounds with discussions of the issues (Adey & William, 2003; Lindblom-Ylance et al.; 2006; Stes et al., 2010). Bhatti, however, like much of the literature, does not probe into tactics or practices that could promote students’ learning motivation. Bhatti reports instructors’ comments that just mention this term without being able to provide more details about their adopted practices that translate this aim into practice. In addition to its broad and all-compassing nature, the term ‘motivation’, it could be argued, refers to the category of learning goals or ends rather than signifying a specific practice.

The fifth conclusion asserts that ‘personalising the learning experience’ is perceived as ‘good/effective teaching practice’. Bhatti reports that “this dimension deals with making the learning experience relevant to students and understanding their motivation, background, and abilities in the course” (p. 49). In addition to this, the provided discussion and the quotes that this maxim captures are not clear and to some extent confusing. Bhatti reports:

“... providing something for the really sharp students that challenges them without losing the students that ... have less background or are less advanced; ... to be able to make them feel like there’s something they can get out of the class”. (instructors’ interviews as cited in Bhatti) (deletions “...” are original)

In addition to reporting these five conclusions as drawn from the instructors responses, Bhatti reports the department chairs’ views of ‘learners’ individual differences’ which are captured in two themes: concerns for students and motivating learners. As for the first theme, Bhatti concludes that, according to the department chairs, good teaching expresses concern or demonstrates care for students. Bhatti elaborates that this theme may take other forms such as

“addressing students’ needs at a personal level, treating them fairly and equally, being willing to listen to their complaints, giving them enough time, respecting them and avoiding actions that could result in their dissatisfaction” (p. 50). The second theme is *‘motivating students’*. For this *repeated* theme Bhatti does not offer any discussion, but rather includes three short comments from the interviewed department chairs. These comments are: “inspiring [students] to work hard in their subject”; “[being] very energetic [and] inspiring; having infectious personality; and influencing the [students]”; “good [instructor] will stimulate, encourage, and involve [students] in the learning process” (Department chairs’ interviews as cited in Bhatti). In general, the two concluded themes could be read or grouped into one theme; students’ learning needs (or ‘good/effective teaching practice’ that promote students’ learning needs, to use a more relevant and critical language). These two conclusions are convincing as they address directly the students’ learning needs and take the students as a priority in the *administrative* practice of the department chairs or from the perspective of instructors teaching practice. Nonetheless, I challenge these two conclusions on epistemological and methodological grounds.

On the one hand, it seems that the department chairs are speaking from the perspective of teaching practice rather than from an *administrative point of view*, if I could rightly use the expression. This, in fact, raises a global criticism of the overall rationale of the study by including the department chairs. Chairs of university departments were originally instructors, and most of them practise teaching alongside their administrative tasks. This argument can be evidenced by examining the above quoted comments and language of the department chairs. Examining their comments (and I purposefully included all department chairs’ comments), they all speak from an instructor point of view rather than from a viewpoint that represents an administrative authority as claimed by the author. In other words, assigning an administration or “leadership” position does not necessarily cause the instructors to abandon their original role as instructors since all department chairs take a teaching load while being in such positions.

In addition to this, an exploration of ‘good/effective teaching practice’ (and this call could be directed to most empirical research) should probe into more convincing empirical data presented by other methodologies such as classroom observation, participants observation and reflection, longitudinal studies, etc.

Such studies could provide rigorous and ‘thick’ data to substantiate such claims. In fact, these methodological trends are informative to research addressing the instructors’ actual classroom teaching practices. Although it was not possible to adopt these approaches in the present study, reviewing them remains useful in several ways. On the one hand, they inform the scope of knowledge claims as based on the methodologies used in this research, rather than providing claims which are not substantiated by proper empirical evidence. That is, such arguments were useful for this study as they help to draw boundaries around the scope of the present research in terms of its claim for knowledge in accordance with the data obtained. On the other hand, such reviews are useful for future research aiming to investigate specific issues surrounding the actual classroom teaching practices such as classroom interaction, lecturing, question-answer techniques, etc.

The third and last study I include in this review is that of Samples and Copeland (2013) entitled “*The University of Good Teaching: A Study of Descriptors across Disciplines*”. Although including the word ‘good’ teaching practice, I perceive this study as a critical review or response to what counts as a ‘good’ teaching. In their investigation of the ‘characteristics of excellence in teaching’, Samples and Copeland adopt a comprehensive exploratory methodology through building a multi-phase research design. They commenced the study by discussing teaching with engineering instructors at a series of workshops. This initial study, according to Samples and Copeland, was very revealing as it identified many descriptions by the participating group. Later conference session discussions with more select groups from various academic subject areas who were interested in the topic were also more ‘revealing’ as these discussions more raised questions than answers to the topic. These provoking and stimulating questions encouraged the authors to explore teaching excellence by “augmenting available workshop data with data taken from the [instructors] at the authors’ universities” (p. 178). Using the available data, the researchers prepared interview questions to obtain data from non-engineering instructors but from the same university. The questions raised at the beginning of each workshop, as the researchers report, were: What is good teaching? How is it accomplished? Is good teaching necessary to have a successful course? How is it evaluated? What are the results of good teaching? (p. 179). In parallel to asking participants in the workshops to respond to these

questions, the same questions were presented as a survey instrument and were administered to other instructors coming from various disciplines where 66 surveys were returned. I will summarise and review these key findings as follows:

What is a good teaching? In response, Samples and Copeland report that “many of the responses focus on the ‘duties’ of the instructors, some are responsibilities of the students, and others represent classroom tactics that apply to both the ... [instructor] and the students” (p. 179). Further analysis, as reported by the authors, indicates that instructors must understand the students’ learning styles, applying practices that promote students’ expectations and motivation. As for those practices, they must be flexible in adopting various teaching styles reflecting the course flexibility; present the materials in an organised manner; make the course learning outcome relevant; and use methods that stimulate students to learn on their own, in the course and through lifelong learning. I wish to present one among the many interesting reported answers of the participant faculties:

“Good teaching is a creative interactional process between the ... [instructor], the students, and the students themselves. During this dialogue process, the students grasp new concepts, their relationships to one another and gain new insights to the reality of the subject under study”. (Instructors’ interviews as cited in Samples and Copeland, p. 179)

In fact, Samples and Copeland provide several other interesting answers as reflecting a multitude of teaching practices that can be considered excellent and relevant to students’ learning. Reflecting on the included quote, however, this singular comment of an instructor can capture most of the recent philosophical trends in education including but not exclusive to: the shared and interactive creativity of both the instructors and the students, which emphasises the principle of democratic education where the students are perceived as active participants in producing knowledge. The second major principle which I emphasise here is dialogic teaching; an emergent and growing trend in learning and teaching (see Wegerif, 2007, 2008, and 2010). A third key principle of this quote is the search for ‘new insights to the reality of the subject matter’. I understand this concept as having immense importance and coming from a thoughtful scholar and educator. Nowadays, academic identity (or specialisation) is put to question as interdisciplinarity (or hybridity) of disciplines replace the claimed authenticity of specialisations. For me, good teaching is therefore a well-crafted action that

responds to the evolutionary nature of subject matter as well as pedagogical practices.

How is it accomplished? The answer, as reported by Samples and Copeland, is through the two key practices of intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport: “expert knowledge of the [instructor], confidence in the dialogue process and exchange of ideas, thoughts, energy among the student and [instructor]” (Instructors’ interviews as cited in Samples and Copeland, p. 180). In addition to this comment and others like it, teaching practices that could foster intellectual excitement include: “preparation, planning, technology, motivation, active, organisation, enthusiasm and experience” (p. 180). As for the interpersonal interactional rapport, the authors report several factors that can influence practice including “students’ involvement, teamwork, interaction, enthusiasm, communication, motivation, trust, connectivity, and students’ responsibilities” (p. 180). In response to these conclusions, several research papers claiming to explore teaching practices or ‘good/effective teaching practices’ merely provide general and broad ideas without probing into the specific required practices. They fail to describe the manner through which they are attempted and how they could promote students’ intellectual involvement.

Is good teaching necessary to have a successful course? The answer, according to Samples and Copeland, is ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. Behind this variation, however, according to the authors, there were thoughtful discussions which depended on the ability of the students and the meaning of the term ‘successful’. “Some argued that their students would learn successfully in the absence of good teaching. Others maintained that less qualified students need good teaching to add value to their education” (p. 181). As for discussions of what ‘successful’ means, instructors’ responses varied from students having a basic understanding of the material to good student evaluations. Samples and Copeland argue that the reason for raising this question was to bring out this kind of discussion since success in the classroom could be measured by various means. Among the reported instructors’ responses is the following outlook: “I believe good teaching is necessary to have a successful course. If you understand your content area but can’t communicate that knowledge to your students they more than likely won’t be inspired to learn” (Instructors responses as cited in Samples and Copeland, p. 180). I support this view since thoughtful and considerate teaching

requires more than knowledge of the subject matter on the part of the instructors, but also knowledge and practice of the necessary means to effectively communicate this knowledge to students. 'Good' practice is necessary to all students' levels as it helps improve student performance at any level.

What is the result of good teaching? Answering this question, Samples and Copeland report instructors comments which talk about *rewarding* results of 'good' teaching practices including "good student evaluation, respect from students and colleagues, and recognition by the university" (p. 181). The majority of the responses contend that "the winner is the student" (p. 181). Students become enthused with their learning of the materials introduced to them and perform better in the class and throughout life. Other reported responses talk about students being happier, more appreciative of their fields, more involved and more confident, thinking more independently, as well as being able to perform better in standardised exams.

In sum, as I have mentioned in the introduction of this section, a huge body of research has addressed the theme of 'good/effective teaching practice', and resulting literature has provided an enormous volume of such teaching practices. A quick look at the surveying tools and questionnaires in the appendices of these empirical studies may give us an idea of the accumulated teaching practices considered to be 'good', 'excellent' or 'effective'. As I mentioned above, my purpose in this research and in this section in particular was to explore teaching practices in their context as well as critically reflecting on how some of these studied reached these conclusions. In fact, such a survey of these studies was useful to the present study in several ways: first, I avoided using a similar research trend (i.e. listing teaching practices perceived as 'good' or 'effective' in a questionnaire survey and asking the research participants (the instructors) to score them). Rather than this, I developed the aim(s) of the study to explore *what is there?* Or what teaching practices are relevant to the context in hand? In other words, my critique of these studies enabled me to narrow down the scope of the present research to explore the nature of the instructors' teaching practices as context-specific including the challenges and factors involved; the instructors' and the students' perceptions of effective teaching practices; and the interpersonal, socioeconomic and cultural values involved in determining what is more effective or better in the studied context. Second, such reviews are useful to determine the

relevant methodology, especially the use of the qualitative exploratory case study methodology through which I approached the topic in hand. I used this to explore *existing* teaching practices including a plethora of related issues. This approach enabled the data to emerge from the research participants rather than establishing a corpus of teaching practices perceived as 'good' or 'effective' and then checking their 'world-views' of them.

3.8 Students' Perceptions of Teaching Practices

In most universities, the practice of students' evaluation of teaching in higher education is implemented. In the present research, I investigated the students' perceptions of their instructors' practices in parallel to exploring those of the instructors. As I indicated earlier, the aim of including students' evaluation is to juxtapose their responses with those of their instructors to deepen our understanding of the nature of teaching practices in the current context. The rationale of obtaining students' evaluation of teaching practices as reported by research is broadly to gain an all-round understanding of teaching practices. Denson et al. (2010), for example, identify several reasons that underlie students' evaluation of teaching practices. Firstly, it is believed that students' evaluation of instructors' teaching practices could enhance the quality of teaching practices with the assumption that instructors respond to their students' evaluation to make appropriate changes to their teaching methods. Secondly, students' evaluations are important for personnel decisions such as promotion and tenure. In turn, these evaluations are supposed to provide an inducement to instructors to improve their teaching or else lose their job. Thirdly, the increasing trend of universities for international recognition and accreditation requires universities to demonstrate to the outside world their seriousness about sustaining teaching practice. One of the methods towards this recognition is to include students in the evaluation traditions adopted in these universities. Fourthly, students' evaluations provide source data for research on teaching, which is directed to enhance instructors' teaching practices. As for the latter rationale, a fairly good body of research has investigated 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices from the perspective of the students (e.g. Alauddin & Kifle, 2014; Delaney et al., 2010; Hussin et al, 2009; Suarman et al., 2013). The conclusions of these studies, and other similar ones, have provided a resourceful body of teaching practices perceived as effective, from the students' perspectives.

Other studies have reported that there is no clear evidence that instructors would make significant changes to improve their teaching practices based on the students' evaluations. Nasser and Fresko (2002) reported that only up to 10% of instructors made significant changes in their teaching practices based on the students' evaluation. Similar results were reported by Alauddin and Tisdell (2010). Notwithstanding these results, I report two studies that explore teaching practices from the students' perspectives. Following the same criteria mentioned above regarding the selection of studies to review in a detailed manner, I selected these studies as they are up-to-date, address the topic in a specific context and relate to some aspects of the present study.

Hussin and her colleagues (2009) explored the perceptions of undergraduate students in three public Malaysian universities about their instructors and teaching practices that stand for teaching quality determinants. They used a field survey conducted through a questionnaire among students from different fields of studies generally categorised as Social Sciences and Pure Sciences. The reported findings include seventeen dimensions as representing 'effective' teaching practices, including "clarity, practicality, exercises, attention, enthusiasm, creativity, feedback, syllabus, motivation, extra reading, availability, technology, punctuality, current issue, approachability, language use, and communication, discriminate between students in terms of [instructors'] teaching performance and students' perception of teaching quality" (p. 113). In discussing these dimensions, Hussin and her colleagues expand in explaining each of these dimensions as representing teaching practices and instructors' attributes. For example, they elaborate on the creativity dimension as follows:

"[Instructors] need to be more creative in presenting their materials by using different approaches to adjust their teaching, to meet the needs and backgrounds that the students bring with them to class. An expert educator will employ cognitive strategies and approaches quite differently from the novice. These approaches involve a combination of acquisition of knowledge in the classrooms, experiential cases, case study, presentations, problem solving approach, problem identification skills approach etc. The [instructor's] role is also to realize that individual students may approach a topic in quite a unique way, to learn how individual students understand the topic, and work with the student in adding to or reconstructing the students' understandings". (p. 115)

Most of the other dimensions are discussed and expanded in a similar manner using a discourse and a language tone that suggests providing advice to instructors towards 'good' teaching practice. Notwithstanding the fact that such studies are mostly sponsored by universities and therefore perceive their task as providing a corpus of 'good' teaching practice, the method used renders such conclusions and recommendations problematic. The study under review, for example, uses a purely quantitative method that is based on a positivistic research paradigm. Such a research tradition, I argue, presents a limited uncritical view of teaching practice.

In response to these methodological and empirical limitations and deficiencies, and based on my engagement with the current research as well as drawing on compelling studies, I perceive a qualitative case study research methodology as a superior approach. Moreover, in the current postmodernist times with its globalised educational trends, digital educational cultures and learners' ever-changing learning behaviours, a shift from positivist to a critical research paradigm is required (Usher et al., 1997; Usher & Edwards, 2003).

Unlike Hussin and her colleagues' study (2009), Delaney et al. (2010) explored students' perceptions of 'effective' teaching practice using a more complex qualitative methodology through utilising a grounded theory approach. They developed a text-based response tool that was developed by asking questions originally drawn from the students' evaluation instruments used by several Canadian universities. The rationale underlining this phase in developing the research data collection instrument was that text-based responses rather than multiple choice could provide a multitude of significant data. Carefully studying the students' returned texts (responses), they developed another questionnaire that categorised effective teaching practices into nine dimensions identifying instructors' effective teaching practices: "instructors who are effective ... [will be] ... respectful of students, knowledgeable, approachable, engaging, communicative, organised, responsive, professionals, and humorous" (p. 26). It is important to indicate that 17,000 students accessed and responded to the online questionnaire in its final version over a period of four months. It is also important to note that the questionnaire included 341 items categorised along the nine key dimensions.

Delaney and her colleagues reported two kinds of findings, quantitative and qualitative, represented by numerical and statistical descriptions and samples of the test-based responses. While they surveyed the former by classifying and rating them, they offer a compelling discussion of the latter. Since the published report of the study exceeds 100 pages, mostly discussing these findings, it was challenging to summarise these findings adequately, but they were mostly original, compelling, convincing as well as providing practitioners with good insights into their teaching practices. It is useful for the sake of the present study to report some significant ideas as drawn from their conclusions.

Delaney and her colleagues underscored the fact that their research was drawn from rich data. They claim: “the rich data provided by the participants in this research leads to a number of compelling conclusions” (p. 87). They also contend that “the approach to data gathering provided students with a clear voice on their perceptions of effective teaching in higher education” (p. 87). The stories students’ shared, according to Delaney and her colleagues, show that their opinions on this topic paralleled the characteristics identified in the literature and was also related to ethical principles. They underscore the fact that effective teaching as drawn from students’ narratives transcends the mode of delivery; it places emphasis on respectful behaviour on the part of university instructors and the immense importance of interpersonal relationships. This emotional perspective, as Delaney and her colleagues argue, holds with the learning and teaching as “students place a premium on instructors who are cognizant and respectful of them as people and, therefore, are better able to learn” (p. 90). In their concluding remark, the authors emphasise the fact that students “have a great deal to share about their experience in university. The rich data they provided can play an active role in improving the quality of university teaching and their own learning” (p. 91).

To conclude this section, and drawing on research exploring teaching practice, although much has been written in recent years about the connection between learning and teaching, it could be noted that research pays more attention to instructors’ perspectives than to those of the students. In addition, research that does focus on student perspectives tends to use quantitative surveys. Although the methodological approach I adopt in this study is not far from those I criticise, as the scope of this study places methodological limitations, the notion of

exploring students' perceptions and worldviews remains convincing and requires careful investigation through using innovative ways of obtaining rich data.

3.9 Conclusion

Research literature into teaching practices in higher education is copious and multidimensional; it covers an amalgam of issues and aspects of teaching practices and from diverse perspectives. It has, however, informed the present study in several ways. In this concluding section, I summarise the line of argument I have attempted and developed in this chapter through reviewing literature related to the aims and the scope of the present study.

The topic of teaching practices in higher education is massive in terms of the many issues addressed under the scope of teaching practices, ranging from instructors' beliefs and perceptions, the strategies and methods they employ while teaching, the relationship between teaching practices and students' learning, and challenges involved in promoting effective teaching practices. The concept, however, lacks concise theoretical underpinnings, and the research traditions followed prioritise the practical level by means of focusing on identifying extended lists of good teaching practices. Drawing on this argument, I perceive my task in the present research (represented by identifying a knowledge gap) as not to rehearse these lists or add to them, but rather to develop a study that deeply explores the topic by focusing on the under-researched areas, including an attempt to contribute to theorisation of the concept. Specifically, through my critical engagement with studies addressing the instructors' perceptions of their teaching practices, I developed a critical position that is cautious about the linear and causal relationship between perceptions and actual practices. I also perceived the task of understanding the instructors' perceptions as a challenging one; the concept needs to be complicated rather than simplified. It requires probing into the epistemological construction of instructors' realities and to explore how such a construction is developed and located in their specific educational contexts.

In my attempt to explore the nature of teaching practices in the current research context, I did extensive research of studies and literature that address the relationship between the two concepts of 'context' and 'teaching practices'. I read thoroughly in these studies and attempted to develop an argument of how

teaching practices are entirely context-specific. I identified three different approaches to the notion of context in its relation to teaching practices including: context-specific teaching practices as relevant to the academic discipline; as related to the demands of the real life and workplace, and as related to sociocultural values. In my reviews of studies addressing these three aspects of context bounded teaching practices, I perceived that such a line of thought is very useful to address the topic with special consideration of the specific contextual factors that determine and influence the instructors' teaching practice in my research context. I have attempted to loosen the strict lines between the three types (or approaches) to addressing the notion of teaching practices and its relation to context. Through my engagements and comparisons between these approaches and in my attempt to identify a gap in the arguments provided by the reviewed studies, I proposed a further understanding of the notion of contextually bounded teaching practices. Rather than adding a fourth or a fifth type (or approach), I argued that three existing ones are inextricably related, and therefore, put my proposition to be tested in the present study.

Likewise, I have developed an argument regarding the proposed initiatives of frameworks of national or regional teaching practice standards. Adopting a similar argument, I understand the attempts at establishing national standards of teaching practice as entailing dilemmas emerging from the need to preserve national or cultural 'identity' of teaching practice and to meet the demands of international trends and standardisation. I proposed that, for a further approach to 'national' standards, a redefinition or reconfiguration of our old understanding of both concepts is required. Drawing on my previous arguments regarding stretching out boundaries of understanding teaching practices, including their relation to their context, as well as developing a perception of social and cultural values as fragmented and dynamic, I raised the question of how such 'contextual dynamism' can inform frameworks of teaching practices at a national or regional level to be addressed in the present study.

Finally, with the belief that students play an influential role in determining their instructors' teaching practices, I reviewed several studies that investigate the students' evaluation of their instructors' teaching practices and their perceptions of good or effective teaching practices. As pointed out above, it seems that researchers are still in disagreement regarding the argument that students'

evaluation of their instructors' teaching practices would enhance these practices. Drawing on my reviews of the selected studies, I have developed an argument stating that for any investigation into this aspect, researchers need to be cautious in selecting suitable research methods to ground and substantiate evidence of their claims. In the present study, I reflect on this position and develop three methods of obtaining the students' worldviews of the several issues related to their instructors' teaching practice. In addition to close-ended questionnaires, I provide a section (or space) for the students to articulate their opinions without specifying any directive questions to them. I also developed semi-structured interviews where they were probed and elaborated on their narratives without interrupting them.

In short, through my engagement with the included literature and beyond, I have built a good knowledge base to address the key issues and research questions through exploring the notion of university teaching practice, its debates, language, concepts, research methodology, etc. I focused on literature which critically engages with these dimensions rather than enlisting a massive body of reported teaching practices. I investigated the place of theory in the field, and identified the existing and ongoing tension between theory and practice. I also adopted the arguments which represent dissatisfaction in the amalgamation of issues addressed under the topic as well as the inconsistency of the used language and discourse. I have argued that, for an understanding of the dynamic and vibrant nature of the topic and concepts involved, it requires a critical investigation that extends beyond the classroom to include all contextually bounded institutional, personal, socioeconomic and cultural factors and values.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH PLAN

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, I describe the research design and methodology used in this research. Within the tradition of academic work, I deem research design an important phase in research since it clearly defines its aims, maintains coherence between several phases in research, and confirms its rigour and trustworthiness (Lewis, 2003). The research design described in this chapter addresses the four components. First, I introduce the research paradigm and philosophy that underpins the claim of knowledge through describing my ontological and epistemological considerations. Second, I describe and justify the adopted research methodology, an exploratory case study methodology including relevant data collection and analysis methods, selection of the research site and participants. Third, I position myself in the research through adopting a self-reflective position. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a consideration of ethical issues and how I treated them in the study.

4.2 Research Paradigm

The aim of the study is to explore the nature of university instructors' teaching practice in an emergent university in Saudi Arabia. The study therefore locates itself in the domain of social research through the examination of educational practice which is relevant to the social world. Based on this identification of the research genre, it is imperative to describe the philosophical underpinnings that justify assumptions, knowledge claims, arguments and realities in this research. Through examination of the ontological and epistemological assumptions, it becomes possible to draw boundaries around the research, which ultimately contributes to the trustworthiness and rigour of the research. I perceive the philosophical stance adopted in this research as providing a view of the nature of knowledge, and the many decisions involved as to how to approach this knowledge. To me, such decisions represent the epistemological position that influences the direction of the research including its aims, strategies and methods. I perceive the selected research paradigm to be an umbrella that operates at an abstract level, but informs the other concrete processes, which ultimately maintains consistency between research phases. Therefore,

describing the adopted research paradigm ensures the quality of the research and the trustworthiness of its claims.

4.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Our perception of the world, including its concepts, notions and arguments, is an inclusive aspect of any research as it addresses our beliefs of the social world. In the present research, I addressed many aspects of this social world represented through my investigation of the worldviews of research participants regarding their perceptions and practices. It locates reality as constructed between the worldviews of several research participants and my own interpretations of these views. Nonetheless, with the belief that there is no external reality that exists outside the human mind and that it can only be known through our engagement with this reality, I accept the argument that reality in the social world is co-constructed between individuals and their interaction with phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this research, I refuse to espouse meanings and reality as stable, fixed, idealistic or as showing up the inner characteristics of people and phenomena (Merriam, 2001), but rather advocate them as historically and socially constructed (Haraway, 1988). I deem such adoption relevant to this research because it offers an attitude of perceiving knowledge as empirically constructed in a particular context and at a specific time. That is, rather than claiming knowledge as universal, ideal and fixed, I estimate my arguments and assumptions provided in this research as bounded to certain geographic and historical contexts. The realities of the instructors' teaching practices, their perceptions of these practices and the students' worldviews of their instructors' teaching practices are thus context-specific and acquire their sense and meaning through a vigilant consideration of the social, economic and cultural context. In short, since the concept of ontology is concerned with identifying the kinds of things that exist around us, including ourselves, the nature of the universe including people, their beliefs, practices, and collective or individual identities are all inherent questions to ontology (Stephan, 2003). Specifically, knowledge and meanings, whether of the instructors' teaching practices or any issues surrounding them, are socially constructed, dynamic and subject to change in different contexts.

The concept related to ontology is epistemology or how we know what we know. Broadly speaking, the two concepts are interconnected as they signify our philosophical assumptions of knowing (Laurence, 2002). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge production and perception and relates to providing answers to questions such as: how do we go about knowing things? How do we separate true ideas from false ones? How can we be confident when we have located truth? What are the systematic ways we can determine when something is good or bad? Epistemology however undergoes several contesting theorisations as reflecting schools of thought such as Rationalism, Idealism, Constructivism and Empiricism (Richards, 1999). In this research, I avoid engaging in the myriad debates around the concept and, after Lahter (1992), I adopt the notion of 'post-positivism' as a comprehensive epistemology that delineates a proliferation of epistemologies and methodologies widely used in these postmodern times. To me, a post-positivist epistemology informs the way I approach knowledge regarding teaching practices for several reasons. First, since pluralism and mobility have become prominent features of individuals and societies, a post-positivist approach to knowledge and meaning-making allows a better understanding of issues surrounding the topic of the instructors' teaching practices. In my context, the Saudi instructors and students are subject to the influence of the post-modern conditions where cultural and individual identities are emergent, societies are fragmented through cyber cultures, the internet and media. In fact, it is not possible to perceive social and educational components as isolated from the wider international context or as localised in a static form, but rather evolving in response to the demands of the contemporary globalised era. Drawing on this, I adopt a constructivist epistemological stance to guide my claim and production of knowledge. Constructivism, as Crotty (2003) defines it, is the view that knowledge and all meaningful reality "is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p.42).

The key argument of constructivist epistemology, according to Gergen (1999), is that there is no meaning in the world unless we construct it, and that reality is socially constructed by and between the individuals who experience it. Reality is subjective, but also independent from individuals who live in it; hence, it differs

from one person to another following their personal, academic and social ways of living (ibid). Knowledge and meaning-making are therefore contingent on our practices and unique understanding of the social world. It is therefore constructed as a result of interaction between individuals (Crotty, 2002). Constructivists insist that meanings are not independent from ourselves, or simply reside in the objects or phenomena we study, but rather is a result of our interaction and interpretation of those objects or phenomena. We give meanings to objects by our unique perceptions, discourse or through our view of reality, including our background knowledge, social values, assumptions and perspectives. In social research, the responsibility of a constructivist researcher is to find their ways into how meanings are constructed among individuals and how they interpret these meanings. In social research, the fundamental role of the researcher is to discover and construct meaning out of interactions and personal reflections of the topic under investigation.

Furthermore, social constructivism, according to Burr (1995), holds the belief that our perceptions and understandings of the world are historically and culturally specific, where knowledge is constructed through our interaction with our environment and the people around us. Social interaction is therefore a major component of how we perceive reality (including ourselves). In my study, I emphasise a vision of reality that probes into the inner and outer components of the topic including the instructors' epistemological stances, the construction of their realities, their beliefs and attitudes and the interpersonal relations with their peers and their students. I adopt a vision of reality that views their realities as constructed as a result of myriad interconnected personal, professional, academic and social factors, and examine how the interaction between all these components shaped their worldviews, perceptions and narratives. Similarly, I operate a social gaze to understand the other mutually related components, including the students and their locations in this educational context. In other words, as this research aims to capture holistic and socially constructed knowledge, I have broadened my outlook to include all possible variables and social, institutional and environmental factors that could contribute to a rounded understanding of the instructors' teaching practices.

In so doing, drawing on social constructivism, I want to embrace a critical gaze towards the taken-for-granted knowledge and the essentialist ways to reach this knowledge (Burr, 1995). In my observation and reading of the worldviews of the research participants, as well as my own role in shaping the resulting knowledge, I operate a critical stance and challenge the idea that knowledge is objective, static, neutral and unproblematic. Since it is not possible to free our research from our intervention as researchers, my own personal and professional knowledge of the context is acknowledged rather than hidden. I utilise my knowledge of the context, language and personal, social and cultural values to provide informed knowledge. I deem myself as a researcher from *within*, but I do not allow my knowledge of the context to serve as a fabrication of realities. Ropers-Huilman (1999) advocates that it is crucial that researchers consciously direct their gaze onto their embodiment of their knowledge of the topic and context as all inquiries and interpretations are meaningful and valid only within particular discursive contexts, within particular regimes of truth. She claims: “[w]e [researchers] are fabricating worlds, not because we are falsifying data or lying about what we have learned, but because we are constructing truth within a shifting, but always limited discourse” (p. 24). In short, the post-positivist and constructivist approach to knowledge I adopt for this research as a conceptual framework not only challenges reductionist tendencies and barren methodological orthodoxy (Lahter, 1992), but also ventures towards a dynamic approach that probes into the ‘gaps’ and ‘discontinuities’ that are often involved in social inquiry (ibid). The manner I approach the topic under investigation is largely informed by an amalgam of principles: the guidance of the reviewed research literature; an understanding of the position of the research participants (the instructors and the students), including their language and discourse and construction of realities, and my previous and present location and knowledge of the research context. All of these tenets were directed to one key aim, to understand and offer trustworthy knowledge in this research.

4.3 An Exploratory Case Study Methodology

The methodological approach I adopt for this study is broadly qualitative although partial inclusion of a quantitative research method (close-ended questionnaire) is included where appropriate. Drawing on the philosophical assumptions of post-positivism and constructivist research paradigms, I perceive a qualitative

research methodology to be useful in responding to my research aims. As Yin (2003) puts it, the selection of appropriate methodology depends on “the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 5). Since I approached the nature of the instructors’ teaching practices with no clear and straightforward assumptions, I found the exploratory approach most useful. I started with a tentative research question broadly addressing the status of teaching practices in my research context. I focused on the ‘*what*’ and ‘*how*’ questions to identify the aspects, boundaries and related issues around the instructors’ teaching practices. Yin argues that “‘*how*’ questions are explanatory and are likely to lead to the use of case studies, [and] a ‘*what*’ question is a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study” (p. 6). Yin also argues that the degree of ‘control’ the investigator has over the events also informs the selection of the research methodology. In the present study, I perceived my control on events as very minor, and according to Yin, the case study is the most useful since the study does not aim to manipulate behavioural events. Furthermore, the selection of research methodology depends on whether the focus is on contemporary as opposed to historical events. Yin points out that, for an investigation that studies a current phenomenon, a case study methodology is the most appropriate. In this study, I aim to explore the current instructors’ teaching practices and how they are influenced by contemporary factors.

In the present research, I use a qualitative approach represented by open interviews (or discussions) with a small sample of participants in one Saudi university to understand the problem from the participants’ perspectives and to postulate and identify key issues surrounding the nature of the instructors’ teaching practices in the given context (Raymond, 2008). Data obtained from these interviews also informed the development of a quantitative survey in a later phase of the research which I will discuss later. The use of a qualitative approach was particularly useful for this study as the topic of university teaching practices has not been studied before in Saudi Arabia. It is therefore imperative to approach the topic with a sense of exploration and tentativeness. In fact, at the initial stages of the research, I perceived the topic to be very daunting, considering the amalgam of issues addressed under the heading of teaching practices. The challenging task was whether to survey all the universities in the country by

means of developing a wide-scale and national survey, or to select one university as a case to intensely study the issues surrounding teaching practices. Another decision that needed to be made, in relation to the challenge resulting from the width of the areas being studied under the umbrella of teaching practices, was whether to address a specific area (e.g. teaching materials, assessment, or lecturing) or to commence in the research as a way of discovering '*what is there to know*'. The decision was in favour of the second option for several reasons, but mainly because the topic was not previously addressed in my country, and guiding studies were absent. For these reasons, I found a qualitative exploratory case study methodology the most useful for this research. As Conrad (1982) points out, "[i]n the field of higher education, qualitative approaches can be a rich source of data both for generating and testing theory" (p. 248).

As it appears, '*qualitative exploratory case study methodology*' is constructed by three key concepts: qualitative, exploratory and case study. In addition to its usefulness in capturing the nature of the investigation I attempted in this research, my use of the collective term results from the harmonious relationship and the theoretical consistency between its constituents. I however wish to address each of these components separately by justifying the convenience of each in this research.

First, I used qualitative methodology to explore the topic in a specific research context represented by an emergent Saudi university. Qualitative research, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue, is conditional and situational focusing on understanding a specific context and specific circumstances. To me, a qualitative method was useful as it aided in establishing my theoretical foundations and generating focusing principles and ideas to assist in maintaining rigour and depth of research. Through identification of relevant ideas, the corpus of concepts and practices, the factors that influence teaching practices, which all emerge from my interpretative reading of the participants' narratives, I managed to combine a conceptual framework towards the direction of these ideas as contextually and socially constructed ones. Unlike the underpinnings of grounded theory, the qualitative exploratory methodology allows for the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (Bryman, 2004). Additionally, qualitative research is informed by a constructivist position that is the philosophical foundation I affiliated with in this research, and through which it was made possible to construct topics for

discussion from unexpected and unanticipated ideas and narratives. In short, my adoption of a qualitative research approach emerged from the belief that this study is situated in the social research tradition which focuses on the interpretation of social meanings and “attempts to provide a holistic understanding of the research participants’ views and actions” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 7).

In this study, I also used a quantitative method represented by the instructors’ and the students’ close-ended questionnaire for the purpose of obtaining more structured numerical data which could be analysed through statistical techniques. I, however, place more focus on the qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questionnaire questions and the semi-structured interviews. I will describe and elaborate in these two methods below.

Second, I used exploratory case study methodology with the belief that a case study allows deep understanding of people and phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Merriam, 1998, 2001). Merriam (1998) argues that the selection of case study methodology is suitable to reveal a lot about a phenomenon which would be inaccessible using other methodologies. Through the use of case study methodology, I aimed to gain an exhaustive understanding of the nature of the Saudi university instructors’ teaching practices in a specific research site. In the exploratory case study, I aimed to gain an all-round perspective of two directions of the current study: a) the instructors’ perceptions of their teaching practices as well as several other related issues and components (e.g. their students, their institutional policies and practices, the teaching practices they employ, etc.), and b) the students’ perceptions of their instructors’ practices, and how both perspectives are related to each other. With the interpretive intent that is made possible through the use of case study methodology, it was possible to make comparisons of the two perspectives to generate and discuss further ideas and themes. These comparisons also made it possible to test the instructors’ perceptions of their teaching practices and how they actualise them in real classroom practice. Specifically, my exploration of the instructors’ teaching practices ranges between notions and beliefs on one hand, and implementation and practice on the other. Therefore, as Merriam (1998) argues, case study methodology allows for a holistic approach to perceptions, sentiments, beliefs and practice.

Furthermore, the thick descriptions and comparisons offered by case study methodology focus on the 'process' through which ideas are developed and generated (Faltis, 1997; Yin, 2003;), and it was the participants' (both the instructors' and the students') meaning-making process that I was interested in, including their construction of their own realities, beliefs and attitudes. Yin (2003) points out that case studies provide an inclusive understanding of a specific problem, and it is preferred when 'how' and 'why' questions are involved and when the research focuses on a contemporary problem with a real life context. Additionally, case study is found very useful when the study takes place in a closed system or a specific context (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), such as in closed educational and social systems like the one being studied, where institutional regulations are centralised and the geographic and regional location of the university (research site) is specific. Case study is also relevant to this study since the topic of teaching practices entails diverse subtopics which too complex for survey research (Stake, 1995). Lastly, case study is useful for studying phenomena in their natural setting where the boundaries of the topic under exploration are not clearly defined during the initial stages of the research (Benbasat et al., 1987).

Case study research is, however, subject to criticism and charged as having insufficient precision when considering objectivity and rigour (Yin, 2003) and runs the risk of only being relevant to specific phenomena (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Like Creswell (2007), I recognise the insights gained through the case study employed in this research as specific to the particular times and places of the current research. Within this understanding, I do not seek to generalise my findings beyond the research context. Rather, I construe the understandings I have gained in this research as tentative hypotheses that can contribute to a knowledge base for future research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Stake, 1998).

Thirdly, I deem an exploratory approach a workable concept that describes what I have done in this research. As mentioned earlier, I have approached the topic without clear assumptions and agendas, but rather as tentatively and with gradually constructed ideas and hunches in mind. The fact that this study is situated within an exploratory approach has guided my investigation during all phases of the research. Within the notions of 'define' and 'design', I treated my first engagement with research represented through piloting interviews to define

the boundaries of the topic, which might be considered as a small scale case study. I utilised the data obtained through these interviews to hypothesise and articulate the problem of the study and the research questions. Yet, through embracing the notion of constant exploration, the problem and the research questions evolved many times until they make an informative version. Drawing on the work of Creswell and Plano (2011) regarding the exploratory sequential research design, the current study has undergone several steps including:

Step 1: Designing and implementing the qualitative strand:

- Developing the qualitative approach and generally stating questions
- Identifying the research site, participants and obtaining permissions
- Obtaining open-ended data via the qualitative approach (e.g. interviewing)
- Carrying out initial analysis of the qualitative data
- Developing themes and identifying relevant topics for the second step

Step 2: Building and designing both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Stating quantitative and qualitative research questions
- Deciding on the instruments of the second phase of data collection
- Revising the relevance of the research site and participants
- Piloting data collection instruments

Step 3: Designing and implementing the quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Revising and refining research questions
- Obtaining permissions
- Collecting the quantitative and the qualitative data

Step 4: Analysing, Interpreting, and discussing the results:

- Analysing the quantitative and the qualitative data to answer related questions
- Summarising and interpreting results
- Generating and indexing themes
- Discussing results

Following the strategy of exploratory studies, I explored the topic in hand by collecting qualitative data by means of a small scale sample in the same university where I planned to conduct the later phases of the research. This initial step was exceptionally important as I managed to define the boundaries of the research problem, questions and direction of research. In Step 2, representing “the point of interface in mixing methods” (Creswell & Plano, 2011, p. 87), I used the data obtained in the qualitative step to identify the salient subtopics, develop the close-ended items of the questionnaire for quantitative data and the open-ended questionnaire items for qualitative data, as well as the questions for semi-structured interviews. It is worthy to mention that during this stage, as well as for the later ones, all of these steps were duplicated in two versions for both the instructors and the students. It is also important to point out that, in the first step, I included female instructors and students, but dropped this in the second step (I will state the reasons for this procedure in the research participants section). In Step 3, I devised and developed two questionnaires, one for instructors and the other for students. These questionnaires were administered to include all the instructors in the targeted university as well as to a large number of the students. The data collected through these questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistical tests. In the third step, I also held semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected sample of instructors and students. In the final step of my exploration of the topic, I analysed the quantitative and qualitative data with special focus on the latter. I discussed the findings of the study in the course of my readings and interpretation of the whole set of data. Through the multi-stage exploratory case study approach, it was possible to define the boundaries of the research, develop an informed argument based on the contextually constructed knowledge drawn from the research site, and provide what I perceive as a grounding study for a strikingly under-researched area in Saudi Arabia.

The use of a small-scale exploratory case study was extremely significant for the present study as it has enabled an investigation of the plethora of factors, challenges and agents (whether internal or external) affecting the nature of the current instructors’ teaching practices. By virtue of offering an in-depth exploration of phenomena in a closed system (Yin, 2003) such as the context under investigation, my utilisation of exploratory case study methodology has enabled a deep study of all these factors as well as the interconnectedness

between them. More importantly, exploratory case study methodology was very useful for studying and exploring both the visible and, to a great extent, the invisible factors impacting and shaping the instructors' teaching practices. Ultimately, in the present study, this adopted approach enabled an understanding of the interactions in a dynamic relationship, which was developed through a model of 'Environment and Dynamics of Instructors' Teaching Practices (EDITP) (see Chapter 6). The EDITP model enabled me to study the socio-cultural contextual factors of a closed educational environment, which represents a variety of 'small culture' previously discussed in Chapter Three. The significance of devising and proposing the EDITP model is that it is expected to assist in understanding the paradoxical nature of a distinctive educational environment, an emergent university in my case. While this environment is deemed as rural, nomadic and traditional, it is also an emergent and potentially modern Saudi Higher Education teaching environment. This paradox involves massive challenges arising from a combination of difficult climatic conditions and dysfunctional resourcing systems. In other words, EDITP represents an emergent case of a contextually and situationally specific educational environment. In Chapter Six, I elaborate on discussing and examining the multitude of contextually related dynamics that explain the nature of the teaching practices in the current context.

Through the application of a qualitative exploratory case study methodology, the study addressed all the surrounding factors within the social, cultural, personal, environmental and institutional context. The rigour and richness of data obtained is relevant in considering the interrelationship between all these factors in the way they shape and determine the instructors' teaching practices. Therefore, the claim for contribution to knowledge lies not only in addressing an under-researched context, but also through researching it differently. While most previous research has adopted a quantitative approach by means of questionnaire surveys, the present study utilises case study methodology that is backed up with critical orientation discourse to deeply examine the phenomenon in hand. I therefore, contend that the study outlines an original 'case' that emerges from several techniques: a) adopting critical analyses of the problematic dysfunctions in a Saudi emergent university; b) utilising personal experience and knowledge of the context (both the institutional and socio-cultural); c) understanding the value

of the dramatic transformational aspect of exploratory research by adopting a flexible and responsive attitude to what emerges; d) and engaging with previous research in similar contexts in a critical manner, which allows an original connection to the existing body of knowledge within higher education teaching and learning research.

Drawing on this, I deem the relevance of utilising exploratory case study methodology is in its ability to combine all factors (macro or micro, intrinsic or extrinsic, and visible or invisible) as well as the interplay between these factors, which, when operating in a multi-directional way, produces a particular sort of teaching practice. In brief, it could be concluded that the importance of case study methodology remains in its potential to provide a rounded and rigorous explanation of the dynamics influencing a distinctively particular phenomenon. The strength of case study also appears when researchers are able to devise models explaining their cases. In my case the proposed EDITP model is deemed as the acme of this study since it consummates an understanding of teaching practices where paradoxes, challenges and contestations are involved. I will elaborate in discussing the proposed EDITP model in Chapter Six.

4.4 Research Site

As explained in the description of the context of this study, in this section I wish to focus on the research site from the perspective of research methodology. Universities in Saudi Arabia are of two types: old established ones and new emergent ones. In addition to being my own university where I work as an instructor, the special nature of this university, as well as similar emergent ones, is quite interesting as an emergent educational phenomenon in the country. Most of these emergent universities are still in the process of formation and are located in the rural and nomad areas of the country far away from the metropolis; a fact that makes a case study investigation reasonably informative to understand the problem in other similar universities. Additionally, the fact that these universities are located in small communities makes the human, interpersonal relations and social values quite influential in shaping and determining the distinctiveness of these universities. Additionally, by virtue of their 'remoteness' from the centralised decision makers, an investigation of institutional practice in these universities has provided rich data into the nature of the instructors' teaching practices in these contexts. In short, the selection of the research site was a significant part of the

research design since, in addition to the immense corpus of data regarding specific teaching practices, which could also be obtained in studying other established universities (located in the main cities of the country), the current research site, representing specific regional values, has revealed an important aspect of the instructors' teaching practices. In fact, this aspect, represented by socioeconomic, personal and cultural values, has directed the focus of the research from exploring the micro level of the problem into the macro level.

4.5 Research Participants

There are two categories of research participants in the study: the instructors and the students in the same university, the site of the research. Choosing the instructors and the students from the same university was quite useful as it allowed for comparisons between their two worldviews. Drawing on the theoretical tenets of purposeful sampling it is deemed that theoretical selection of the sample of the study is the most convenient for case studies (Barbour, 2001; Maxwell, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Pallant, 2007). Since the study addresses the topic under investigation in one university, I carefully studied the population of this study by defining the characteristics of the selected sample that is expected to provide sufficient data. Specifically, I applied the principles of purposeful sampling strategies including: early-stage decision of sample selection; its relevance to the research aims; its diversity and representativeness; its conformity to existing theories about the field; and its convenience of access (Ritchie et al., 2003). Based on these principles, I explicitly identified the larger context of the sample (population) represented by the instructors and the students in the whole university. In fact, I deem purposeful selection of research participants a crucial stage in the research design since this strategy allows a necessary degree of freedom in selection to achieve a rational representation of the context of the study. As Barbour (2001) points out, a "purposeful' or 'theoretical' sample is common in qualitative research since it offers the researcher a degree of freedom and control rather than being at [the] mercy of any selection bias in the pre-existing groups" (p. 115). Additionally, for both categories, I focused on the depth of data collection more than breadth of coverage of the participants since in qualitative research in-depth coverage is usually better than breadth in terms of sample size, "even if this means focusing

the study on certain parts of the population rather than achieving a more broadly defined sample” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 53).

Since two instruments of data collection were used (the questionnaire and the interviews), the number of research participants differed between these two methods. The following table (4.1) illustrates the number and distribution of the research participants:

Table (4.1) Number and Distribution of Research Participants

Total no. of instructors	No. of instructors participating in the interview piloting study	No. of instructors participating in the questionnaire piloting study	No. of instructors participating in the interview main study	No. of instructors participating in the questionnaire main study
48	3	0	7	Distributed 48
				Returned 43
Total no. of students	No. of students participating in the interview piloting study	No. of students participating in the questionnaire piloting study	No. of students participating in the interview main study	No. of students participating in the questionnaire main study
699	3	39	17	Distributed 628
				Returned 240

As the table above illustrates, the number and distribution of the research participants for both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods is representative of the total number of instructors and students. During the initial step of the research, I was targeting female instructors and students, but dropped them when it appeared very difficult to include them, especially for the interviews. Although it was difficult to reach female instructors and students, I managed to contact a few, but when I explained my study, few agreed to hold in person or even phone interviews. I approached all the male instructors in person to explain the study and to invite them to the interviews. As for the instructors' questionnaires, I handled them in person and asked the instructors to return the

completed questionnaires by dropping them in a sealed box placed in the hall of the main building, a location which is very accessible to them. As for the students, after I obtained the permission of the instructors and the departments, I visited the students in their classrooms, which is the only possible way to approach them. During my visits, I explained the study, its aims and benefits, and took their permission to complete the questionnaires and return them upon their convenience in the same box. During these visits, I also invited the students to participate in the interviews and gave them my phone number to call to indicate their willingness.

4.6 Data Collection Instruments

The data collection methods used in this study are both quantitative and qualitative represented by a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The purpose of using such mixed data collection methods is to gain inclusive data that serves the purposes of achieving trustworthiness and depth (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Turner, 2003). As Turner (2003) argues, the fundamental principle of using mixed methods is to achieve complementary strength between depth and breadth of data. However, the data obtained for this study is essentially qualitative since the major findings of the study depend on the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questionnaire items as well as on the participants' interview narratives. The problem in hand demands qualitative data so that it becomes possible to explore in depth the instructors' perspectives, perceptions and the challenges they face in their teaching as well as their justifications for choosing certain teaching practices. Similarly, the study aimed to explore the students' views regarding their instructors' teaching practices and how these influence their own learning. As for quantitative data obtained through the closed-ended questionnaire, it served to define the general orientation of a larger group of the research participants (Creswell, 2003). For these reasons a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is found useful, and a necessity rather than luxury (Bryman, 2004). Since the strategy of mixed methods has become an established approach in social research with the assumption that: "in the history of ideas, new antitheses and syntheses continually develop in response to current theses. Mixed research is a synthesis that includes ideas from qualitative and quantitative research" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 113). The theoretical tenets of exploratory case study methodology adopted in this research require

navigation between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Furthermore, the need for combining data collection methods is essential when complex human behaviours are under investigation including teaching and learning practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Using a combination of methods is also relevant when researchers attempt to understand the topic under study from the perspectives of the participants through qualitative data and then collect quantitative data on specific issues (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the present research, this kind of blending of the genre of data was very useful to address a wide range of topics and concepts used in the field of teaching practices. It also serves in understanding diverse research participants including students, instructors, policymakers and other social actors. As Gorard and Taylor (2004) put it, “figures can be persuasive to policy makers whereas stories are more easily remembered and repeated for illustrative purposes” (p. 7). In short, using a mixed methods approach to collect data is perceived as a way to compensate for the shortcomings of one method with the strength of the other; it confers depth, rigour and breadth of data.

4.6.1 The Instructors’ and the Students’ Questionnaires

The use of questionnaire and survey has become an established method of data collection in social research. Brown (2001) defines questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (p. 6). Informed by the theoretical underpinnings of quantitative methodological assumptions, questionnaires are characteristically empiricist and aim to establish abstract knowledge (Maxwell, 2005). The use of questionnaire survey was a relevant data collection method as it provided answers to the research questions addressing the research respondents’ perceptions and attitudes. As Richard and Lockhart (1994) point out, the questionnaire is a useful method to collect “information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning, such as beliefs, attitudes, motivations and preferences” (p. 10). Since the questionnaires developed in this study were targeted to address this aim (exploring the participants’ perceptions of teaching practices), I maintained a careful focus while wording the questionnaire items by using the standards provided by Brown (2001) and Fabrigar (2003) including that: questionnaire items should be of suitable length, unambiguous, free from embarrassing, biased or

double meanings, with suitable language for the respondents' academic level, proper order and format, as well as a reasonable total number of items. In my context, I paid special attention to the language used to fit the respondents' social, academic and professional discourses. To achieve this, I consulted professional linguists to edit the language of the items so that they became appropriate to the respondents' discourse norms. I deem this step important to eliminate possibilities of confusion on the part of respondents by explicitly describing the study, its aims and research questions in the covering letter. Krosnick et al. (2005) argue that measuring perceptions is a way to assign values to the perceptions and expressions, and how these perceptions are expressed and understood in their specific contexts. To explore the perceptions of people regarding a given topic, the explicit articulation of items is essential as it ultimately results in precise interpretation of numerical data (ibid).

Two versions of the questionnaires (for the instructors and the students) were applied in the study to obtain quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix 1 and 2). The purpose of including the students' questionnaires was to obtain complementary data paired to those of the instructors through juxtaposing the responses of the two groups. This was useful since the items of both versions of teaching practices section addressed similar topics. Each of the two versions of the questionnaire was divided into five sub-sections. These sub-sections are planning and organisation, clarity of teaching, interaction and communication, assessment and feedback. For the instructors' and students' version the five sub-sections included 43 items that addressed the status of the teaching practices instructors used, and one more section for instructors' version included 5 items represented the challenges that they faced while conducting their teaching. In the sub-sections that addressed the teaching practices in the two versions, I attempted to make the items match specific teaching practices to make comparisons between the instructors' and the students' responses easier. In this study, the questionnaires were designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. In addition to the close-ended items where the respondents' task was to select from given options, the questionnaires used included an open-ended invitation to add commentary in their own words (Bryman, 2004). As for the design of the open-ended questions, they were very broad since I asked the respondents to "add any comments" they felt relevant to the topic. There were

only two open-ended questions; one below the section addressing the instructors' teaching practices in both versions (the instructors' and the students'), and another below the section addressing the challenges in the instructors' version. In fact, the comments provided by the instructors and especially by the students were very informative and qualitatively rich. I assume that, in the case of the students' questionnaires, the richness of their open-ended responses resulted from the freedom and anonymity that questionnaires offered. The use of questionnaires also allowed access to more respondents, especially with the challenges of access that researchers usually face while seeking interviews, and the present researcher is no exception. In my context, I faced reservations from many instructors and students over taking part in the interviews. As Table (4.1), illustrates, the questionnaires used a relatively wide scale survey to cover most of the population in the context of the study represented by the selected university. Drawing on the pilot data obtained through the initial interviews, as well as reviewing related research studies, I developed and checked for content validity of the two questionnaires using the conventions followed by researchers including drafting, editing and revising. When arriving at the final versions of the questionnaires, I examined students' questionnaire reliability on a sample of 39 respondents using Cronbach's Alpha test that proved that the students' questionnaire is reliable (0.8). However, and for the small number of the instructors, the instructors' questionnaire was not checked for reliability.

The two versions of questionnaires were handed in person to the respondents and the returned ones were collected by requesting respondents to drop them in a box in the manner I described above. I used a Likert-scale method to explicitly measure the respondents' answers and to serve the purposes of statistical analysis and interpretation. For more clarity, I divided the questionnaires into subsections that addressed specific topics, which was also useful in analysing the results. These topics represent the status of teaching practices including the existing teaching practices practised by the instructors, in addition to the challenges that instructors faced while teaching. Below the Likert scale sections, I asked the instructors and the students to provide their comments without providing specifying or directive questions. The rationale behind including this request was to provide space for the research participants to articulate and express their views freely and confidentially.

4.6.2 The Instructors' and the Students' Interviews

Probably the use of interviews is the most common data collection method in social research; it has been an established data collection method in terms of its theoretical underpinnings, usefulness, strategies and rationale. In its basic sense, interviewing is a sort of conversation related to the study in hand which is focused to answer research questions (Curtis et al., 2000; deMarrias & Tisdale, 2002; Fontana & Frey 2000; Greef, 2002; Lofland & Lofland, 1994). DeMarrias, for example, states that through interviews both the researchers and the participants engage in conversation where the research participants express their thoughts, worldviews and perspectives, and narrate and describe specific events and experiences related to the topic under discussion. Among the several types of interviews is the semi-structured, which involves “guided conversation[s] whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis” (Lofland & Lofland, 1994, p. 18). Greef (2002) argues that semi-structured interviews are especially suitable when issues discussed are related to the respondents' behaviour, perception and personal matters. Semi-structured interviews are intermediate between open and closed ones, and therefore allow a mode of conversation with a reasonable flexibility of framework of the topic. They also allow a sort of dialogic and conversational communication to enrich data through elaborations and probing (ibid). Additionally, they are suitable for creating a two-way flow of information allowing new issues and questions to emerge during the interview based on what the interviewee says (ibid). Through my experience of the semi-structured interviews, the ‘loose’ approach to the topic in hand allows the creation of new and unexpected directions of subjects, concerns and themes, which could adapt the direction of the study.

In the study, I used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data from the instructors and the students regarding their perspectives, perceptions and views of teaching practices. Drawing on the literature of research methodology and previous studies as well as the results of the pilot study, I designed and developed the interview questions to respond to the research questions of the study. Specifically, the questions revolve around the framework of the main themes of the study including: the instructors' perceptions, descriptions of their own teaching practices; their perceptions of effective teaching practices; the

challenges they face in their teaching which affect their teaching practices; and narratives of their current experiences which are related to the topic, among others (see appendix 3). As for the students' interview themes, they were similar to those of the instructors, but handled from the perspectives of learners. Specifically, I asked the students to provide their opinions of their instructors' teaching practices including teaching materials used, teaching styles (e.g. lecturing, discussions), assessment techniques, classroom interaction and relevance to their learning, among others (see appendix 4).

During the interviews, I kept a list of 'grouping topics' (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002), which allowed variations of asking the respondents in different ways without losing the focus of the topic. This method removed the intrusive nature of asking the research participants about their own teaching practices. In other words, through the two-way communication, friendly manner of articulating and initiating discussions, variations and acceptance of the interviewees' remarks, sometimes questions, it was possible to gain their trust and to meet their expectations. I also sought an interactional bridge between my own probing and comments and their narratives. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I managed to collect 'thick' data in terms of depth and breadth. The transcription of the audio taped interviews reached around 400 pages. I got the whole set of interview data translated into English for convenience of analysis (I explain my data analysis approach in the next section).

4.7 Data Analysis Approach

In this research, I employed an inductive approach to analyse the raw data (Ezzy, 2002; Silverman, 2000), in order "to allow research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraint imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2003, p.2). The major principles that guided my analysis using the general inductive approach are outlined as follows. Firstly, analysing data was informed by research objectives and through several readings and interpretations of the raw data. Secondly, the key aim of analysis was to develop categories from the corpus of raw data to decide on a framework that captures principle themes. Thirdly, the findings of the research were principally based on multiple interpretations of data and partly informed by reviews of previous research literature, existing knowledge, my research assumptions and experiences. Decisions about what was more or less important

were therefore taken through an iterated and interactive process between the existing raw data and intersubjective mode of analysis informed by my broad knowledge of the research context, theory-laden assumptions and, most importantly, the data itself. Fourthly, the trustworthiness of findings was maintained by independent replication, comparisons with findings from previous research, and feedback from the participants and the users of the research findings (Ezzy, 2002; Silverman, 2000; Thomas, 2003).

I used the “indexing technique” proposed by Ritchie et al., (2003) to analyse the transcribed interviews as well as the written open-ended responses of the instructors and the students. Ritchie and his colleagues describe the indexing technique as “a matrix based analytic method which facilitates rigorous and transparent data management such that all the stages involved in analytical hierarchy can be systematically conducted” (p. 220). Similar to other methods, this technique is informed by major principles of the inductive approach (see above); it allows themes to emerge from the corpus of data, but guided by research aims and questions and the researcher’s knowledge of the context and experience. The technique involves several stages.

In Stage One, after the qualitative data is transcribed, translated and is made ready, I read thoroughly and intensively to gain an overview of the data and to immerse myself in the whole story being told in the raw data. The stage of familiarisation came through several readings of the raw data with some note taking until I felt that I had understood the diversity of circumstances and characteristics of the data (ibid, p. 221). During this stage, I started to identify the recurring themes and ideas, and once I had started to notice them, I started to devise a conceptual framework, an “index”, which is similar to book indices where key words are listed in another file with a page reference to their location in the main text (the text of the raw data). It is important to mention here that decisions about the entry of key words should be taken with special care; they shouldn’t be too many; should be representative and should be the exact words of the research participants. The devised index is a link between two stages (or should serve two purposes): to make the retrieval process easy and efficient, and to act as the grounding for the devising of themes in the next stage. In fact, the use of the concept of “indexing” (Ritchie et al., 2003), rather than “coding” is quite informative since the indexing process represents the status of the categories

more clearly in the way the themes or concepts could easily be referred to within the particular section of the raw data. This stage also involved “reading each phrase, sentence and paragraph in fine detail and deciding ‘what is this about?’ in order to determine which part or parts of the index apply” (p. 224).

In Stage Two, I sorted and grouped the indexing words as main themes; sub-themes; sub-sub-themes and so on. The decision about the grouping (or typology) depended on the frequency of occurrence of the entry words. For example, the words “social” is repeated 78 times in different contexts, and my decision is therefore that this word should act as a main theme. In fact, this stage is complicated and demanded excessive efforts since, unlike statistical or numerical analysis (or measuring frequencies), it requires human decisions of what could be listed and grouped as themes, sub-themes or simply, irrelevant. For example, the phrase “teaching practices”, “teaching” and “learning”, etc. are repeated many times, but cannot be considered as themes because they are too broad. Additionally, language matters especially as my research participants used their native language (Arabic). This placed another challenge of decoding the exact meaning of some words (I refer to this aspect in Chapter 5). The process of categorising themes and sub-themes, etc. was repeated many times, where the reading of the main text (raw data) still going on in parallel with the process of categorisation. I reworked the process of categorising themes and sub-themes several times until I felt that they had a workable structure and could tell an informative story related to the aims of the study. In this stage I avoided replacing the participants’ words with any theoretical concepts so that themes or topics could emerge from the data described in a language very close to that of the participants. I revised and discussed the thematic structure with my PhD supervisors and edited it several times before moving to the next stage.

In Stage Three, ‘creating the thematic chart’, I devised my own retrieving process, which slightly differs from that provided by Ritchie and his colleagues. Instead of copying the paragraphs, which represent the themes from the raw data file into the matrix chart, as suggested by Ritchie et al., I developed a colour-coded scheme for each of the main themes in the raw data file, which made the process of listing examples easier. It also allowed for more efficient comparisons of the similarities between themes as well as cross sectional reading in the paragraphs (participants’ quotations). I also devised a set of thematic matrices in which each

theme was associated with subtopics using a numerical form (e.g. 3.2.11: the first digit refers to the main topic or theme, the second to the sub-theme or category, the third to sub-sub theme, and so on). These indexing numbers were allocated in the raw data script and hyperlinks were used so as to make the retrieval process easier.

In Stage Four (the final stage), I allocated the participants' representative extracts and quotations, and copied them in another file under the main and subthemes for discussing them in the writing up stage. It is important to mention here that these quotations represent themes that are repeated by three or more participants, but the selection of the particular ones depended on their inclusiveness and robust representation of the theme. Additionally, for the cases where these extracts could represent more than one theme, I decided upon the most prominent ones, and mentioned this in the course of my discussion in Chapter Five.

4.8 Trustworthiness

Within the tradition of the qualitative research paradigm, the trustworthiness of the claimed knowledge of the research is perceived as the main criterion for evaluating the robustness and quality of the research in hand (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While attention is directed to reliability and validity in quantitative research, trustworthiness is the equivalent in qualitative research as representing “a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research” (Bryman, 2008, p. 700) through which researchers identify the strengths and limitations of their studies. Among these criteria are four major ones including dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability (Bryman, 2008; Given, 2008; Schwandt, 2001). Schwandt (2001) defines dependability as “the process of the inquiry and the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process of the enquiry is logical, traceable and documented” (p. 258). In the present study, I attempted a down-to-earth inquiry as it responded to the existing notions, worldviews and attitudes of the research participants by means of raising suitable questions, allowing time for them to respond and discuss relevant issues, carefully reading and reflecting on their narratives as well as using relevant knowledge to interpret their views. Additionally, for both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques used, they were grounded upon established theoretical literature concerned with social research

methodology. Specifically, with the adoption of case study methodology, questionnaire surveying, interviewing and sampling technique and using of inductive approach for analysing data, I perceive the research design as reflecting a coherent and logical order, which allows other researchers to trace and duplicate its design. Additionally, my use of mixed methods of data collection including closed and open ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for both the instructors and the students, allowed for informative and useful comparisons through which integrity and robustness of inferring data is maintained (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

As for achieving credible research findings as drawn from the consistency between the research participants' worldviews and my interpretations of these views, I maintained a co-construction of reality shared by the worldviews and narratives of the research participants. As Given (2008) argues, credibility in research refers to "the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretation of them" (p. 138). Drawing on constructivist underpinnings, I adopt the argument that reality is shared and constructed by several individuals and their interaction with a phenomenon. The instructors' and the students' narratives were read several times to search for common shared worldviews among them. In my interpretations I endeavoured to construct meanings and realities through my interpretations as reflecting and articulating the participants' realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Specifically, since language embodies reality, I focused on the discourse of the participants; I listened to their audio-taped narratives several times, read them in Arabic, got them translated to English, read them again to check translation, – all of which was prior to commencing the process of interpretation. In several cases, I referred to the original tapes, and/or Arabic transcriptions when I felt that specific parts of the final English version did not express meanings clearly. Through this iterated cross-checking approach, I believe the interpretations are credible and match the worldviews and realities of the research participants.

The third component of confirmability, which is related to credibility, is concerned with the correspondence between the researcher's interpretations and the obtained data where all claims on the part of the researcher are substantiated by relevant data (Given, 2008). In fact, the huge corpus of data obtained in this study

made it a challenge to decide what to include and what to exclude. In other words, I deemed *all* the participants' views relevant and worthy of being included as they addressed the topic from myriad, but essential perspectives. However, to conform to the tradition of reporting findings and in view of the space limitations, strategic decisions were taken to precis representative extracts and examples of the participants' narratives. For all claims and discussions of the ideas and issues reported in this thesis, I exerted exceptional efforts to substantiate them with examples from the data. Specifically, several steps to confirm the match between my interpretations and the data reported: a) in addition to the several editing stages of the findings chapter between my two supervisors and myself; b) I asked a colleague to review the relevance of my interpretations to the data provided; c) I sent samples from the findings chapter to two instructors participating in the study to provide their opinions regarding my interpretations, and read and responded to their comments.

The fourth component related to the trustworthiness of the research is transferability, which represents the duplication or replication of the study in other contexts (Given, 2008). In fact, the tradition of qualitative research and case study methodology in particular is less concerned with duplication of studies in other contexts, yet, it is still possible when research contexts are similar and entail analogous problems (ibid). As I discussed the research context in Chapter 2, I identified the boundaries and the scope of the current research context, which is an emergent university located in rural and nomad regions of the country. In fact, the particular nature of this context has informed (or redirected) the focus of the study as it was found that the instructors' teaching practices were shaped and determined by their socioeconomic and cultural contextual values. Drawing on this, I perceive that transferability of the current study is quite possible as it principally relies on two broad concerns: first, using major and abstracted principles of qualitative case studies that could be adapted and applied in other contexts, and, second, accurately reporting the research methodology including data collection and analysis methods, inclusive and representative samples and providing all necessary rationales that explicitly describe the study.

As stated earlier, during the first round of constructing themes, I was focusing on the narratives that addressed specific teaching practices that took place in the classroom, and ignoring many others. However, as I reflected on the data more

and more I discovered that I was just searching for ideas that confirmed my research assumptions and discarding those which seemed irrelevant. By moving to an open and flexible position, I allowed myself to explore *what is there?* in the fullest sense of the question.

In short, the trustworthiness of the study was attempted through the cautious implementation of the theoretical underpinnings of the adopted research paradigm, methodology and methods. The present research also ensured trustworthiness by clearly defining the aims of the study, relevant selection of the research context and by maintaining a reflective position on the part of the researcher. Self-reflexivity in social research is posited as a method that qualitative researchers use to question and explore research practices and representation (Fine & Weis, 1996; Ropers-Huilman, 1999). Fine and Weis argue that, in order to achieve self-reflective positions, researchers focus on themselves while they “ravel and unravel the lives and practices of others” (p. 203). Ropers-Huilman (1999) calls researchers to consciously direct their attention to their inquiries, interpretations, and propositions, and perceive that these elements are meaningful and valid only within particular theories and discursive contexts. My role in this research was multifaceted; in addition to being the principle investigator, which imposed a colossal responsibility in taking decisions, I also perceived my role as an educator (instructor), whose knowledge of the topic was practised through daily engagement with teaching. Being an instructor in the same university where I conducted this research, I deem myself as another research participant with similar worldviews, concerns and is subject to similar challenges as those reported. I therefore reckon myself as a researcher from within; a researcher whose personal, professional and academic experience is very relevant to the topic under investigation. Yet, through my representations of the research participants’ worldviews and realities, I tried to avoid allowing this knowledge to interfere with the way knowledge was constructed in this research. I maintained a discursive construction of knowledge through placing the present inquiry in its knowledge base; working within the guidelines of the research methodology tradition and ensuring that all claims to knowledge were supported and substantiated by empirical evidence from this study as well as from earlier ones.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Generally, social research is subject to potential ethical issues since its subject matter involves people's lives or areas related to them in one way or another. Literature concerning research methodology has provided researchers with tools and guidance to protect research participants against any potential harm. These principles include anonymity, confidentiality and autonomy of the research participants as well as obtaining their informed consent after explicitly and clearly informing them of what will be enquired into in the research (Pring, 2001; Wiles et al., 2006). Ethical considerations also involve the researcher's academic honesty in reporting the research findings which comes through eliminating any prejudice and bias on the part of the researcher. In my research, prior to commencing the pilot study, I obtained approval from the research ethics committee in the Graduate School of Education, Exeter University. I attach a scanned copy of this certificate in Appendix (5). As for the other major principles to maintain the right of the research participants, I will discuss how I attended to them in the following paragraphs.

First, the issue of anonymity was a real challenge to this study since the study addresses the topic in a specific research context. In fact, the first feedback I received from one of my PhD supervisors was to avoid mentioning the name of the university where the study took place. In reporting and disseminating the research and its findings, I developed a tradition of referring to the university as "an emergent" one. I used this term to serve several purposes among which was to avoid stating the name of the university, the site of the research. In fact, I deem the term "emergent" university workable for this research as, in addition to describing the context, it reduces the possibilities of identifying the particular one where the research was conducted. As I mentioned earlier, there are many emergent universities that have been established in similar regions during the past few years, which supports the use of the term to keep the name of my university anonymous in this thesis. Related to this, I maintained the research participants' anonymity by avoiding mentioning their names while reporting their narratives and worldviews. I have used pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

As for the institution and the participants' informed consent, I obtained a letter directed from my school to the university where I followed the conventions and protocols to access the research participants. In addition to this, I obtained

consent from each participant individually, including the students. I explained the study and its aims to each participant and assured them that their participation would be for the sole purpose of research. I also informed them of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Following these procedures, I exerted all possible effort to remove the possibility of any potential risk to the participants; I built with them a rapport of trust and confidence, which encouraged them to unfold their experiences and openly express their opinions.

In this study, I perceive the above description of the research design and methodology a guiding framework that justifies my claim for knowledge. In short, within the tradition of constructivist and qualitative research approaches and methodologies, I perceive the reality and knowledge introduced in this research as co-constructed between the research participants and myself. I therefore do not claim objective knowledge in a positivist sense, since the worldviews presented in this research, which form the basis of my claim to knowledge, are contingent on time and place as well as changing with the case under investigation.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF TEACHING PRACTICES IN THE CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVES

5.1 Introduction

In the present study, I have explored the nature and the status of the instructors' teaching practices in an emergent Saudi university. As the study adopts an exploratory case study methodology, I approached the topic with tentative research questions to explore and identify the nature and status of the instructors' teaching practices including the challenges involved and any other factors that facilitate or hinder 'good'/effective' teaching practices in the research context. Specifically, I addressed three areas of investigation: a) the current teaching practices that Saudi instructors implement in an emergent university, and how they optimise 'good'/effective' teaching practice in this context; b) the various factors that could facilitate or hinder them from actualising 'good'/effective' teaching practices, and c), the role of the context-specific factors including socioeconomic, personal and cultural values and their roles in determining the nature of teaching practices. In addition to this, I investigated the students' views regarding their instructors' teaching practices, and how these practices affect the students' learning. In this chapter I present the findings from the questionnaire surveys and from the semi-structured interviews with instructors and students.

Although the three areas of investigation identified above are intertwined, I report the quantitative and qualitative data in two separate sections. In so doing I aim to facilitate the fluidity of reading these findings in terms of the areas of investigation addressed in the study. The results chapter is divided into two parts; quantitative and qualitative. The first part presents the descriptive statistical data concerning teaching practices from both instructors and their students. It is divided into two main categories: the first category addresses the status of the instructors' teaching practices, which is the main body of the quantitative section. The second main category addresses the challenges that instructors faced while conducting their teaching. For the first category, I cluster the questionnaire items addressing similar issues from both the instructors' and the students' questionnaires. The

rationale for this classification is to make the comparisons between the instructors' and the students' responses easier.

In the second part of this chapter, I report and discuss the qualitative data obtained from the instructors' and the students' semi-structured interviews as well as from their comments on the questionnaires' open-ended questions. Since the study is essentially qualitative, the second section will be all-inclusive; in addition to reporting the participants' responses, I will interpret and discuss the qualitative with reference to the knowledge base and in light of the literature reviewed.

5.2 Section One: Descriptive Statistics of the Research Participants' Responses Regarding Teaching Practices

In section One, I present the findings of the questionnaires for both the instructors and the students, which addressed two main areas: the status of the instructors' teaching practices and challenges involved in teaching practices. The first part includes 43 items collectively exploring the instructors' and the students' perceptions of the status of the current teaching practices attempted by the instructors in their departments. The second part includes 5 items exploring the factors that either place challenges (i.e. hinder) or facilitate teaching practices as perceived by the instructors. I used descriptive analysis of responses using frequencies on a five-point Likert Scale, percentages, means and standard deviations for each item for both the instructors' and the students' responses. I also include a t-test to compare the instructors' and the students' responses.

It is important to mention that the quantitative data addresses the research questions that broadly relate to the teaching practices employed by the instructors and the factors that facilitate or hinder their actualisation of 'good'/'effective' teaching practices. I therefore state the research question followed by the quantitative data represented by the tables and provide basic commentaries next to each section. As for the qualitative comments on the open-ended question, I include them in the course of interview data and my discussions in Part Two.

Question One: What is the status of the current instructors' teaching practices in an emergent Saudi university?

First Part of Question Five: How do students in the same research contexts perceive instructors' teaching practices?

Table (5.1) Teaching Practices Category; Planning and Organization Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Planning and Organization	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
State instructions clearly at the first lecture of the module	33 (76.7%)	10 (23.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.77	0.427
Provide students with a study guide	8 (18.6%)	16 (37.2%)	11 (25.6%)	3 (7%)	5 (11.6%)	3.44	1.221
Are well organized and prepared for every lesson	24 (55.8%)	19 (44.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.56	0.502
Take students' evaluation of your teaching. (e.g. oral, written, questionnaire form)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	27 (62.8%)	11 (25.6%)	5 (11.6%)	2.51	0.703

Table (5.2) Teaching Practices Category; Planning and Organization Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Students

Planning and Organization	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
State instructions clearly at the first lecture of the module	94 (39.2%)	71 (29.6%)	44 (18.3%)	23 (9.6%)	8 (3.3%)	3.92	1.121
Provide you with a study guide	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	45 (18.8%)	58 (24.2%)	137 (57.1%)	1.62	0.784
Are well organized and prepared for every lesson	44 (18.3%)	79 (32.9%)	65 (27.1%)	41 (17.1%)	11 (4.6%)	3.43	1.111
Take your evaluation of their teaching. (e.g. oral, written, questionnaire form)	17 (7.1%)	50 (20.8%)	82 (34.2%)	50 (20.8%)	40 (16.7%)	2.81	1.158

The results in Table (5.1) and (5.2) present a summary of instructors' and students' responses to questionnaire items relating to planning and organization. From Table (5.1) we can see that more than three-quarters of the instructors (n=33; 76.7%) reported that they always stated instructions clearly in the first lecture of the module. In comparison, less than half of the students (39.2%) reported that their instructors always stated the instructions clearly at the beginning of the first lecture.

There was a more varied instructor response to the item regarding providing students with a study guide. In comparison, the majority of the students (n=137; 57.1%) reported that their instructors never provided a study guide. More than half of the instructors (n=24; 55.8%) reported that they were always well organized and prepared for every lesson. There was a more varied response from students however; with only 18.3% of students reporting that their instructors were always well organised and prepared.

It was not common for instructors to regularly elicit students' evaluation of their teaching, with the majority of the instructors (n=27; 62.8%) reporting that they sometimes took students' evaluation of their teaching. Interestingly, however, while none of the instructors chose the 'always' or 'often' response to this item, 67 of the students did; suggesting a large difference in perceptions.

Table (5.3) Teaching Practices Category; Clarity of Teaching Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Clarity of Teaching	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Start the lesson on time	30 (69.8%)	13 (30.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.7	0.465
Take attendance at every lesson	43 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5.00	0
Preview the topic of the teaching session	25 (58.1%)	17 (39.5)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.56	0.548
Relate today's lesson to the previous one	25 (58.1%)	12 (27.9%)	6 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.44	0.734
Provide students with different teaching materials (e.g. handouts, articles, newspapers, etc.)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34 (79.1%)	9 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	2.79	0.412
Use traditional aids (e.g. blackboard)	11 (25.6%)	16 (37.2%)	9 (20.9%)	3 (7%)	4 (9.3%)	3.63	1.215
Use modern technology (e.g. PowerPoint, whiteboard, etc.)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18 (41.9%)	24 (55.8%)	1 (2.3%)	2.4	0.541
Use various teaching methods	12 (27.9%)	13 (30.2%)	11 (25.6%)	6 (14%)	1 (2.3%)	3.67	1.107
Clarify areas of misunderstanding	26 (60.5%)	14 (32.6%)	1 (2.3%)	2 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	4.49	0.768
Take students learning needs into account	12 (27.9%)	22 (51.2%)	7 (16.3%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.3%)	4.00	0.873
Discuss the content knowledge in an organized way	21 (48.8%)	14 (32.6%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.26	0.902
Define new terms, concepts and principles clearly	29 (67.4%)	12 (27.9%)	2 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.63	0.578
Present abstract ideas clearly supported with examples	20 (46.5%)	17 (39.5%)	6 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.33	0.715
Focus on understanding and skills mastery	16 (37.2%)	16 (37.2%)	9 (20.9%)	1 (2.3%)	1 (2.3%)	4.05	0.95
Use a variety of questioning techniques to probe students' knowledge and understanding	25 (58.1%)	15 (34.9%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.51	0.631
Allow students to learn cooperatively (e.g. pair work, group work, etc.).	9 (20.9%)	8 (18.6%)	15 (34.9%)	8 (18.6%)	3 (7%)	3.28	1.202
Check comprehension of what is taught	18 (41.9%)	18 (41.9%)	5 (11.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.7%)	4.16	0.974
Support students for independent learning (e.g. coursebooks, resources).	14 (32.6%)	18 (41.9%)	6 (14%)	5 (11.6)	0 (0%)	3.95	0.975
Use appropriate opportunities to enhance students' learning	8 (18.6%)	15 (34.9%)	11 (25.6%)	9 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	3.51	1.032
Review the teaching session	19 (44.2%)	16 (37.2%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.3%)	4.21	0.888
Finish the lesson on time	16 (37.2%)	18 (41.9%)	9 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.16	0.754

Table (5.4) Teaching Practices Category; Clarity of Teaching Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Students

Clarity of Teaching	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Start the lesson on time	43 (17.9%)	75 (31.3%)	73 (30.4%)	39 (16.3%)	10 (4.2%)	3.43	1.087
Take attendance at every lesson	41 (17.1%)	88 (36.7%)	105 (43.8%)	5 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	3.69	0.774
Preview the topic of the teaching session	45 (18.8%)	56 (23.3%)	65 (27.1%)	51 (21.3%)	23 (9.6%)	3.20	1.243
Relate today's lesson to the previous one	47 (19.6%)	70 (29.2%)	74 (30.8%)	35 (14.6%)	14 (5.8%)	3.42	1.132
Provide you with different teaching materials (e.g. handouts, articles, newspapers, etc.)	0 (0%)	20 (8.3%)	108 (45%)	96 (40%)	16 (6.7%)	2.55	0.741
Use traditional aids (e.g. blackboard)	28 (11.7%)	40 (16.7%)	61 (25.4%)	76 (31.7%)	34 (14.2%)	2.80	1.22
Use modern technology (e.g. PowerPoint, whiteboard)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	42 (17.5%)	85 (35.4%)	113 (47.1%)	1.70	0.749
Use various teaching methods	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	69 (28.8%)	124 (51.7%)	47 (19.6%)	2.09	0.691
Clarify areas of misunderstanding	37 (15.4%)	66 (27.5%)	74 (30.8%)	54 (22.5%)	9 (3.8%)	3.28	1.091
Take your learning needs into account	45 (18.8%)	48 (20%)	70 (29.2%)	48 (20%)	29 (12.1%)	3.13	1.274
Discuss the content knowledge in organized way	52 (21.7%)	71 (29.6%)	64 (26.7%)	32 (13.3%)	21 (8.8%)	3.42	1.214
Define new terms, concepts and principles clearly	26 (10.8%)	53 (22.1%)	69 (28.8%)	64 (26.7%)	26 (10.8%)	2.95	1.17
Present abstract ideas clearly supported with examples	14 (5.8%)	22 (9.2%)	107 (44.6%)	79 (32.9%)	18 (7.5%)	2.73	0.94
Focus on understanding and skills mastery	15 (6.3%)	85 (35.4%)	108 (45%)	24 (10%)	8 (3.3%)	3.31	0.862
Use a variety of questioning techniques to probe your knowledge and understanding	14 (5.8%)	22 (9.2%)	107 (44.6%)	79 (32.9%)	18 (7.5%)	2.73	0.94
Allow you to learn cooperatively (e.g. pair work, group work, etc.).	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34 (14.2%)	53 (22.1%)	153 (63.8%)	1.50	0.732
Check comprehension of what is taught	34 (14.2%)	88 (36.7%)	32 (13.3%)	62 (25.8%)	23 (9.6%)	3.20	1.244
Support you for independent learning (e.g. coursebooks, resources).	9 (3.8%)	23 (9.6%)	47 (19.6%)	51 (21.3%)	110 (45.8%)	2.04	1.174
Use appropriate opportunities to enhance your learning	17 (7.1%)	30 (12.5%)	68 (28.3%)	51 (21.3%)	74 (30.8%)	2.44	1.243
Review the teaching session	65 (27.1%)	58 (24.2%)	69 (28.8%)	35 (14.6%)	13 (5.4%)	3.53	1.189
Finish the lesson on time	62 (25.8%)	85 (35.4%)	59 (24.6%)	28 (11.7%)	6 (2.5%)	3.70	1.055

The results in Tables (5.3) and (5.4) present a summary of instructors' and students' responses to questionnaire items relating to clarity of teaching. From Table (5.3) we can see that most of the instructors say they use a range of methods to ensure clarity of the lesson (understanding), with the most common being previewing the topic of the teaching session (42 out of 43) and the least common being allowing students to learn co-operatively (17); providing students with different teaching materials (0) and using technology (0). Interestingly, the results from Table (5.4) reveal that the students do not entirely agree with the instructors regarding the use of varied teaching methods. Whilst just over half of the instructors said that they always or often used varied teaching methods, none of the students reported this. The students however do seem to concur with the less frequent use of technology and co-operative learning.

Table (5.5) Teaching Practices Category; Interaction and Communication Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Interaction and Communication	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Have good control of the class	35 (81.4%)	8 (18.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.81	0.394
Use various strategies to engage students in the lesson (e.g. question techniques, activities, etc.)	9 (20.9%)	27 (62.8%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.05	0.615
Hold small group conferences with students	1 (2.3%)	6 (14%)	14 (32.6%)	8 (18.6%)	14 (32.6%)	2.35	1.152
Motivate students to learn	30 (69.8%)	12 (27.9%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.67	0.522
Encourage students to ask questions in class	31 (72.1%)	8 (18.6%)	3 (7%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	4.6	0.728
Encourage students to discuss ideas in class	11 (25.6%)	12 (27.9%)	13 (30.2%)	6 (14%)	1 (2.3%)	3.60	1.094
Listen and respond to students	35 (81.4%)	5 (11.6%)	2 (4.7%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)	4.72	0.666
Allow students to respond to other students' questions or ideas	19 (44.2%)	17 (39.5%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4.28	0.734
Deal with students with respect	43 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5.00	0
Treat students fairly	43 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5.00	0

Table (5.6) Teaching Practices Category; Interaction and Communication Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Students

Interaction and Communication	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Have good control of the class	72 (30%)	80 (33.3%)	63 (26.3%)	19 (7.9%)	5 (2.1%)	3.82	1.021
Use various strategies to engage you in the lesson (e.g. question techniques, activities, etc.)	8 (3.3%)	19 (7.9%)	39 (16.3%)	74 (30.8%)	99 (41.3%)	2.01	1.096
Hold small group conferences with students	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	67 (27.9%)	119 (49.6%)	54 (22.5%)	2.05	0.709
Motivate you to learn	27 (11.3%)	43 (17.9%)	79 (32.9%)	56 (23.3%)	35 (14.6%)	2.88	1.199
Encourage you to ask questions in class	63 (26.3%)	53 (22.1%)	44 (18.3%)	36 (15%)	44 (18.3%)	3.23	1.453
Encourage you to discuss ideas in class	15 (6.3%)	37 (15.4%)	74 (30.8%)	40 (16.7%)	74 (30.8%)	2.50	1.248
Listen and respond to you	102 (42.5%)	77 (32.1%)	45 (18.8%)	10 (4.2%)	5 (2.1%)	4.09	0.983
Allow you to respond to other students' questions or ideas	26 (10.8%)	49 (20.4%)	78 (32.5%)	60 (25%)	27 (11.3%)	2.95	1.158
Deal with you with respect	41 (17.1%)	67 (27.9%)	66 (27.5%)	51 (21.3%)	15 (6.3%)	3.28	1.162
Treat you fairly	16 (6.7%)	62 (25.8%)	76 (31.7%)	57 (23.8%)	29 (12.1%)	2.91	1.115

The results in Tables (5.5) and (5.6) present a summary of instructors' and students' responses to questionnaire items relating to interaction and communication. The results reveal many differences between instructors' and students' responses. For example, while all (100%) the instructors reported that they always or often treated students fairly and with respect, less than half of the students reported this (32.5% and 45% respectively). 69.3% of instructors reported that they always motivated their students to learn; compared to 11.3% for students.

Table (5.7) Teaching Practices Category; Assessment Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Assessment	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Provide students a list of assessment criteria (Rubrics)	17 (39.5%)	16 (37.2%)	6 (14%)	4 (9.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4.07	0.961
Use various assessment methods during the semester (e.g. tests, quizzes, etc.)	13 (30.2%)	11 (25.6%)	10 (23.3%)	4 (9.3%)	5 (11.6%)	3.53	1.334
Use various homework assignments during the semester	8 (18.6%)	14 (32.6%)	11 (25.6%)	9 (20.9%)	1 (2.3%)	3.44	1.098
Assess students' understanding of the course contents	18 (41.9%)	14 (32.6%)	10 (23.3%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4.14	0.861
Grade students' work fairly	43 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5.00	0

Table (5.8) Teaching Practices Category; Assessment Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Students

Assessment	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Provide you a list of assessment criteria (Rubrics)	10 (4.2%)	15 (6.3%)	34 (14.2%)	56 (23.3%)	125 (52.1%)	1.87	1.13
Use various assessment methods during the semester (e.g. tests, quizzes, etc.)	13 (5.4%)	51 (21.3%)	70 (29.2%)	48 (20%)	58 (24.2%)	2.64	1.213
Use various homework assignments during the semester	0 (0%)	18 (7.5%)	36 (15%)	80 (33.3%)	106 (44.2%)	1.86	0.936
Assess your understanding of the course contents	48 (20%)	55 (22.9%)	70 (29.2%)	41 (17.1%)	26 (10.8%)	3.24	1.258
Grade your work fairly	31 (12.9%)	77 (32.1%)	85 (35.4%)	39 (16.3%)	7 (2.9%)	3.36	0.998

The results in Tables (5.7) and (5.8) present a summary of instructors' and students' responses to questionnaire items relating to assessment. The results reveal many differences between instructors' and students' responses. For example, all (100%) the instructors reported that they always grade students' work fairly compared to just 12.9% of the students. More than three-quarters (76.7%) of the instructors reported that they always or often provide students a list of assessment criteria (Rubrics) whereas only 10.5% of the students reported the frequency of this as 'always' or 'often' and over half of the students 52.1% said 'never'. Also, 18.6% of the instructors said they always use various homework assignments during the semester; compared to 0% for students and 44.2% who said 'never'.

Table (5.9) Teaching Practices Category; Feedback Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Feedback	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Provide each student with oral feedback on his work	8 (18.6%)	20 (46.5%)	6 (14%)	7 (16.3%)	2 (4.7%)	3.58	1.118
Provide the whole class with oral feedback	13 (30.2%)	22 (51.2%)	5 (11.6%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	4.05	0.844
Provide students with written feedback on their work	7 (16.3%)	15 (34.9%)	4 (9.3%)	15 (34.9%)	2 (4.7%)	3.23	1.231

Table (5.10) Teaching Practices Category; Feedback Sub-Category; Descriptive Data for Students

Feedback	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)	Mean	SD
Provide you with oral feedback on your work	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	40 (16.7%)	117 (48.8%)	83 (34.6%)	1.82	0.695
Provide the whole class with oral feedback	14 (5.8%)	48 (20%)	55 (22.9%)	77 (32.1%)	45 (18.8%)	2.62	1.171
Provide you with written feedback on work	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	31 (12.9%)	67 (27.9%)	142 (59.2%)	1.54	0.713

The results in Tables (5.9) and (5.10) present a summary of instructors' and students' responses to questionnaire items relating to feedback. From Table (5.9) we can see that almost two thirds of the instructors (65.1%) said they always or often provide students with oral feedback on their work and over half of the instructors (51.2%) said they provide students with written feedback on their work. Interestingly, the results from Table (5.10) reveal that the students do not entirely agree with the instructors regarding providing students with oral feedback and written feedback on their work. The students however do seem to concur with the less frequent use of oral and written feedback.

Table (5.11) Independent Samples T-test to Compare Means for Instructors and Their Students

Sub-Category	Participant	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Planning and Organization	Instructors	43	3.82	0.473	8.424	281	0.000*
	Students	240	2.94	0.651			
Clarity of Teaching	Instructors	43	4.03	0.366	14.569	281	0.000*
	Students	240	2.90	0.487			
Interaction and Communication	Instructors	43	4.31	0.228	14.83	281	0.000*
	Students	240	2.97	0.583			
Assessment	Instructors	43	4.04	0.540	12.52	281	0.000*
	Students	240	2.59	0.721			
Feedback	Instructors	43	3.62	0.822	16.292	281	0.000*
	Students	240	1.99	0.557			

As differences were observed in tables (5.11) between the instructors' and the students' views of teaching practices, the researcher applied an independent samples T-test to test whether these differences were statistically significant. From Table (5.11) we can note that all the t-values of all sub-categories of teaching practices (planning and organization, clarity of teaching, interaction and communication, assessment, and feedback) were significant at p-value less than 0.01, so we can conclude that there is a real difference in the views of the instructors and their students on the application of teaching practices and that the differences in scores were not simply due to chance.

Question Four: What are the factors that facilitate or hinder them from actualising or consummating ‘good’/‘effective’ teaching practices?

Table (5.12) Challenges Category; Descriptive Data for Instructors

Challenges	Very challenging (5)	Challenging (4)	Unsure (3)	Unchallenging (2)	Not challenging at all (1)	Mean	SD
Physical teaching environment	12 (27.9%)	21 (48.8%)	3 (7%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0%)	3.88	1.005
Teaching load	8 (18.6%)	15 (34.9%)	7 (16.3%)	12 (27.9%)	1 (2.3%)	3.40	1.158
Large classes	19 (44.2%)	21 (48.8%)	1 (2.3%)	2 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	4.33	0.747
Teaching aids	15 (34.9%)	25 (58.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	4.21	0.773
Professional development programmes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	43 (100%)	1.00	0

The results in Table (5.12) present a summary of responses to questionnaire items relating to the challenges category.

It is clear from Table (5.12) that all instructors (n=43; 100%) who participated in the study perceive that professional development programmes are not highly valued by their departments, school, or by the policy of the university in general. Also, almost all of the instructors (n=40; 93%) reported that teaching aids and large classes are ‘always’ or ‘often’ a challenge. Also, more than three-quarters 76.7% of the instructors said that the teaching environment is ‘always’ or ‘often’ a challenge. In addition, Table (5.12) shows that shows more than half of the instructors (53.5%) said that teaching load is ‘always’ or ‘often’ a challenge.

As the quantitative data represented by the instructors’ and the students’ responses on the questionnaire close-ended items reveal, there is a lack of correspondence between the answers of each group. This observation is verified by the use of the t-test which compares the answers of the two sets. As for the instructors’ answers regarding the challenges, it appears that most of them face different kinds of challenges, especially the total absence of any professional training programmes. In Part Two of this chapter, I will discuss these results alongside my interpretation of the qualitative data obtained via the open-ended questionnaire questions, as well as the semi-structured interviews.

5.3 Section Two: Analysis of Qualitative Data

In Section Two, I present the qualitative findings as obtained from interviewing the research participants (both the instructors and their students). There were seven instructors and seventeen students interviewed in the same university. The findings reported in this section reflect those presented earlier in Section One; I however aim to probe into the worldviews of the research participants by reporting and interpreting their stories regarding their own teaching practices and how this might bring about a holistic and deep understanding to the plethora of issues I addressed in this study. In other words, rather than a complementary section, I utilise this section to respond to the research questions (see p. 22) in a qualitative manner by means of answering the *how* and *why* questions.

The style of writing I adopt in this chapter, especially in Section Two, is informed by Holliday's (2007) discussion regarding writing about qualitative data. My presentation of the findings consists of three elements: discursive commentaries, *data*, and argument. I use discursive commentaries to talk about the *data* within the context of the argument (p. 98). My commentaries and argument are presented in (plain type) and the occurrence of data is always in (*italics*), whether in text or in extracts. As Holliday argues, presenting qualitative data in this manner safeguards the voice of the research participants which is the driving force of the data discussion, and to elucidate "the relationship between data as evidence and writing as presentation and discussion of this evidence within the context of a developing writing" (p. 89). I also expect this writing style would provide the reader with a fluid and more straightforward access to the corpus of findings I am dealing with.

5.3.1 Instructors' Perceptions of their Teaching Practices (TP)

A growing body of research has explored the relationship between instructors' perceptions and beliefs of their teaching practice and their actual practice (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Kane et al., 2002; Kember, 1997; Pajares, 1992). Researchers, however, seem not to agree on whether there is a linear and direct relationship between instructors' beliefs and how they actualise these conceptions in practice. Pajares (1992), for example, claims that instructors' perceptions of teaching practice play an influential role in their judgment of what to do. In a more recent study, Devlin (2006) points out that exploring such a relationship is a challenging task, and the complexity of understanding this relationship partly emerges from

the myriad concepts used to denote 'conceptualisation' including: "conceptions, beliefs, orientations, approaches and intentions", which are used 'interchangeably' (p. 112). Nonetheless, I draw on Pratt's (quoted in Devlin) definition of conceptions, which states that "conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena [...] In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world" (p. 112).

The theme of Instructors' Teaching Practices is an emergent one since I did not address the question directly. I however include this theme as it reflects how the instructors understand these practices and how this understanding is translated into real practices or otherwise. The data indicate that there has been a noticeable gap between the instructors' perceptions and their actual practices. The first set of answers, those coming from the instructors, denotes various conceptualisations of what teaching practices could mean to them; their answers ranged between those who believe that teaching practices mean *all activities relevant to the teaching process* (a holistic approach); others who perceive teaching practices as *lacking clear definition or a mixture of everything at the same time*. Others perceive TP as those activities that depend on the subject they teach, and, accordingly, defined the concept as any practice that is *related to the subjects or topic* that they teach. The final set of answers refers to TP as constituent of three main thrusts (*the instructor, the students and the teaching environment*). I detail these answers in the following section exemplifying with representative quotations and extracts from the instructors' answers.

Teaching practices as a comprehensive and all-encompassing approach to classroom activities is a perception that several instructors articulated when referring to the concept; Ahmad⁷, for example indicates that:

For me, teaching practice is all activities that take place in the classroom including attracting the students' attention through varying teaching methods and techniques; I also perceive teaching as the activity that is directed to achieving the learning goals. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

⁷ In this chapter, I use pseudonyms to refer to interviewed instructors and students.

Classroom activities as reflecting teaching practices are deemed to be one major concern for higher education instructors to successfully perform their tasks in the classroom. In fact the majority of the interviewed instructors highlighted all sorts of activities in the classroom while referring to their own teaching practice. Within such an understanding, it could be argued that in-class performance that is directly related to the concept of teaching practices is a major factor that instructors pay a lot of attention to. They perceive their teaching behaviour in the classroom to include all other relevant activities including the procedures, rules, role-exchange, interactions, etc. that would draw loose boundaries of what teaching practice could mean to them. As Day (2004) argues, such classroom procedures and conventions would establish a 'norm' through which instructors perceive their in-class performance. But, equally important, instructors, similar to Ahmad keep in their minds the importance of achieving learning goals as a major constituent of their teaching practice. In fact, learning goals, or more precisely, teaching that is driven by learning goals is considered as effective teaching practice by many scholars who concern themselves with effective teaching practice. Anderson (2004), for example, argues that "an effective [instructor] is one who quite consistently achieves goals – be they self-selected or imposed – that are related either directly or indirectly to student learning" (p. 25). Drawing on these observations, I argue that maintaining clear and focused learning outcomes enables instructors to define and structure their teaching practices including planning, assessment, etc. Drawing the necessary and relevant boundaries around teaching practice is a crucial procedure as it frames a context-bound pedagogical practice that serves the established aims of a specific educational milieu.

Similar to this perception of the notion of teaching practices is Ali's opinion, who perceives his teaching practice as lacking unity, for him it "*is a mixture of 'everything' at the same time, and a profession that lacks a unified definition*". (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

As might be derived from Ali's remark, the profession of teaching lacks a unified and strict definition. In fact, Ali's opinion signposts an existing crisis in the profession as lacking well-defined set of criteria delineating a cadre of what could be included as teaching practice. For me, the use of such sweeping and unclear understanding of teaching practices invites instructors to resort to their intuition

to make choices regarding what could work. In fact, research stresses the complexity and the multidimensional nature of teaching practices, which make it challenging to construe a one-size-fits-all definition of teaching practice, for example, North (1999), Hativa (2000) and Raymond (2008) among others. Yoo et al. (2013) report that the absence of consensus about a definition of teaching practice is one of the root problems of the profession. Nonetheless, Ali's conceptualisation of teaching practice is significant since teaching activities could only mean those procedures that instructors or even students would be involved in, but also an enormous amount of other activities including interpersonal communication; humanistic and moral conduct by both the instructors and the students; the logistic facilities, the physical environment; and the social, cultural and context, among several others. According to Brown (as quoted in Fook, 2102), teaching practice involves myriad aspects including: "curriculum, subject matter and epistemology, teaching and learning, and assessment-evaluation [...] the nature of what is taught, how that content is taught and learned, and how that teaching and/or learning is assessed and evaluated" (p. 18).

Furthermore, Ali's understanding could resonate with what Holliday (1999) calls 'small cultures' where he distinguishes the teaching and learning environment as being a 'culture' on its own; rather than using the term 'culture' or 'large culture' to denote all aspects and activities that take place in the classroom, he uses his concept of 'small cultures' as a paradigm by its own nature that includes social grouping or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour. Although Holliday speaks of the rather different context of applied linguistics or EFL, it might be of use to bring his argument into this discussion. I understand that what happens in the classroom is a variety of the 'small cultures' Holliday speaks about since what is usually developed in the classroom is a form of 'culture', loosely defined, where people who are involved in this 'culture' would agree upon certain conventions that are usually derived from a larger 'culture' (e.g. the higher education institution), which is in turn is derived from a larger social and cultural context. In Saudi Arabia, as I will introduce below, this multilayer understanding of cultures is crucially significant to project a special teaching environment, which directly influences the instructors' teaching practices.

This interpretation could be illustrated when considering Zaid's understanding of teaching practices. He perceives teaching practices as a component of three main elements: the instructor, the student and environment (social background):

When I talk about teaching practices I have three things in mind: the instructor, the student and the 'environment' (the social context). These three elements are inextricably intertwined and inform each other; I give an example - on the university level, I have experienced two different 'environments': Hijaz (Western Province) and Najid (the Central Province) ... for the Hijaz, people are very kind, friendly and sincere, and honest - this makes people who deal with them relaxed. In the classroom, when I say anything, I can tell their sincerity from their reactions: if they know the answer, they would say it or otherwise. Teaching, there, is all smooth and productive ... Students as well as instructors bring with them their life system outside the university, and in the classroom... For the other, Najid, it could be said that they are exactly the 'other side'; people are difficult to deal with ... in my view, you cannot say that teaching practices would be the same in these two different 'environments. (Zaid, instructors' interviews 4th)

As can be inferred from Zaid's narrative, the instructors' perceptions of teaching practice are mutually related to the wider social context. In fact the influence of societal context was a reiterated emergent theme throughout the whole set of qualitative data (I discuss this theme in detail below). However, as for a definition of teaching practices, this understanding is important since cultural and social contexts would act as defining factors of conventions and protocols within and outside the classroom. The triangulated peculiarity that Zaid defines or understands teaching practice includes: the instructor, the students and the wider social context. I argue that such an account reflects the current discussion of educational literature, the social and cultural aspects of the pedagogical practices have been received with a special interest by theorists, educators and practitioners. Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005), for example, argue that among the decisive elements of good teaching practices is what they refer to as 'supportive' social and professional community surroundings including social morals, peers' support and institutional regulations, which make good opportunities 'to teach and learn' for both the instructors as well as the students. This definition of teaching practices, according to Wechsler and Shields (2008), is the one that occurs in a supportive environment. This 'complex' activity, as

Labaree (2001) argues, involves an amalgam of myriad parties and traits, including psychological, social, and physical, that operate in a collective manner to project a good model of teaching practices.

This vision of the triangulated aspect of teaching practices helps in understanding the teaching activity as a process that mediates between three elements: the instructor (I), the content (C) and the students (S). Fenstermacher (1986) explains this relationship as follows: the instructor (I) by means of possessing knowledge, tools (methods) and good intention to impart (C) to the students (S) who initially lacks (C). Throughout teaching progress both (I) and (C) build a kind of social relationship and positively engage for the purpose of (S) acquiring (C). Nonetheless, in reality, this kind of linear relationship is not easily applicable since there are multitudes of other factors that interfere when one attempts to understand the process of teaching. One important question to raise here is: what if learning does not take place? In response, I refer to Zaid's remark: "*Teaching, there, is all smooth and productive... Students as well as instructors bring with them their life system outside the university, and in the classroom*" to argue that it might be possible to understand the nature of teaching practices only when the wider socio-cultural context is considered. For Zaid, he perceives the productivity and smoothness of teaching as a trait that is derived from the social life system of both the instructors and the students. Drawing on this argument, it could be concluded that teaching practice is a concept that needs to be complicated, rather than simplified, to reach a workable understanding.

In addition to perceiving teaching practices as combining several fundamentals shaped by a wider social context, other instructors define teaching practices as *the art of communicating knowledge to students* (Ali, instructors' interviews 2nd). When I asked Ali what he meant by saying that, he elaborated that knowledge is a wide-ranging concept that includes all theoretical and practical aspects of knowledge production; and the instructors' responsibility is to find his way to not only communicate knowledge to students, but also how to enable them to invest this knowledge for their future academic and professional welfare. As can be inferred from this discussion, Ali's perception of teaching practices includes what goes on in the classroom and beyond; his remarks regarding the academic and professional future of the students and how the acquired knowledge could help them is significant to an understanding of teaching practices as involving activities

beyond the immediate classroom encounter to involve the future utilisation of this knowledge. The *art of communicating knowledge* that Ali understands as the overreaching purpose that defines the notion of teaching practices could be optimised as a major element of what could make a good instructor. I argue that the instructors' or instructors' perceptions of effective teaching practice constitute an important element of what could make a good instructor since these understandings are the backdrop or the theoretical underpinnings that all other practices emerge from. Although Goodwin (2008) speaks of several characteristics that constitute a good instructor, including research, preparation, ability and credentials, he emphasises what he calls 'intangibles' as special crafts that instructors need to believe in and practice in order to achieve good teaching. Among these is that the instructors' belief that all students can learn, belief in their own abilities and, more importantly, is their ability to connect with students and facilitate their acquisition of knowledge.

As can be observed from the above viewpoints regarding the instructors' conceptualisation of teaching practices in the current research context and through juxtaposing their conceptualisations with other research findings, it can be noticed that these instructors are aware of the idiosyncratic elements of teaching practices. Although they demonstrate a variety of conceptualisations, I argue that these varieties are harmonious and complementary, leading to the interest of the student as far as their learning is concerned. They could be optimised within the terms of inclusiveness and student-centredness as well as being identified within the wider or macro socio-cultural context.

5.3.2 Instructors' Actual Teaching Practice (What They Do)

Since one of the major aims of the study was to explore the instructors' actual teaching practices in the current context, I directly addressed this issue in the semi-structured interviews. I asked the group of participant instructors to narrate their views regarding their own teaching practices involving all the relevant processes inside and outside the classroom. Their answers involved a myriad of narratives regarding their existing pedagogical practices including their responsibilities, how they plan teaching, classroom management, textbooks and teaching materials, assessment and evaluation, and how they handle student feedback. I understand the term 'pedagogy' as those practices that are informed by wider educational and social underpinnings. While the term 'methodology'

refers to the techniques and specific practices that the instructors adopt in the classroom, the concept of pedagogy is a more overarching one delineating the impact of the educational philosophy and tradition as well as the wider socio-cultural context of the present study. I detail the instructors' responses regarding these aspects with my analysis and commentaries in the following subsections.

5.3.2.1 Instructors' Duties (What They are Responsible for)

The instructors' perceptions of their duties include activities both inside and outside the classroom. They provided accounts of their moral and ethical commitments towards students' learning. The instructors addressed a wide range of duties that are relevant to myriad aspects of the educational process. I highlight those related to their teaching practices and how they positively or negatively affect the students' learning. Prior to presenting the findings regarding the instructors' duties, it is useful to address the concept of 'duty' as used in this argument. For most of the instructors' viewpoints, they used the term to refer to those responsibilities and tasks that they are required to fulfil as indicated by the university regulations, but I explored some other uses of the term that reflect their personal or professional intuitions regarding a moral responsibility towards the students' learning.

To start with these opinions, Ahmad, for example, provides an all-compassing understanding of an instructor's duties, and perceives his own duty as an instructor as involving all aspects of classroom activities:

I feel my responsibility to involve all activities that take place in the classroom; I feel myself responsible for making sure that students attend the class. I allow students to join the class if they appear 5 to 10 minutes later because, for me, this is a moral responsibility not to deny the students' right to attend the class. I also take the responsibility to run the class to the best of my capabilities. For example, I prepare my teaching materials according to the specified learning objectives, and make sure that all of these objectives are achieved. Additionally, I deem my responsibility is to do all of this within a shared responsibility between the students and myself to achieve our learning goals. In other words, I feel my own responsibility is to empower students to hold responsibility for their own learning. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Similar to their understanding of teaching practices, some instructors deem their responsibilities to include all aspects of classroom teaching activities. Ahmad, for example, perceives himself as having the main responsibility for running or shaping all classroom activities including allowing students to attend the class. In my interpretation of this narrative, I navigate between two epistemological accounts: a positivist and critical or neutral and sceptical. Given the presence of teaching practices of both ontological and epistemological perspectives, it is essential to understand that ontology (the nature of being, or what is there to know?), and epistemology (or how we know what we know?), - influence the instructors' interpretation of teaching practices as their epistemic accounts and beliefs that inform their practice are socially constructed within a specific context.

Reading Ahmad's accounts in what might be broadly classified in positivist terms, it could be maintained that for an instructor to be responsible for all classroom activities would make a 'good instructor' who is responsive, caring and exerts efforts to the students' well-being and education. Within these terms, a 'good instructor' could be an 'authority' in the classroom; a person who espouses control over the educational process with the aim of achieving good learning outcomes. I understand positivist teaching as a teacher-centred philosophy that adopts and relies on laws of absolute truth and sees that objective reality that can be known through objective means (Ganly, 2013). It rejects matters of mind, essences and inner causes as the "ultimate purpose of positivism is to control and predict human and natural phenomena" (Kathy, 2000).

Pedagogically and within the broader lines of positivism, the role of the instructor is clearly defined as someone who assumes authority on knowledge (or one who owns knowledge), hence, dominates the entire activities related to the process of teaching. Specifically, such a didactic method that follows a consistent scientific style focuses on the baseline of knowledge where the instructor functions as an authoritative figure (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998). In the current context, such an instructor-centred and lecture-based environment appears to be the dominant one. The clear specification of instructors' roles and behaviours is, in fact, a recurrent theme in the whole set of the qualitative data, that several other instructors speak about. They deem this approach as the most efficient in their particular context where, according to them, most students do not have active roles. Based on this analysis, it could be argued that the instructors' conscious or

unconscious adoption of a behaviourist approach would achieve the desired learning goals since, according to this approach, "effective teaching is demonstrated when the instructors can write objectives relevant to the course content, specify classroom procedures and students' behaviours needed to teach and learn such objectives, and show that the students have achieved the objectives after exposure to the instruction" (Fuhrmann & Grash, 1983, p, 287).

In addition to perceiving the current roles of the instructors as coinciding with the early behaviourist approach, it could be noted that Ahmad's remarks reflect personal attitudes or beliefs about attaining students' learning and achieving the desired learning goals. In the absence of clear educational policy, the instructors quite often refer to wisdom as imputed to adhere to their moral duty towards their students. Marouchou (2011) reports that a "growing body of research has helped to provide evidence that uncover [instructors'] beliefs (known as epistemological beliefs) and offer insights as to how instructors promote their actual perception of teaching across educational settings" (p. 123). For Ahmad and other instructors alike, they deem this as a moral responsibility to initiate humanistic roles where the instructors and the students enjoy a shared responsibility of achieving their goals. In certain cases, such creative and innovative ideas would contradict the mainstream ideals. As Csikzenmihalyi (1988) argues, some instructors bring to their teaching practice creative and valuable ideas, which, in many cases, are rejected by the commonly held conventional wisdom. This might resonate with what Fuhrmann and Grash (1983) refer to as an approach that is based on the theory of humanism. For them, humanistic teaching could be more effective when instructors are able to provide necessary activities that assure students' acquisition of knowledge within the broader realm of their (the students') needs and objectives.

Nonetheless, Ahmad's remark that he *is responsible for whatever takes place in the classroom* reflects a moral duty towards his students. Although Ahmad's remark could be read as a statement of power, I read this opinion with special interest as it reflects an example of 'collective responsibility', the roles instructors should aim for in their relationship with students. The caring and considerate tone of how Ahmad articulated his opinion negate the interpretation that his ideas reflect relations of power in this specific narrative. This shared or collective responsibility, according to Alexander (quoted in Hattie, 2009), reflects a vision

of collective responsibility rather than an individualist one. Such a shared responsibility, as Hattie argues, assures effective teaching and thus learning. This interactive mode of teaching practices resonates with what Cooper and McIntyre (1996) call 'transmission-interactive-reactive' teaching strategy. Nonetheless, it could be argued that, for students to share responsibility or have input in their own learning, is more easily said than practised. Since the study aims to investigate the instructors' actual teaching practices, it becomes necessary to read this opinion in a more critical perspective. On the one hand, Ahmad perceives himself as responsible for *all* activities that take place in the classroom and, on the other, he maintains that this responsibility could be shared with students. It is also possible that Ahmad is taking responsibility for creating a classroom ethos where there is some shared responsibility for learning. Although this opinion could be read as reflecting what actually happens in the classroom, it might also be argued that this straightforward or easily distributed responsibility is difficult to exercise in the classroom. Morgan and Morris (1999) speak of 'paradoxical' notions that most instructors hold between how they imagine themselves and what they actually do. For me, this argument is valid as the whole set of data and my personal knowledge of the context suggest that that most of the instructors would assume an authoritarian responsibility in their classrooms. Even if they claim that they maintain a shared responsibility with their students, there are still remarkable chances for them to practise controlling roles in their classroom. Research literature concerning the instructor's role emphasises the need to transform the situation from one where the instructor holds absolute power, domination and control over the classroom into one where he or she shares (in practice as well as in perception) a shared responsibility with students. Related to this argument, educational research literature tells us that there has been a growing tendency among educationalists and researchers to perceive the role of the instructors as a facilitator to students' learning rather than a source of knowledge to be transferred to students (Brufee, 1993; Cabera et al., 1999; Cokrell, 2000; Tinto, 1997). This argument could be further validated when discussing the students' narratives later.

5.3.2.2 Planning Teaching

Planning teaching is an important element of any teaching practice and, for teaching to achieve its desired learning objectives, it is vital for instructors to carefully set out their plans of what they need to perform in the classroom (Cohen et al., 2000; Eley, 2006; McNiff, 2010; Roberts, 2002). Planning is an all-inclusive term including many types of planning such as long term (e.g. programme content); medium term (e.g. module content); short term (e.g. weekly plan if a series of sessions over a week) and individual lesson planning. In the current study, I highlight the planning of teaching activities (or planning those necessary actions instructors attempt while conducting their lessons). Based on the research participants' responses, I address my discussions to individual lesson planning, and when other types of planning occur in their responses, I will highlight these types.

In the present study, planning teaching activities (or individual lesson planning) was a recurrent theme that several instructors talked about when they described what they actually did in the current context. However, in their responses, the participant instructors demonstrated discrepant views regarding planning their own teaching. It could be discerned that these responses reflect a loose distribution over a spectrum of two extreme accounts: between those who prioritise planning as the most important stage to pass through while implementing their teaching practices and those who totally discard planning under the assumption of being 'not useful'. In this section, I examine the instructors' views to explore the factors that lead to these contradictory positions. It is noteworthy to indicate that most of the interviewed instructors used the term 'planning' as a collective concept to refer to the various types and levels of planning. I however will focus on those lucid ones which denote to a specific type of planning.

The instructors who deemed the planning process as the most important element of teaching gave the sort of views expressed below.

Ahmad: Talking about positive things in my teaching practices, I give the first priority to planning, which leads to other phases of teaching such as organisation, action [actual teaching], assessment, and feedback. But, planning is the closest thing to me as it facilitates all future activities. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Khalid: I always start with planning. Planning is an important step in my teaching; it helps in preparing the teaching materials, time management, responding to emergent issues, etc. ... I also take students' opinions of my plans at the beginning of the semester. (Instructors' interviews 3rd)

Omar: I never enter the classroom without planning; I always plan for two or three classes ahead. I don't believe in day by day planning; this is not planning, not useful. I plan for everything that could take place in the classroom such as introducing the topic, use of teaching materials, notes, and technology. I always prepare PowerPoint presentation to each topic. I do this to anticipate all the setbacks that prevent good teaching from taking place. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

With the assumption that teaching is an activity that requires a careful planning, the act of relying on improvised and intuitive activities on the part of the instructors makes it quite possible that instructors fail to attend to all aspects of teaching. As these instructors indicate, planning is a prerequisite for their success and it should precede actual teaching. While this view sounds adequate, planning could be perceived as a link in the chain of teaching practices; planning teaching does not start in vacuum, but rather is an integral stage that informs teaching and, at the same time, is informed by teaching (Eley, 2006). For instance, while actual teaching tells us about the various learning styles, students' proficiency level, and the overall teaching environment, relevant and effective planning needs such knowledge. This cycle makes planning more relevant as it allows instructors to understand the students' learning behaviours, and to provide timely remedial alternatives, which minimises chances of inefficient or inappropriate use of teaching methods. Day (1999) identifies this process as 'reflection-in-action'; a process through which instructors are actively and reflectively engaged in identifying issues and needs as they emerge during the teaching practice. Day describes this process as a systematic one that occurs before and after the action which is the subject of reflection. For this process to achieve its aims it is required to be deliberate, systemised and analytical. Additionally, it requires collaboration between colleagues, which opens up further possibilities for discussions/discourse about teaching and collective planning of activities. On a similar ground, Kyriacou (1997) perceives effective teaching practice to involve timely, responsive planning and appropriate planning. Effective teaching, for him, entails more than a mere presentation of knowledge, but one that, through careful

planning, takes into consideration social, traditional, institutional and departmental challenges. (I address these aspects more fully later)

Based on this, the above opinions could reflect effective teaching practices as planning requires interactive as well as reactive strategies (Chan, 2010) where planning is deemed as a creative activity that modifies itself according to the educational environment. Planning, in relation to interactive teaching strategies, could be understood as utilising previous knowledge about the students and teaching environment in planning the current or future teaching activities. Based on the instructors' views which favour and give immense priority to planning teaching, it could be maintained that conducting a cycle of planning through merging teaching, observation and reflection would assure the value of planning in achieving learning goals. As Eraut (1992) contends, deliberative and strategic planning that is based on myriad educational elements would provide good opportunities to succeed in the profession of teaching. In addition to being an essential element of teaching practices, planning needs to embrace all aspects of teaching practices including the use of teaching methods, the utilisation of technology, the conduction of assessment, etc. As the above views demonstrate, general outlines of planning could not serve its purposes, and for effective planning to take place, it should probe into classroom details including the use of teaching aids, the employment of study skills as well as anticipating the obstacles and setbacks that could hinder teaching. Interestingly, Khalid's remark about inviting students to participate in planning demonstrates an uncommon behaviour of instructors in this context. I read this remark to reflect a more friendly and student-oriented approach. It also backs up the previous argument of the shared responsibility between instructors and students that some instructors talked about.

At the other extreme, other instructors in the same institution minimised the value and importance of planning teaching. Unlike the first group of instructors, some instructors in the second group did not directly address the issue of planning to reflect what they actually did. Although some instructors expressed opinions that reflected their own practices, others provided commentaries on the status of planning teaching in their context in general. The two sets of responses could be exemplified by these extracts:

The interviewer (I): Can you talk about the activities that you consider of no value for teaching practices:

Ali: Probably, planning is the most marginalised aspect of my teaching practices, or it is the least important.

The interviewer (I): Why do you think so?

Ali: It is impossible to apply planning, or, more precisely, the application of planning could be very limited. We, instructors, like to improvise a lot, but with a special focus on the significant topics in the textbooks; we usually avoid probing in detailed of these topics. As for planning, I, as an instructor, don't feel comfortable with it. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

Fahad: I believe our attention should be directed to what actually takes place in the classroom; to spend long hours for planning and preparation is not useful as we change what we have planned. I focus on immediate issues which require adaptation of the teaching plans. I have strong reservation on planning especially long-term planning; most of our planning requires revision as it is just for formalities; no-one applies them. In reality, the act of teaching requires us to be ready and responsive to the changing obligations of teaching. (Instructors' interviews 6th)

Abdullah: ... planning in our university is not honest; it is not useful, and those who speak about planning find themselves doing different things in the classroom. I cannot do good planning because the learning objectives are loose, irrelevant and not useful. They are written by people who don't know our students. I always say that for anyone to set objectives, they need to enter the classrooms and interact with the students to know their level. Objectives are already written and preserved, but few would look at them and apply them. (Instructors' interviews 7th)

As can be read from this latter set of responses, these instructors deem planning to be of no value with remarks that indicate a perceived lack of honesty regarding how much planning some instructors claim they do. In fact, interpreting these views while taking the first ones in the previous section is challenging, but, as an inside researcher, I use my experience in this context to interpret such accounts.

To start with the first narrative, Ali speaks of the marginalisation of the planning of teaching, and when I asked him about the reasons for this opinion, he elaborates by saying that while planning does exist, it is not used or applied. I realise this view of Ali to be a sincere one since, for him, the real value of planning is in applying what is planned. To recall some of the instructors' views in the first set, the component of applying these seems to be absent from their remarks.

The second narrative of Fahad is also quite interesting in providing a special understanding of the issue of planning in this context. Although Fahad appears to distinguish between planning and teaching, taking the latter to be more relevant to students' learning while the first is always subject to change, he confuses the role of planning with that of actual teaching practice. I understand Fahad's views to be similar to those of Ali as both devalue planning with the assumption that planning takes place in an early stage and is considered as an end in itself. Fahad believes that focusing on immediate issues is more important than planning, which indicates a particular understanding or practice of planning teaching. It could be inferred that planning practice among the faculties is a requirement of the department, a routine of just 'formalities' that they need to go through as a mere practice of the instructors. Indeed, such an interpretation is convincing since, in the current research context, most instructors complain about planning as demanding, time consuming, and useless. Instructors, especially senior ones, often depend on their intuition and long experience to handle their teaching, particularly immediate issues. While this might look like a sweeping generalisation, some instructors, in informal chat would often provide these narratives when planning is mentioned. Additionally, it may be worth noting that one of the consequences of bringing in (Question Answer) QA procedures is that instructors are required to document their practice e.g. write plans. But then the implementation of these plans is not always checked - hence it is seen as a bureaucratic exercise.

Planning teaching, according to Abdullah, lacks honesty since it is not applicable as they do not reflect the students' needs. In fact, Fahad articulates the behaviour of most instructors in this context. As I will discuss below, the instructors, or more precisely, the 'teaching culture' suffers from several challenges, and planning teaching is no exception. Abdullah is aware of these challenges especially those related to the massive gap between theory and practice or between policy-

makers and practitioners. Since good planning would reflect the students' needs, such views may indicate an attitude of what the instructors are commenting on is the kind of planning they are expected to do and how this contrasts to the kind of planning they would like to do. The lack of honesty Abdullah speaks about reflects such lack of coordination between those who set out teaching objectives and the immediate demands of classroom teaching since, for him, learning objectives are 'written by people who don't know our students'. He believes that for planning to be efficient, a thorough and updated knowledge of the students (in the classroom) is needed. To recall my earlier argument about the nature of effective planning, I understand Abdullah's views as reflecting a perception of strict and rigid planning that takes place at earlier stages of teaching. Nonetheless, since learning objectives are different from planning, Abdullah could still plan his lesson even if he has had the learning objectives imposed upon him. In other words, planning could include the activities instructors undertake, the resources they use, the type of questions they ask and the amount of time they allocate to each part of his lesson.

5.3.2.3 Course or Teaching Management

Course or teaching management is a vibrant aspect of any teaching practice, and this study addresses this aspect with interest as it sheds light on the teaching practice attained by the instructors in the current research context. I addressed this aspect by asking the participant instructors to narrate their accounts about how they manage their own teaching in the classroom and beyond. Specifically, two aspects of teaching management are identified: course management that refers to developing the curriculum and the pedagogy for the course including the teaching materials and teaching methods required to conduct teaching. The second type of management refers to 'classroom management', which refers to those activities relevant to class timing, taking attendance, running exams, etc. In general, the instructors' responses demonstrated a variety of techniques they employ to manage their teaching and courses. These responses could be optimised as follows: a) managing teaching is often coincident with time management where the instructors emphasised the value of good distribution of time between several teaching activities during the class; b) structuring the courses around several relevant features including concepts, topics, subject matter, among others, is deemed of high significance to some instructors as

reflecting the excellence of teaching practices; c) connecting the topics being taught with current issues is another technique that some instructors follow to attract the students' attention and to emphasise the smoothness and fluidity of their teaching; and d) restructuring, reforming and integrating the course elements to meet the changing demands of each group of students. In this section, I discuss these aspects in detail and provide my commentary in order to better understand how the concept of teaching management could be branched out to involve more relevant aspects as derived from the current context.

For classroom management, the instructors estimated time management as reflecting running and organising (managing) the classroom activities. This type of 'teaching' management was a recurrent theme among several instructors who maintained that managing class time is essential to achieve their goals. For example, Ali emphasised classroom time management as one among several major factors to achieve learning goals: "*... I use the first ten minutes to introduce the topic, half an hour for my presentation and the rest of time (10 to 15 minutes) for students' questions and discussion ... I find this distribution quite efficient*" (Instructors' interviews 2nd). On the other hand, course management was also emphasized by some instructors who perceived managing a long term distribution as a vital process to achieve their goals. Khalid highlighted the importance of distributing and managing time over the whole semester: "*... as for managing my teaching, I give immense priority to the issue of time distribution - I distribute the whole units, topics and teaching materials over the whole semester*" (Instructors' interviews 3rd).

For these instructors and some others, they expressed their interest in time management and how they responded to the component of time while conducting their teaching. In fact, time management including punctuality, pace of the lessons and the use of class time are among several other related issues the instructors underlined while expressing their views about course management. It is interesting to mention here that none of the interviewed instructors criticised their own time management or even complained about this aspect of teaching, while several students expressed their concern and dissatisfaction about how time is used in their classes. In fact, research literature emphasises time management and provides special techniques to help instructors manage their teaching time. Anderson (2004), for instance, considers time management as a

component of 'in-class competence' that is owned and practised by effective instructors. Similarly, Borich (2000) describes how class time management is practised by those efficient instructors by providing several indications for good or efficient time management. Among these indications are the following ones: to start and end the class on time, minimising non-instructional time and distributing time equally between students.

Despite the fact that the interviewed instructors underscored the importance of class time management, they did not talk about *how* they attended to managing it in their classes, and the students' complaints about their instructors' time management leave this aspect subject to debate (I include examples of student' views of "student's learning" below). I however find it useful to respond to the students' issue with time management. Based on empirical research, Stones (1992) concludes that pronounced teaching problems occur when they fail to allocate adequate time for the students to absorb, interact and respond to newly taught subjects. It might be argued that the instructors in the current context tended to follow a strict application of their planned time, which in most cases yielded poor teaching. Lesson planning (as I explained above), and planning time, in particular, are critical skills that instructors need to respond to; they need to allow room for modifying their previously set plans and scheduled activities.

In addition to time management, some instructors talked about tailoring the course so as to meet the students' needs: Among these responses are the following:

Abdullah: From specialisation [Islamic Studies], the general features of the curriculum are clear; this is because I have taught it for many years. I build my teaching around concepts, each week I teach between 15 to 20 new concepts. Ideally speaking, it is possible to cover all of the planned topics and concepts, but in most cases, I reduce them. This 'automatic' way does not work with our students. Sometimes, I need to spend more time on some difficult topics ...
(Instructors' interviews 7th)

Khalid: ... Since my topic is all theoretical, I find myself reforming or restructuring my teaching methods as well as the topics I teach. This requires doing two things at the same time: either to reduce the topics by choosing more important ones, or to restructure the whole course by transferring these topics to other future courses. I also use different methods to teach different topics... I consider this necessary to achieve the teaching objectives. (Instructors' interviews 3rd)

As can be observed from the above extracts, the common theme between the two narratives is the structuring or restructuring of the course (materials) to fulfil the needs of the students. Abdullah's use of the expression *structuring the course around concepts* delineates the notion of 'concept based teaching and learning' and reflects Abdullah's awareness and attention to the students' (learners') cognitive processes. This opinion is rearticulated by Khalid when speaking about adjusting the topics in the manner he described. In addition to demonstrating flexibility regarding the course materials and topics, Abdullah alluded to another form of adaptation that is relevant to the adaptation of his teaching methods. In fact, it could be argued that the two elements are inextricably related since, as pointed out by these two instructors, the concepts and topics could impose particular ways of teaching. Furthermore, such adaptability of the course, whether that of the teaching materials or teaching methods, becomes a necessity when considering the learners' needs and levels of proficiency, among other factors. Based on this, course management could be deemed as consisting of wide-ranging and inclusive teaching strategies that require taking into consideration several factors such as time and resources availability, teaching environment, and, above all, the students' needs.

While issues related to course management were recurrent in the instructors' narratives, some instructors provided narratives addressing special experiences in individual lessons. I find it necessary to include some of these experiences as they reflect how some instructors connect and contextualise their teaching into immediate events and matters that attract students' attention. Ahmad's following narrative is quite significant in relation to discussing this aspect of course management and teaching practice, in general:

Ahmad: I always start my class with a quick revision of what has been taught before. I also allow space for some questions since while revising what has been taught, some students might need to ask about further issues. ... During this semester I don't commit myself to the book contents, I usually select a case that is relevant to students' lives/ I navigate through this case to search for possible connections to the required topic; this case often reflects urgent matters that captures the students' attention. I foster this case to create a teaching atmosphere that is based on discussions and different opinions. ... I try to listen to students' concerns/ these cases are usually debatable. I like using them because they entail different aspects of the topic being discussed. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

This extract is part of a longer response Ahmad provided while talking about the various means he used to manage his teaching in the classroom. Probably this narrative resonates with a typical strategy that most instructors resort to for introducing new topics. Ahmad's emphasis on using this strategy throughout the semester is however significant in telling us more about course management strategies and how they might be useful in particular contexts. Ahmad, as well as some other instructors, talked about this strategy, but in different contexts, for example, students' interaction, involvement and discussion (see below). In fact, the profession or, more precisely, the art of teaching calls us to foster whatever possible to achieve the desired learning outcomes. In this particular context, as I discuss below, the issue of engaging students is a challenge that most instructors talked about. While it is quite possible that, in other educational contexts, students are active and willing to discuss and interact, in the current context, where students are coming from rural and nomadic places, engagement becomes a crucial matter. Williams and Burden (1997) argue that "learners make their own sense of the world, but they do so within a social context and through social interactions" (p. 28). Ahmad's narrative regarding connecting teaching to students' lives could therefore be noteworthy as far as pedagogy is concerned. For him, and probably for several others, this strategy is vital as an involvement strategy for learners whose proficiency and academic levels are often below the average. Furthermore, I understand this strategy as an outlet for some instructors whose areas of specialisation are rigid and needs additional efforts to involve students. It also becomes a demand when the textbooks do not connect

knowledge to students' lives; this assumption could be inferred from Ahmad's remark: "*During this semester I don't commit myself to the book contents, I usually select a case that is relevant to students' lives*". It could be concluded that for teaching to be meaningful to students, instructors need to search for all possible ways, including structuring, restricting and adapting, as well as connecting their teaching materials and methods to the students' needs. I elaborate in discussing these issues in the next section that addresses the instructors' use of teaching materials.

5.3.2.4 Teaching Materials

'Textbooks' is the word that most instructors used when talking about anything concerning teaching materials. They also use textbooks as the main or, to a great extent, the only source for their teaching. They also pointed out that, in most cases, the textbooks they use are previously decided upon and 'imposed' by the department; some other instructors, however, challenged this by indicating that they choose, adapt or modify the textbooks themselves. This group of instructors explained their ways of preparing these 'textbooks' (teaching materials) by compiling them from other books (i.e. photocopying chapters or sections from other books or resources and producing their own textbooks which bear their names). Others expressed their opinion that all *teaching materials should be restricted to books*; they however believed it was the right of the instructors to decide upon these books. Other responses dealt with the use of extra teaching materials to support the textbooks including the use of technological resources such as PowerPoint software and internet sites (Youtube) among others. More interestingly, some views, although few, highlighted the importance of the selected textbooks to fulfil the learning objectives, and students' needs, in particular. Lastly, some instructors expressed their opinions of the textbooks that were currently used, or more precisely, imposed on them. For this group of instructors, they perceived the textbooks used as weak and lacking criticality, continuity and integrity with the other textbooks used for the upper levels.

For the first of the themes introduced above, most instructors used the word 'textbook', in its narrow sense, whenever talking about the teaching materials they used. The following extracts are examples of these narratives:

The Interviewer (I): Can you talk about the teaching materials⁸ you use?

Ali: Wallah [a way people in Saudi Arabia open their conversation to stress the importance of what they are about to say] I use nothing instead of the book [textbook]

The Interviewer (I): Who chose this textbook?

Ali: The department.

The Interviewer (I): The department?

Ali: Yes, the department imposes the books we use in teaching, and there is another issue; the instructors are obliged to use these books because resources are very scarce in our region.

The Interviewer (I): What about other resources such as journals, magazines, the Internet?

Ali: No. No. No, I do not depend on them, and the department does not depend on them either. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

The academic level of the textbooks used is far ahead to the students' level, I spend most of the time teaching prior concepts and skills that students should have studied in previous courses. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

This exchange is typical of ones that emphasised the fact that what is used as teaching material is a textbook. However, I opt to focus on demonstrating this dialogue between Ali and me to highlight several points. First, in the current context, the instructors, as pointed out by most of them as well as by the students, use one resource referring to it as a 'book'. Although I am aware of the differences that translation from the original use of the word in Arabic into its English equivalent may bring, the sense of the word used in this educational context is inclusive to include any materials in the hand of the students. Therefore, the word 'book' or 'textbook' consists of photocopied and bound materials that instructors

⁸ I used the Arabic of the term Teaching Materials and avoided narrowing down the concept into 'textbooks'.

place in the print centres and that students buy. Although this description might at the first glance seem irrelevant, I deem it significant as it provides a unique insight into how the teaching materials or textbooks are produced and 'consumed' in this context. In many cases, as the students indicated, the book that is photocopied is placed there by the instructors for several years without any revision or modification. Abdullah, for example, said that he uses a book that was authored during the sixties of the previous century.

In addition to insisting that the textbooks are previously chosen by the instructors and the department, Ali deems that it is only the book that could achieve our goals: *"by using a specific textbook, we can achieve important aims ... we also can protect our traditions against other incoming ideologies ... this is, you know, an agreed upon policy"* (Instructors' interviews 2nd).

The second theme that could be drawn from the instructors' narratives regarding teaching materials is the use of some extra teaching materials to back up the existing textbook, and to respond to the learners' needs. In his narrative regarding the importance of students' research, Omar talked about the various resources that he used as teaching materials including those of the Internet. He also emphasised adaptability and revision of the teaching materials and textbooks in every semester. When I asked him about the reasons for this, he talked about his personal belief that *"all sources of knowledge should be open to students"*. Ahmad, another instructor, also mentioned a similar view by stressing the need to *'back up'* the textbook with extra teaching materials to respond to the changing nature of students' learning. Others also talked about the instructors' right to have control over the teaching materials they used but, as this section discusses the actual teaching practices, I leave analysing these views to the section that deals with the instructors' *perceptions* regarding effective teaching practices. It is, however, important to include some students' views regarding textbooks to reach an adequate understanding of what and how textbooks are being used in this context. One of the students, Marwan for example, claims that in the first week he can tell whether the instructors have paid attention to their teaching materials or whether they were just selected in a rush. Some of the textbooks, Marwan goes on, *"add nothing to my knowledge"* (Students' interviews 7th).

As I attempt to explain above, based on these findings, the issue regarding teaching materials and textbooks in the current context is complicated and multifaceted. It also reflects several other problems and challenges that instructors and students face (as I will discuss below). I, however, prefer to probe into the importance of teaching materials as an aspect of teaching practices. For, in these contemporary times, a wide range of teaching materials is now available to instructors, particularly through the Internet and online resources. Additionally, knowledge resources have become more accessible and available to students. Teaching practices should therefore respond to these myriad resources in a more challenging manner.

The above views and narratives demonstrate the different constructive ways that instructors attend to teaching materials. Probably the most significant of these views is Omar's when connecting the development of teaching materials with students' research. Omar, in fact, provide us with an interesting means and a constructive outlook on to how, in these current times, we need to attend to textbooks and teaching materials. His link between the students' autonomy in research while selecting their resources and the textbooks they formally study might provide instructors with effective strategies to bridge the gap between students' changing learning demands and keeping the standards of good education. While, in most cases, students use topics from the textbooks they study to develop their research, it might be possible to follow a reverse process. As Omar remarked, the instructors can use the resources the students *themselves* select in their research to develop their own teaching materials.

Youngman and Singh (2005) contend that competent instructors are those who perceive their learners as mobile individuals and do whatever necessary to meet this mobility. In a similar manner, Biggs (1999) argues that dedicated instructors, through their scholarship and research, could develop relevant perspectives of their areas of expertise which could not be found in the markets of ready-made textbooks. In a similar vein, the instructors' research when combined to that of the fellow students could add to this innovative method of developing teaching materials.

Neumann (1992) emphasises the relationship between research and teaching. In what he calls 'the tangible nexus', he argues that university instructors can develop and disseminate the latest trends in knowledge, facts, and ways of engagement with students. Coate et al. (2001) perceive the university instructors to be at the cutting edge of their specialisations, and, therefore, they can develop a corpus of up-to-date, relevant and flexible materials as drawn from their immediate engagement with research. These perspectives, according to Coate et al., when accompanied by a list of multi-structural methods of teaching, can also be passed on to students. Drawing on these arguments and my findings, I advocate the linkage between teaching practices (methods employed for teaching) and instructors' and students' research as an effective strategy or method to develop relevant teaching materials. This method could also afford room for students' role, voice and various learning needs.

In fact, the common trend in most international educational systems is the instructors' inclination to use extra teaching materials; they adopt such a practice as an essential aspect of their teaching practice to fill in the gaps in the textbooks. For this type of instructor, this practice indicates that the prescribed textbooks are unable to meet the ever-changing learners' needs. Several conclusions could be drawn from this practice: a) this confirms that any previously selected textbooks are subject to potential shortcomings, which b) gives indications about the centrality of the policy makers' decisions regarding the selection of teaching materials. c) It also could be observed that some, but not all, instructors in this context are aware of the need to vary teaching materials and maintain them with the most up-to-date knowledge. d) Most importantly, this disparity tells us that those who are responsible for selecting teaching materials are not in direct contact with those who are in immediate contact with teaching. In other words, it could be concluded that they ignore the learners' needs and impose on them their own vision of 'proper' knowledge.

As can be observed, the instructors' narratives regarding their use of teaching materials reflect a contradictory state of affairs. In fact, this discrepancy is an interesting one as it reflects several other contradictions in the instructors' views regarding many other issues. While it seems that some instructors are satisfied with their ways regarding teaching materials, others are less content when they consider the need for more specialised and modern-day textbooks that provide

learners with skills according to the new trends in learning and teaching. Both groups of instructors, however, reason their views according to certain perspectives; while variation is interesting to reflect the nature of diversity among instructors' teaching practices styles, the lack of diversity of textbooks and the strict manner through which they are introduced to the students reflect the bounded and centralised nature of the current educational context. This inconsistency, I argue, could bring a fundamental question regarding the policy-making and the autonomy of the instructors. While, in most cases, this centrality is imposed by the educational system or policy makers, for other instructors it could be understood as self-imposed. Instructors of this latter type, who resort to using fixed textbooks, might estimate this practice as a safe refuge, over-trusting the system or as lacking confidence in their own ability to prepare and adapt their own textbooks and teaching materials.

Alongside the previous argument, the textbooks used or imposed, as perceived by most of the instructors, do not promote critical thinking skills, which provide the students with ways to question the knowledge provided to them. Critical thinking skills, as used by some instructors, could also refer to the utilization and employment of the acquired knowledge in real life situations. The fact that these textbooks do not encourage the necessary skills that help students to employ and transfer theoretical knowledge is perceived by the instructors as weak aspects of the textbooks. Similar to the issues related to the strict imposition of the textbooks, these textbooks, according to some instructors, fail to meet the learners' need for critical thinking skills to meet the ever-changing demands of the current times. These demands of the current times with its unprecedented conflicts call instructors to seriously consider the need for teaching materials that foster and develop students' critical thinking skills. The key argument of the rupture between what is needed and what exists in the current context regarding curricula not only leads to instructors' dissatisfaction regarding the textbooks but also impacts their wider social aspirations for advancement and development, since what these textbooks offer is a type of learning that is old fashioned, which mainly depend on indoctrination on the part of the instructors, and memorisation on the part of the students. In her study regarding the methodological problems of textbooks, Kalmus (2004) investigates the interactive relationship between textbooks and learners. Among the core problems of textbooks is that they fail to

promote critical thinking skills due to an absence of social interactivity. In the current context, textbooks receive minor attention, and serious efforts to enhance them seem to be absent.

The last theme that emerges from the instructors' narratives is that these textbooks lack continuity and integrity. In other words, some instructors complained about the fact that the prescribed books do not follow a logical and gradual order that meets the developmental aspect of learning. Interestingly, some of these opinions came from those who believe in the use of specific textbooks without leaving room for adaptation and change. I read the two views as signifying their objection, but also inability to take action to change policies regarding the selection and use of the textbooks. This also reveals the lack of coordination among instructors as well as policy makers. In brief, there are copious issues related to teaching materials and textbooks, whether those are published or combined by instructors, as the interviewed instructors and students demonstrated. I opt to address only the most significant ones as these could reflect the old fashioned and centralised educational culture that prevails in the current context.

5.3.2.5 Lecturing

All the interviewed instructors used the terms 'lecture' and 'lecturing' whenever they described their method of teaching. Prior to summarising and engaging with the instructors' views regarding this theme, it is important to provide a note regarding the use of the terms 'lecture' and 'class' in Arabic. In most Arab universities, including the site of this current study, the word 'lecture' is used interchangeably with 'class'. For example, the expression: '*I have a class*' is often used in Arabic as '*I have a lecture*'. As minor as this note might be, it reflects a norm or 'culture' among most students and instructors in the Arab world's higher education institutions and the current university is no exception. The term 'lecture' is used in the whole dataset whether from the instructors or the students. In this section, I will utilise this description among other facts regarding lecturing to explore how the instructors optimise their own in-class teaching practices. As expected, all of the interviewed instructors and their students indicated that lecturing was the only teaching style used. To probe further into answering the questions of why and how lectures are conducted, the data indicate that lecturing style is mostly determined by the students' learning styles and levels of

proficiency. Additionally, the instructors indicated that lecturing was the best method for theoretical subjects, and the topics being taught determine the teaching styles used. Others expressed their dissatisfaction with the overuse of lectures, justifying this overuse by attributing it to several factors, including the students' learning styles, the number of the students, and lack of necessary facilities for other styles of teaching.

5.3.2.6 Assessment

Data concerning the theme of the instructors' methods of assessing students is extensive in this educational context. I, however, will present them under two major themes. Firstly, most instructors use written forms (in-classroom exams) of evaluation following a strict and standardised formal written examination for the purpose of deciding who passes and who fails the course. Secondly, some instructors' accounts suggest they use the exams as a practice in perceived power and manipulative authority over the students. Other instructors express their discontent with these practices as well as with the overall system of assessment. It is necessary to point out here that while there are several types and purposes of assessment such as summative, formative, oral and written, most of the interviewed instructors talked about their use of written exams for summative purposes. I detail these responses as follows:

The use of in-classroom written exams is the dominant assessment technique that is used in the current context. The following extract exemplifies some other similar ones:

The Interviewer (I): As far as assessment is concerned, what forms of evaluation do you use?

Khalid: I specify my exams in the first lecture, and distribute the grades according to the followed regulations. I provide students with four exams; two mid-terms 20 grades each and final exam 40 grades and 20 for attendance and participation.

The Interviewer (I): Could you please explain more about which types of exams you use?

Khalid: I use in-classroom exams - as I said, two mid-terms and one final, we all do this.

The Interviewer (I): Are all your exams written ones?

Khalid: Yes.

The Interviewer (I): Why do you use three exams?

Khalid: Sometimes I do three mid-terms and choose the best two for the students. Maybe, I am the only one who does this.

The Interviewer (I): Can you tell me why you do it this way?

Khalid: It is for the benefit of the students - I do this to increase their chances to get good grades and pass the course.

The Interviewer (I): How do the students receive this way? Do you think this will encourage them or make them concerned about the exams?

Khalid: 'I don't care'; the student who is given such an opportunity and does not use it does not affect me in any way. I believe my way is the most objective to determine the students' levels. (Instructors' interviews 3rd)

In my teaching, I do not highlight exams, I focus on teaching skills. I try to convince students to focus on the learning not on exams. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

This extract is part of a longer one regarding the techniques Khalid uses for assessing his students. As can be observed from Khalid's description, the in-classroom written exams are the only ones used to assess students. In fact, Khalid's remarks can be read at several levels, such as the spontaneity and confidence of his discourse which might indicate that the described method of evaluation is trusted as the best one. I doubt that Khalid does not know about other evaluation techniques, but he mentioned none during our conversation. On another level of reading, the strictness of this evaluative technique is indicative of the instructors' teaching practices in general e.g. their use of teaching materials and lecturing. More importantly, the students are disadvantaged by the use of this rigid assessment method. In their open-ended answers as well as in their interviews many students expressed their discontent, fear, intimidation and dissatisfaction regarding the way they are assessed. For example, expressing his

intimidation, Fawzi says: “*I cannot ask [an instructor] to review my paper because this might lead to failing the course*”. Another student, Hasan describes the correction process as something beyond question: “*Our [instructor] says that his marking is 100 percent correct ... he says: it’s a waste of time to spend another hour re-correcting our exam papers ... some of them even challenge us to find any mistake in their correction*” (Fawzi and Hasan, students’ interviews 11th and 14th). While students should be entitled to high quality assessment, such methods fail to meet the demands of up-to-date robust assessment techniques that guarantee the fine quality of learning and teaching. This conclusion coincides with Biggs and Tang’s (2007) findings who assert that exams conducted with the minimum effort on the part of the instructors, although seeming to meet the learning requirements, only touch the surface levels of learning.

Additionally, Khalid highlights the issue of grades and students' success or failure as reflecting the ultimate purpose of exams. Other purposes of assessment such as diagnostic or affirmative are not used by most of the instructors in this study. This is to argue that the use of particular assessment forms reflects the instructors' conceptions of teaching. At the level of individual instructors, the methods of assessment adopted, the learning objectives and the teaching methods are strongly intertwined. The relationship between these variables is determined by their deeper teaching philosophy. The use of exams for the mere purpose of deciding who succeeds and those who fails reflects the power that instructors hold over the permission or hindrance of knowledge; this control is exercised through politically-informed decisions on the knowledge to be given to students through teaching (lecturing), then the acquisition of this knowledge is tested through strict exams to guarantee the production of confirmative learners. This abusive authority on the part of instructors is displaced through practising an absolute authority over the conveyance of exams. Khalid's remark that he *does not care* is highly symptomatic of the perceived power he and other instructors alike practise in the current teaching setting.

Similar to this, another instructor claimed that he was able to evaluate the students and to decide whether they would succeed or fail in the first week. How odd such a statement is! But still it reflects some of the assessment strategies followed by some instructors. This should raise substantial questions regarding the whole educational system in the present context: who decides upon the

quality of teaching? Who maintains authority upon what and how to teach? And who decides about the validity and accuracy of the assessment methods? In the current context, although these questions seem easy to answer, they entail colossal epistemological complications. The right for students to have an input in their own education, including how they should be assessed, is totally absent from the minds of the instructors.

Abdullah describes his assessment technique as follows:

... I always have room for exams. My written exam does not go beyond the taught materials ... I believe that the assessment techniques used, including mine, have massive shortcomings ... they only focus on specific aspects of the subjects being taught ... we lack a clear strategy of how and why we plan and devise our assessment techniques. (Instructors' interviews 7th)

Although he did not excuse himself, Abdullah provides a convincing narrative of how the assessment techniques used are limited, partial, unreliable and inadequate. For me, I read this opinion of Abdullah as an honest and audacious one as he practises self-criticism contextualising his disapproval of the assessment methods in a wider criticism of the educational system.

Students in this study generally expressed their intimidation and fear of exams. Kember et al. (2008) draw a connection between anxiety-provoking assessment systems and a surface approach to teaching and learning. They argue that students are likely to agonise over their own learning and regularly suffer a loss of motivation at the times of examinations. Assessment methods, if carefully devised and diversified, could therefore be taken up as another resource to broaden learning and its potential outcome.

5.3.2.7 Students' Feedback

Students' feedback is one major factor that is believed to have an integrated relationship with teaching practices. It provides a kind of assessment of teaching practices on the part of the students whereby instructors could review their own teaching styles to meet the students' learning needs. The following views were reported from interviewing the instructors regarding their responses to students' feedback. The instructors reported that the students' feedback was oral and limited to specific matters related to previously explained lessons. They also

reported various ways in which they responded to the students' feedback; these ways could be summarised as follows: a) some instructors' answers revealed lack of understanding of the term and, when I explained it to them, they stated that they did not have such a practice. b) Others however asserted that they frequently used feedback to enhance their teaching materials and methods. c) Other instructors complained about the students' passive role in the process of learning and teaching.

The following set of instructors' answers encapsulates the above views regarding the students' feedback:

The Interviewer (I): What do you think of students' feedback?

Zaid: I cannot say it is sufficient.

The Interviewer (I): Do students' provide feedback? Do you think they are responsive to this element?

Zaid: No. Students never ask - students do not demand anything. This does not help the instructors - it helps them relax. The students and the whole society consider the university a place for the instructor to be relaxed, but to pay efforts.

The Interviewer (I): Why do you think the students hold this image? Why don't they provide feedback?

Zaid: Some students told me that we fear the instructors - we always have the feeling of intimidation. If we demand more work in his side, more effort - this would have a negative impact on us regarding our evaluation.

The Interviewer (I): Do you think instructors do this?

Zaid: This might be true. Students always fear exams and they fear that the instructors could use them and grades as weapons against the students. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

My students do not know what feedback means. They are passive, and cannot talk properly in the classroom. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Probably this extract is indicative of several issues related to the educational culture in this context, including the interpersonal relationship between the instructors and the students, the assessment issue, and the teaching culture in addition to students' feedback. I, however, wish to focus on two perspectives: the interpersonal relationships and students' feedback. Prior to my discussion of this extract, it is important to highlight that several instructors found difficulty in understanding the concept of students' feedback, and when I tried to explain it to them, they confirmed that they never used it to evaluate their teaching. Students' feedback is an important aspect of the teaching and learning process, and the instructor/student relationship. The basic and well-established argument regarding feedback is that it provides the instructor with immediate evaluation of their teaching practices so that they can develop and improve their methods, teaching materials and assessment to achieve effective learning. Research is copious regarding the increasing importance of students' feedback and its role in improving teaching effectiveness (e.g. Cohen, 1980; Costin et al., 1971; Hattie, 2009; Penny, 2004; Ramsden, 2003; Richardson, 2005; Rowley, 2003). Hattie, for example, in his proposition of a model of what he called 'visible teaching and learning', argues that, among the means that confirm teaching and learning effectiveness, is one where learning is approached as an explicit goal; but for this to be attained, both instructors and students (in their various ways) seek to ascertain the challenges of learning, and this may occur "when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate, and engaging people ([instructor], students, peers, and so on) participating in the act of learning" (p. 22). Similarly, in their report entitled *Considering Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: 2007-2013*, Gunn and Fisk (2013) report that students' feedback is an important aspect of teaching that demonstrates excellence as it assists instructors to reflect on their own teaching practice and attend to students' learning needs. Similarly, Hay's *Inspiring Academic* (2011) lists students' feedback among other similar criteria that help instructors realise the inadequacies of their teaching. He argues that students' feedback is a valuable aspect of the learning/teaching process that calls instructors to think deeply about the various ways of developing their teaching. In order for development to be achieved, he argues, it requires and involves the students as active agents, and to focus on their learning rather than delivery of content. This not only requires

paying close attention to students' feedback, but also making meticulous efforts to pursue feedback and act on it in a timely way. .

In addition to these arguments, and based on my findings, I argue that interpersonal relations between the instructors and the students are of immense importance for encouraging the students to provide constructive feedback and to foster their critical thinking skills. As the corpus of the data discussed so far indicates, the students in the current context are generally perceived as passive and assume a very marginal role in their own education. I therefore read the above quotation as well as the similar ones to suggest that the current educational context is largely governed by relations of power between instructors and learners where the latter ones are disadvantaged, marginalised and powerless. Effective relationships between the instructors and the students would strengthen the ties of mutual respect, appreciation and trust. I perceive interpersonal relations as beneficial to both the instructors and the students. On the one hand, on the part of the students, maintaining an interpersonal relationship with their instructors would eliminate feelings of fear and coercion, and encourage students to take an active role in their own education. On the other hand, on the part of the instructor, interpersonal relations with their students would allow space for her/him to reconsider her/his teaching and to take actions to enhance them. Roberts (1998) believes that both student and peer feedback facilitates self-directed development, which implies, Roberts goes on, that instructor development cannot be abstracted from cultural or social settings. From a social constructivist perspective, the importance of personal relation, communication and collaboration would enhance opportunities to use the same language; hence, building ties that would clarify ideas through interaction. Roberts (1998) contends that such interchange between interpersonal and professional and, I add, humanistic dimensions of the educational process, would enable constructive feedback to occur.

While, as the above example shows, students desist from being involved in feedback out of fear that their weak position would be threatened, the instructors also feel discomfort. The lack of understanding of the purpose of feedback could contribute to such feelings for both. For the students, the general assumption is that providing feedback or 'evaluation' (see below) would place them at high risk of the instructors' power. Nonetheless, I argue that the above extract

demonstrates an instructor's concern about the students' feedback. In fact, Zaid articulates his own, as well as the other instructors', concerns regarding the whole issue of feedback. For instructors with this understanding of feedback, they perceive it as threatening to their intellectual and professional integrity and quite often resist being involved in any kind of feedback. Research literature confirms that students' feedback, when used for the sole purposes of evaluation and rating, is quite often resisted by the instructors. Haskell (1997), for example, argues that students' feedback regarding the effectiveness of their instructors' methods is quite often received with unease as it could threaten their academic position.

On another level of discussion, the above extract illustrates a misunderstanding of the purpose of students' feedback by both the students and even, sometimes, by the instructors. Zaid's connection between exams, threats, and intimidation on the part of the students with their feedback indicates a misinterpretation of the purpose of feedback. While research literature addresses the various aspects and purposes of feedback, Zaid's view indicates that he reduces the various types of feedback into 'evaluative feedback', where the students' feedback takes place at the end of the course and for the purpose of evaluating the course and the instructors. Cashin (1989) warns that evaluative and judgemental feedback is often subject to 'conflict of interest' that may arise between different stakeholders. This understanding, added to the lack of strong interpersonal relationships, could cause the instructors and the students to either underestimate or refrain from using feedback to enhance the teaching practices and solve issues around students' learning. Generally, this kind of formal or evaluative feedback is used to serve as 'checking' mechanism for summative purposes with little value of enhancing work. In addition to this, cultural and social dimensions are significant to understand issues around the students' or peers' feedback. At a conceptual level, feedback remain an underdeveloped concept in Saudi Arabian social and professional contexts; issues of reliability and lack of trust, according to Al-Issa and Sulieman (2007), are still largely influential in the Gulf region.

Additionally, the instructors reported that students' feedback was limited and lacked serious engagement with the topics as well as only coming from a few volunteers. In his response to my question regarding the students' feedback, Abdullah reported that he distributed blank sheets of papers towards the end of the semester and asked the students to write whatever they considered

necessary as an evaluation of the course. He also mentioned that students did not have to write their names. When I asked why blank sheets, and not ones that include specific points, he responded that his way would allow more freedom to express their views without any directive remarks. When I asked him to summarise the common views in the students' feedback, he provided a long narrative regarding the lack of seriousness on the part of the students. He continued:

... our students know that their feedback is not going to be marked. They sometimes write anything, silly or nonsense issues. Unfortunately our students did not reach the level you talk about. This is a problem of the whole society; they often take such things [feedback] with cynicism - they are never serious about it ... you find the student knows that feedback is not rewarded by grades or anything else, therefore, they take it as a game ... sometimes I become enthusiastic to receive their feedback. When I go home and read what they had written, I discover that they know nothing ... they write aimless and random things ... (Instructors' interviews 7th)

In addition to its indication of some of the previously discussed issues, especially those relevant to the social and institutional 'culture' of underestimating the value of feedback, this extract reveals that, similar to the instructors, the students either devalue or do not know much about feedback. I read this opinion as indicating twofold issues. The first issue is the lack of specific criteria provided to the students represented by Abdullah's remark of providing the students with *blank sheets*, and the lack of seriousness on the part of the students. In fact the two issues are related as both could share responsibility for the poor feedback provided. Prior to analysing these two issues, it is useful to provide a brief revision of what previous research reports regarding students' feedback from this particular perspective. Students' feedback and rating of their instructors is a debatable matter. Some favour students being aware of the role their feedback can have in refining their instructors' views (Marsh, 1987; McKeachie, 1997a; Scriven, 1988, 1995). Others, however, point to potential student bias in arguing that qualitative feedback and rating of instructors is questionable. As can be elicited from Abdullah's description, he cannot trust students' feedback as they are immature, unserious and lack engagement. In fact, the nature of the students' feedback in the manner explained reveals one major issue in this educational

setting: that is, critical skills among the students are absent. For the students to provide constructive and informed feedback on their instructors' performance, several criteria must be attained. Drawing on my findings, I argue that, in addition to the many criteria discussed in the literature, in the current context the following ones could be added.

First, building strong and passionate interpersonal and communication ties and relations between the instructors and the students would largely encourage both to engage in constructive and productive results. As I have attempted to explain above, removing the chances of intimidation on the part of the students, and perceiving them as active agents in the teaching/learning process, could permit better chances of their involvement in the process of feedback. Students' empowerment (or lack of it) is, indeed, a recurring theme across the whole set of data and, therefore, is one major critical issue in this particular context (see below). As far as students' feedback is concerned, I understand it as an immense outlet to open spaces for them to actively participate in providing feedback as a significant aspect of their learning.

Second, close to this argument is the fact that the students lack critical skills. Probably the whole educational and social culture in Saudi Arabia suffers from the absence of critical skills, and students' feedback is no exception. Students need to be trained in these skills; they require knowledge of how to constructively engage in discussions and to critically reflect on their learning without any fear of intimidation or threat to their vulnerable position.

Third, and more importantly, the instructors as well as the system, need to revise their ways and conceptualisations of the notion of feedback; they need to remove the established stereotype that the only purpose of feedback is the one intended for evaluating the instructors' teaching practices. Other forms of feedback should be encouraged, such as diagnostic, formative, analytic and so on. In addition to this, feedback needs to be perceived in the context of cooperation and mutual responsibility that are directed to the sole purpose of enhancing the teaching and learning process.

5.3.3 Instructors' Perceptions of Effective Teaching Practices

While, in the previous section, I reported the findings relevant to the instructors' actual teaching practices, I devote this section to report the findings that deal with how the instructors optimise effective teaching practices. It is important to point out that this section deals with the instructors' perceptions and prospects rather than what is actually practised. Although I did not address this theme directly in the interview, it emerges frequently from instructors' accounts regarding their expectations of the ideal teaching practices. The rationale behind including this theme is to explore the nature of the gap that exists between the instructors' actual teaching practices and their insights into what their teaching practices ought to be. I also aim to investigate the factors that hinder them from actualising these perceptions into tangible practices. Although the next section will report and discuss the challenges that the instructors face regarding their teaching practices, it could be useful to probe into the instructors' 'theoretical' knowledge of effective teaching practices since this exploration could provide good insights into understanding the challenges as well as responding to them.

Three key themes have emerged concerning the instructors' conceptualisation of effective teaching practices: a) teaching that is centred on students' learning; b) that fulfils the learning aims, and c) that meets the expectations of the students' social, personal and economic expectations. It is important to emphasise that these key themes are significantly interrelated in the ways that were articulated by the instructors during the interviews. In other words, they emerged in course of their responses regarding various issues related to their teaching practices. As I mentioned in the introduction of this section, the reason to include these themes is to explore the gaps and discontinuities between the existing educational practices and those that are aspired to from the point of view of the instructors in this institution. In fact, the views which could be included within the theme of their hopes, expectations, or prospects are too many to be addressed in this study. However, my study has identified a gap between what instructors know or wish to be achieved and the current, actual and existing practices. The rationale of addressing this issue in this study is twofold: providing a further exploration of problems surrounding teaching practices with the aim of finding possible practical solutions and recommendations for policy makers, and to contribute to the existing academic literature regarding the gaps between perception and practice

relevant to teaching practices. Since these three themes are inextricably intertwined, I have chosen to present and discuss them in one section that addresses the relationship between teaching practices and students' learning. I have also devised a thematic scheme around these themes and my discussions to maintain the fluidity of reading the section.

5.3.3.1 Student-Centred Teaching

The notion of student-centred teaching refers to all those teaching practices that prioritise the students' involvement, interaction, motivation, voice, etc. that could ultimately achieve learning (Fasko & Grubb 1997; Ho et al., 2001; Watkins, 1998). Teaching practices that facilitate students' learning is the first key theme that the instructors alluded to while addressing several issues regarding their teaching practices. As a matter of fact, and as can be read through the whole corpus of data, issues surrounding students continue to emerge whenever the instructors address their own teaching. For each aspect of the interview, instructors followed the fashion of referring to the students; sometimes with blame, discontent, empathy or contention. I however focus on those responses that reflect the instructors' beliefs of effective teaching as reflecting students' real engagement. Ahmad speaks of the limited space that is allowed to students and claims that, for effective teaching to take place, students need to be entitled or *allowed sufficient space to talk, discuss and express their own ideas*. Ali perceives that effective teaching should be directed to *making talented students*:

Good teaching is fundamentally what takes place in the classroom. This means that a good lesson, the first thing is to make distinguished students, and you can make distinguished students through attracting their attention; discovering their talents and orientations, you love them. In short, good teaching reflects the success of the instructor in achieving the learning goals. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

Zaid wishes for the means that enable his teaching to be *of value to students' learning* in terms of matching his teaching with what they need for their future careers and personal lives:

Teaching should touch upon the students' milieus and prospects for a good future... [Teaching] should produce individuals who are capable of serving their communities ... these are implicit learning objectives that we need to place as the core of our teaching. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

My students are my first priority; I do whatever I can to communicate knowledge to them. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Teaching practices need to achieve students' involvement in the learning process (Anderson, 2000; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Joseph et al., 2005). This is another theme that emerged when the instructors addressed the lack of students' interaction and passivity during the classes. Many analytical views and suggestions were provided concerning students' interaction, discussions and classroom involvement. The instructors' major views were in response to students' lack of interaction. In addition to providing various views of the problem, some addressed their own teaching practices and others talked about how effective teaching practice could attend to it. One instructor pointed out that teaching should touch upon relevant issues and serious matters that concern students. Another spoke of the need to stimulate students' interaction through the use of technology and online interaction channels e.g. social interaction website, emails, on-line chat and so on. Another mentioned that since the students' academic background is still immature and they do not value the importance of interaction, there emerges a need to specify a course for teaching students study skills. This instructor highlighted this point saying that the students did not know how to study for the course. Similarly, other instructors emphasised the role of the social and cultural background of the students as determinant factors for their lack of involvement in the learning process. In response, some of them suggested that teaching needs to be meaningful to their immediate concerns, lives and local needs. Others also talked about the need to allocate a significant part of their teaching to addressing social problems but, as they claimed, the system does not allow them to do so.

After introducing these views, I wish to discuss them according to the following themes:

Theme One: *teaching and students' voice and involvement.* It is clear that students in this context are marginalised and lack the desired active role, but how can teaching practices support students' interaction and involvement in their education? Based on the findings, teaching and learning are inseparable, and it remains the shared responsibility of the institution and the instructors to work out a solution for the problem of students' passive roles. Teaching practices that

promote learning require enhancing students' critical thinking skills, awareness and sense of responsibility. The instructors' acknowledgement and awareness of this as a problem, although not translated into concrete behaviours, remains a good sign for enhancing the chances of shared responsibilities between learners and instructors.

Theme Two: *gauging the gap between theory and practice*. In a related theme, the instructors demonstrated sensible accounts regarding how attending to students' learning is related to their teaching practice. Data, however, signpost that a colossal gap still exists between perceptions and concrete practices. I realise this problem is very much related to the previous one since it reflects a wider institutional, social and cultural problem. All instructors, including the interviewed instructors, seem to be aware of the problem, but taking the necessary measures towards solutions is still impossible. I argue that to bridge the gap between theorising and practice, the instructors are required to reflect on their teaching practices and to seriously search for the means to achieve their aspirations of affording good learning. I observed that the social and cultural elements are of immense impact on this matter since, as we say it in Arabic, '*the culture of blame*' is the most dominant among the instructors when addressing this issue. This notion refers to assuming the position to blame all involved in a certain activity or practice, but without taking the necessary actions to solve the problem. In a similar study, Chan (2010) reports that effective instructors should use various strategies to motivate students, use a variety of teaching methods and activities (inside and outside the classroom), and provide clear instructions of their teaching. On the top of these activities, Chan concludes, that an "effective [instructor] should have a good relationship with his/her students and make the best use of reinforcement" (p. 1). Chan, however, distinguishes between perceptions or claims and real practices, and concludes that if perceptions are not developed into practices, the desired shift from teacher-centred to student-centred approaches would not happen. Interestingly, Chan acknowledges the cultural influence of perpetuating the gap between perception and practice, and adds: "although the [instructors] claimed that students should take care of their own learning, they did not actively try to encourage their students to do so in reality" (p. 1).

Theme Three: *viewing teaching as a learning activity*. The instructors' accounts indicate that they perceive good teaching as unquestionably leading to learning. This opinion tells us a lot about how we perceive the relationship between teaching and learning; a relationship that needs to be complicated rather than simplified. The instructors reported that their teaching practices are substantially related to '*what is suitable for the students*' in this context, and therefore, the assumption is that learning will take place. In fact, although the instructors seem confident while talking about the relevance of their teaching styles to the particular nature of their students, their very assumption of deeming their students of a *particular* nature calls their claims into question. It is important to recall the fact that the instructors hold very negative attitudes towards their students as being passive and incompetent. The question that remains unanswered is: what makes them sure that their teaching practices reflect aspects of students' learning? To this end, the unanswered question shows the mono-directional flow of the current teaching practice, that is, from the instructors to the students. Related to this theme is the issue of how teaching practice can be made meaningful to the students.

Theme Four: *teaching as meaningful practices for students*. Among the instructors' perceptions of good or effective teaching practice is one that matches the students' concerns, prospects, job orientation, immediate social problems and so on; essential elements I refer to as 'meaningful teaching practices'. The following are summarised samples of their views; these themes are divided into parts: while the first deals with the instructors' critique of the current situation, the second part demonstrates their views of good teaching that ultimately effect student learning:

Khalid: We should be 'selective' while developing our courses. Our teaching must be meaningful to students ... it must address students' expectations and needs... our announced learning plans are not easy to be translated into real practice, they are just a bunch of statements that no one cares about while teaching.
(Instructors' interviews 3rd)

Ahmad: When providing students' with something relevant to their lives, they can understand it and interact with us. This is the core of our students' culture.
(Instructors' interviews 1st)

Omar: Most of our courses are old fashioned; they are borrowed or copied from neighbouring countries ... the study plan includes lots of irrelevant topics. 40% of the plans are non-specialised subjects. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Fahad: The practical aspect of our teaching is missing... I wish it could be possible to take students to apply what they study in real-life situations. (Instructors' interviews 6th)

In my classes, the students are the ones who determine what to teach and how to teach. I don't mean that they select the teaching materials, but I respond to their level and interests. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Perceiving teaching as meaningful to students is the core of any successful learning and, as demonstrated by these views, the instructors are aware of this aspect of their teaching practices. In fact, the above extract could be included in several other sections in this chapter as they reflect cross-sectional themes. I however prefer to discuss them under the main theme of 'learning-centred teaching' for the purpose of underlying the fact that effective teaching practice is one that leads to learning. Since the context of the present study is a newly established university in a rural or nomadic region, students' social and economic backgrounds are far different from those in the main cities in the country. I read this fact alongside the above views with immense interest as a researcher from within whose knowledge of the social particularities is quite significant to shed light on this aspect of teaching practice. I therefore wish to discuss this theme from this aspect, which I prefer to call the macro level, as well as referring to relevant literature. The specialisations offered, the designed specialisations and, to a greater extent, the announced learning aims are uncritically borrowed and applied in the present university. Specialisations offered, or the way they are designed, reflect traditional and old fashioned approaches, which are mainly structured around providing students with theoretical and abstract subject packages. The instructors' teaching practices as articulated by them are impacted by this educational practice which is influenced by tradition. In fact, some instructors expressed the necessity to change this situation through substantial reform of the whole educational policy in the country. In short, since teaching requires more than presenting information, effective teaching is socially challenging and sometimes challenges the traditions and values existing in the system.

In addition to this argument, and as far as teaching practices are concerned, this global situation (or macro level), I argue, is mirrored in classroom teaching behaviour. In part, the instructors' teaching practices are determined by their specialisations, which is beyond the authority of the instructors themselves. As explained above, since the selection of teaching styles is determined by the topics taught, the instructors find themselves obliged to use traditional methods (lecturing) as the most convenient way of delivering theoretical and previously prepared knowledge. While various teaching techniques, such as discussion, group-work, and problem-solving, require resolute cognitive and practical skills, disseminating knowledge (theoretical information) in its basic form does not require teaching to go beyond dictation, which aims for memorisation on the part of students. Bahrain (2007) maintains that “effective teaching requires the [instructor] to consider what the students know, to communicate clearly to them, and to stimulate them to think, communicate, and perhaps in their turn to stimulate their [instructors]” (p. 3). (I will consider these themes more fully in Chapter 6).

5.3.4 Challenges Instructors Face in the Current Teaching Context

Challenges the instructors face in the current context are myriad, reflecting most aspects of the educational process. These challenges include issues related to the physical environment, instructors' teaching load and administrative responsibilities, legislation and lack of financial support. In addition to these, the study revealed others, related to the instructors' research roles and students' proficiency levels as well as the impact of socio-cultural values. Although the first set of challenges is of immense significance as they reflect various issues surrounding teaching practices, I deem the second set as of particular significance as they reflect special and, to a certain extent, unique issues relevant to the current research context. As challenges reported by the instructors are wide-ranging and disparate, I opt to cluster them under the following sub-themes below. In the following sections, I report findings relevant to the instructors' teaching practices.

5.3.4.1 Physical Teaching Environment

To start with these challenges, several instructors tackled issues around the physical teaching environment as causing obstacles to effective teaching practice. These challenges are related to the hot weather of the country, the

extended distances between departments and faculties, and the lack of learning/teaching facilities and equipment in the classrooms. As I pointed out earlier (Chapter 2), Saudi Arabia is a country that covers a huge area, and the research site is a college among several others that are scattered over a distance of 300 kilometres. Additionally, the climate of the country is one of the hottest in the world, especially in summer. These facts, among others, were considered as significant challenges to the instructors while carrying out their teaching. Ali, for example, perceives the noon time as the worst for giving lectures. He contends that the afternoon lectures (those taking place from 1 to 5 p.m.) are very difficult to handle since the temperatures are so high and the students feel reluctant to drive a long distance to attend these lectures. He claimed that, in some cases, he finds himself with three or four students attending the lecture. In fact, one might argue that weather is beyond the control of human beings as no one can change the weather of a region to make it ideal for learning and teaching. However, it could be argued that the long distances and weather challenges could be met by adopting several mechanisms such as creating more branches of colleges to spare the instructors and students wasting time travelling from one college to another. As for the weather issue, the peak hot times could be avoided especially in the summer. It is also important that some instructors complained about the failure of air-conditioning, which makes it impossible to teach at these times of the day. In addition to this, and through my personal observation, the university campus consists of two buildings with no green areas or trees, which adds to the problems of the harsh environment. The campuses of universities should be designed following an international standard, and that of the current university is far below these standards. Boyer et al. (1996), reporting the views of alumni in 15 representative campuses, conclude that a satisfactory campus should provide an inclusive educational environment including building design, open spaces, and facilities that integrate social and academic life. In short, this is a typical case for most of the emergent universities which, I argue, has negative impacts on the psychology of instructors and students.

The other challenges relevant to the environment of teaching and learning are the lack of IT facilities in the classroom, absence of email communication or availability of the internet, among others. Most instructors reported that they were not satisfied with the use of technology in their teaching as technology was not

available or efficiently utilised in most of the university. For example, in response to my question about the nature of his teaching, Khalid responded:

We use very conventional techniques ... as for technology, there is much of it, but unfortunately our university does not provide any of technological means such as smart boards and internet - the classrooms are not at all equipped with any of these technological means, even the most affordable ones that you can find in schools are not available to us. (Instructors' interviews 3rd)

As a university instructor, I need a suitable educational environment. Our classrooms are not equipped with any technical facilities except for a blackboard. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

The crowded classrooms cause us feelings of injustice as large class sizes don't count in our teaching load. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

It is important to notice from this opinion, as well many similar ones, that the instructors are fully aware of the benefits of the utilisation of technology in teaching. The utilisation of technology and the internet in teaching and learning are well established almost everywhere around the globe. Saudi Arabia is a rich country, and affording such facilities would not be beyond the capability of its universities, even the emergent ones. Similar to issues related to the lack of specialisation, discussed above, I perceive this problem as reflecting a problem with how policy makers estimate the importance of technology in education. Although we are living in the twenty-first century, where the use of technology has turned out as a necessity, instructors in the current context still underestimate or resist technology-based teaching or even teaching that is aided by technology. Mostly, they still perceive technology as not relevant to teaching or learning. Although this argument might be perceived by people from different contexts as an exaggeration of the situation, the problem, I argue, is deep rooted in how technology is received in Saudi Arabia. The country exerts incomparable restriction on the use of the internet, and, the society still largely perceives that the internet would endanger its values and morals. Although universities and higher education institutions are supposedly more liberal in taking a rather different stand, the use of technology in education at a technical level is far below international standards. As reported by several instructors, the websites of the

universities, which are supposed to reflect the professional and academic aspects of these universities, is mostly awkward and lacks important information for users. Although this argument might seem beyond what the instructors have spoken about, I argue that this is significant as it reflects a whole 'culture' of these institutions as far as technology as a whole is concerned.

5.3.4.2 Institutional Expectations and Constraints

Issues surrounding the institutional expectations and constraints include the involvement of the instructors in administrative duties as well as being overloaded with teaching. The instructors reported that their teaching load and involvement in other responsibilities were viewed as challenges to achieving effective teaching practices in the classroom. Overload and teaching various courses beyond their specialisations were also concerns the instructors stated in their interviews. On a related aspect, they also indicated that their over-involvement in administrative work and tasks beyond their teaching significantly impacted their teaching practices. The following quotations are examples of these challenges:

Ahmad: We suffer shortage of instructors, and as an instructor, my teaching load is very high ... sometimes I teach 20 credit hours, and this affects the quality of my teaching. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Zaid: The shortage of instructors and the teaching overload are two major problems in our department. Talking about myself, this problem causes challenges: the first, when I teach many courses, I find myself incapable of handling them in one semester; they are very heterogeneous. The second, as a university instructor, I find myself teaching courses which are not of my specialisation. I therefore cannot give the course or the students their right. This causes critical harm on the part of the students. I perceive the availability of instructors with various specialisations affords many solutions to this problem; each instructor chooses his favourite course, prepares it very well, is responsible for enhancing and developing the course. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

We are few instructors especially those who hold PhD compared to the large number of the students. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

All of the interviewed instructors mentioned workload and lack of subject knowledge as real challenges to achieving their teaching goals and thus success in their teaching practices. Lack of subject knowledge is a global issue that most Saudi Universities, including the current one, suffer from. I read this problem as a manifestation of several substantial issues related to higher education in the country. Firstly, this problem denotes a problem at an epistemological level through which many instructors and, to a certain extent, decision-makers perceive the university instructors as capable of teaching all the courses within their general specialisations. This also signifies a problem of the level of proficiency expected from the students, since lack of subject knowledge could necessarily mean that the level of teaching would remain at a minimum level. Secondly, teaching overload and the lack of subject knowledge indicates another major problem, that is, with the overwhelming growth of universities in the country, (see Chapter 2), there has been shortage of specialised instructors. Added to this is the fact that most emergent universities are located in remote villages and rural areas, which invites Saudi instructors to look for better opportunities in well-established universities in the major cities of the country. Some instructors reported that most of the newly appointed instructors strive to leave the university and seek to establish their careers in the well-established universities. They also mentioned some cases where instructors spend one or two years in the current university and then leave to work at other universities (I elaborate on this problem in the 'Socio-cultural values and interpersonal relations section below). Thirdly, it can be observed that the instructors, or at least some of them, are aware of the problem of lack of subject knowledge, which indicates that most instructors are aware of this as a challenge to conducting effective teaching practices. Zaid explicitly articulates his concern that the problem of lack of subject knowledge is one major obstacle towards achieving teaching and learning goals. For him, the students are the major group who are disadvantaged from the instructors' teaching overload. On another occasion, he demonstrated that his work including developing proper course materials, planning, enhancing teaching practices and course materials, and that these were severely hampered by these problems.

Similar to the teaching overload challenges, the instructors reported that they were consumed by administrative duties and additional work. They, however, distinguished between two types of what they perceived as additional duties: first, teaching-related activities that are relevant to their teaching including preparing course reports, schedule and exam committees, planning, etc., and other administrative duties such as student affairs committee and equalisation committee as well as other administrative work. Omar, for example, commented on the many committees that the instructors have to take part in by saying: "*It is all committees; we are consumed by these committees*" (Instructors' interviews 5th). Similarly, Ali perceives administrative work as:

...the main obstacle to the instructors' work as instructors. The university instructors need to focus on their teaching rather than being involved in administrative responsibilities. The university administration considers the instructors more than instructors who need to devote their time to teaching and research, but as employees who have to accomplish all sorts of administrative and paper work. We are not directly obliged to participate in administrative work, but this comes by an indirect way. The university instructors do care about holding administrative positions, and our society pays more respect to those who assume such positions. In general, there is a trend among us (instructors) to seek for these administrative positions and we prioritise them over teaching. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

The university administration does discriminate between instructors; some newcomer instructors with no experience are placed in leadership positions. There is a lot of connectionism and dishonesty in our university. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Ali's narrative is crucially significant as it tells us a lot about the complications of the instructors' involvement in administrative duties and how this could affect their teaching practices. I read in Ali's narrative an ambivalent stance of the instructors as he shows both the instructors' repulsion and acceptance of being involved in administrative position. To understand the complication of this desire, it is necessary to define what is meant by the notion of administrative position in the current context. Drawing on Ali's narrative, it is quite evident that most Saudi instructors do search for these positions since they are financially profitable as

well as being socially rewarding. They are, however, aware of the fact that being in these positions diverts them from their teaching responsibilities, and thus negatively affects their teaching practices. For me, it could be argued that this creates a dilemma for them; while they do seek administrative positions, they develop a feeling that this participation affects their teaching. It could also be argued that university instructors quite often take part in administrative tasks alongside their teaching and manage both. The case for Saudi instructors, as reported by some of them, indicates that most of them prioritise assuming administrative positions over teaching, which consumes most of their time. Some instructors reported that in some cases the deans, vice deans and department chairs have zero teaching credit hours. It is crucially significant to point out that most Saudi universities, including the current one, hire a remarkable percentage of non-Saudi instructors mainly coming from other Arab countries (see below). This is noteworthy since non-Saudi instructors do not hold any administrative responsibilities, but are hired only for teaching. Indeed, this argument, in addition to how society influences the perceptions and the practices of Saudi instructors, creates a real crisis regarding the roles of the Saudi instructors in their universities. (I detail in the challenges of the influence of the society below.)

In addition to the problems of teaching overload and the instructors' involvement in administrative work, the lack of clarity and overlap of the instructors' duties were reported as significant issues that affect the instructors' teaching practices. Fahad's following narrative relates several issues around the challenges the instructors face regarding the overlap of their duties:

Through my observation, and when talking about our university as an emergent (new) one, I believe it requires more time to achieve stability in terms of the work the instructors need to do. Currently, there is a lot of overlap of our roles as instructors; we are required to teach and actively participate in loads of administrative work. Some of us are still involved in work with other institutions. In general, the university suffers from this overlap... most of us however pursue these administrative positions; from the first day of their appointment, they always seek to take part in any of these positions. Every day we hear about problems and stories about people who are willing to participate in committees, but are rejected. Most of the Saudi instructors compete to hold administrative positions, and in some cases this causes conflict among them. (Instructors' interviews 6th)

Ali: ... many students reported that Saudi instructors spend half an hour in the class and leave as they have meetings in an administration or a committee. Students complain that these instructors lack honesty in teaching as they direct their attention to administrative work. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

There are several themes that could be drawn from the above narrative, in addition to the involvement of the instructors in duties and roles other than teaching, it demonstrates other major challenges including the overlap of duties and teaching responsibilities of instructors, the commitment of the instructors with additional outside jobs, and the overlap of responsibilities. All of these observations could signpost another major challenge that is the lack of clear regulations and legislations that specify the instructors' roles (I will discuss this in more detail in the next section). More importantly, Fahad's narrative is indicative of the unique nature of the Saudi university instructors as well as the institution itself. As I have argued above, the instructors quite often find themselves oscillating between two or more obligations. While being involved in teaching and other related matters should remain their duty, the present case tells us that Saudi instructors willingly or unwillingly have become subject to a 'trap' of administration. In the current context, I argue, administrative work causes a crucial dilemma for these instructors. On the one hand, they are attracted to participate in administrative work as it is socially and institutionally rewarding, and on the other hand, they are aware that such participation would make them digress from their main duty as instructors. Yet, as Fahad narrates, the instructors are aware of this as affecting their positions as professionals and academics, which causes them to be subject to a predicament as far as their professionalism is concerned.

More interesting is Ali's view that shows how the students' learning is directly influenced by the instructors' busyness and involvement in administrative work. It is imperative to notice that Ali is a Saudi instructor who might be subject to this criticism by the students, yet he speaks of the concerns of the students, and how such indulgence in duties rather than teaching might harm them.

In fact the problem of instructors' involvement in administrative positions and their competitiveness to obtain such positions bring about a major issue of professionalism in teaching. The assumption is that university instructors needed to assume the dual roles of instructor and researcher, which could be achieved

through their active commitment and contribution in their own teaching and research. Probably it is safe to claim that the case for Saudi instructors is far below (or beyond) professionalism since, as data demonstrates, they perceive university jobs, particularly administrative works, as prestigious positions that reflect their fine status in society. I perceive, the argument goes on, that this is problematic as far as promoting effective teaching practices is concerned since the demands of these positions would direct their attention from their major roles as instructors.

5.3.4.3 University Regulations

Among the challenges that the instructors talked about, they reported that university legislation, lack of clear aims and bureaucracy in administration are among several other challenges that hinder their effective teaching practices. The following extracts are examples of the instructors' views regarding issues related to university regulations:

Omar: At first, I'd like to talk about the university administration; we feel that it does not offer us enough support, and there is severe lack of cooperation between the administration and the university instructors... I'd also like to mention the financial support; the university does not offer sufficient financial resources to perform our work. I consider this as a major challenge since there is evident shortage in financial support and matters related to finance are always overdue... Allow me to talk about the routine and bureaucracy in administrative operation in general. We suffer from unnecessary delays and the huge amount of paper work we need to process before getting our demands fulfilled. I always consider the university instructor as a person who has a special mission towards his students, and society and nation at large. He therefore needs moral and material support to him to accomplish his mission. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Ahmad: ... it is not only regulations that causes the major challenge, but also cronyism, nepotism, and connectionism that damage our educational reputation and moral system. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Zaid: ... among the other challenges is the absence of clear code of conduct for both the students and instructors; we do not have any regulations that monitor the conduct of the instructors. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

We cannot communicate easily with those in the positions of responsibility. There is a lot of paper work involved to ask for simple things and it takes too long to respond, sometimes we receive no responses at all. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

The above extracts are among several others that elucidate the nature of regulations in the current university. As these instructors describe, a plethora of issues are raised resulting from the nature of the educational culture followed in this institution. I prefer to read these issues in a collective manner; i.e. I attempt to answer the questions of how and why such absence of professionalism on the level of administration and legislation causes major challenges to promote effective teaching practices. In response, I find it quite vital to understand the nature of the management processes in the Saudi educational system. In many cases, universities in Saudi Arabia borrow and adopt ready-made regulations and management operations from neighbouring Arab countries, mainly Egypt and Jordan, as templates to follow without sufficient adaptation (Zahrani, 2010). Therefore, a huge gap develops between the written regulations and the actual application of these regulations. Added to this is the particular culture of Saudi Arabia where personal relations and connectionism plays a major role in shaping the nature of the educational process as a whole. Following a clear code of conduct that is applicable to all, for example, it would be impossible; people quite often find themselves subject to the interference of personal relations that impacts on their work. For effective teaching practice to occur, instructors need to rely on clear regulations that preserve the right of all of those involved in the educational process.

At another level of discussion, the above views reflect the unstable atmosphere through which the instructors find themselves obliged to conduct their teaching. Clear and straightforward regulations would make it quite possible for them to promote their teaching practices since they could draw clear boundaries between what is allowed and what is not. Such institutionalism is necessary for any practice to achieve its aims and to promote good results, and educational institutions are no exception. Efficient management operation where responsibilities are clear can save effort and time. In the current institution, however, these equivocal rules leave instructors to their intuition to improvise in their teaching practices. This also minimises the instructors' motivation as they

might find themselves unprotected by clear regulations or code of conduct that guarantees their rights to do what they do.

5.3.4.4 Financial Challenges

Although Saudi Arabia is considered a rich country, the university instructors' salaries are the minimum compared with other institutions. In addition to this, as some instructors reported, the university does not provide the required financial aids necessary to support their teaching.

Omar, in the above extract, connects the financial problems with the routine and bureaucracy in making available the required financial aids. As for the financial support, the interviewed instructors quite often pronounced their dissatisfaction with their incomes as well as lacking necessary financial support to conduct their teaching. Omar, for example, talked about how many instructors who are originally missionnees⁹ of the current university struggle to leave the university and seek to join other old universities in big cities of the country. Other instructors expressed their distress with the university administration's failure to finance their projects, research and even support them with necessary facilities and equipment to conduct their teaching. It might be noteworthy to mention here that, unlike instructors in other universities, for example in the UK, who are required to seek funding from external bodies to finance their research, Saudi instructors often depend on internal funds to support their research. Although one might find these claims surprising with the assumption that Saudi Arabia is considered among the richest countries in the world, it is quite evident from the data as well as from my own personal knowledge that Saudi instructors receive the minimum wages among their counterparts in the Gulf region. To achieve stability for instructors, a reconsideration of the financial policies and salaries is crucially needed since many of them would seek other jobs to support themselves or keep their search for administrative positions that could offer them some increase in their income. It is evident that such financial discontent causes key challenges to promoting effective teaching practice since, rather than focusing on their teaching, instructors are more concerned to pursue other means to support themselves.

⁹ Students who are sent abroad to complete their higher education and who are sponsored by the university; these students should serve in the university as part of their commitment to financing their studies.

5.3.4.5 Students' Prior Attainment and Attitudes Towards Learning

Students' proficiency or lack of proficiency is another challenge the instructors spoke about in their interviews. These views could be summarised as follows: a) the students who join the university have very limited knowledge, b) they never prepare their lessons, c) their absenteeism is higher than their counterparts around the world, and, more importantly, d) they lack motivation to study hard to achieve good learning outcomes. The following extracts exemplify these views:

Ali: ... when we talk about a step by step, we cannot consider the university to be the first step for students to start their education; this is what they need to understand. My students still lack the basics of language with all sorts of grammatical and spelling mistakes; their knowledge is very limited. It seems that our high expectations and the aims that we draw in our minds conflict with the students' low standards, their interaction, their knowledge and many other things, In reality our aims are never achieved. (Instructors' interviews 2nd)

Khalid: ... I often say that when students join the university, they must acquire the necessary knowledge to start their higher education with. Our students cannot speak fluent Arabic, and their pre-university education offers them the minimum knowledge to pass their exams ... There are many factors that cause this - public education, the family, the society, the personal aspects. I see the latter as the most important as the students do not help us to teach them; they are often silent, they're not willing to talk or discuss anything; they cannot provide an opinion in any problem... by the end of the day I perceive that they are victims of our educational system. (Instructors' interviews 3rd)

Omar: The level of our students is very, very weak. I appeal to their participation, but it is almost absent. They are indifferent to their education; they come to the class without being prepared. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Although these views chime with the findings presented below regarding 'students' learning' (see below), I opt to partly discuss them among issues related to the challenges that the instructors marked in their narratives. Although it seems that these opinions are convincing as they reflect how students' proficiency level is directly related to low teaching performance, I prefer to highlight aspects relevant to the lack of mutual understanding between instructors and students. I

argue that the above opinions reflect a substantial problem that signifies how the students are disadvantaged in the Saudi educational system as a whole. Since students' right to a proper education should be guaranteed by all educational systems, it is necessary to search for suitable teaching practices and solutions to the problems mentioned above. In fact, I read these claimed challenges with special sensitivity as it quite possible that university instructors have high or even exaggerated expectations of their students. Therefore, rather than talking about these seemingly challenging issues, they could be perceived as means to enhance teaching practices that can accommodate all sorts and levels of students. Students with low proficiency and limited knowledge should be more motivating to instructors to search for effective methods to deal with these problems rather than expressing feelings of frustration and disappointment. Relevant educational research literature is replete with ideas about the proper means and teaching practices to deal with such cases (e.g. Bruegmann, 2009; Tusting and Barton, 2006; King, 2003; Mahajan, 2000; Maslow, 1970) and for motivated instructors to enhance their own teaching practice, these apparent challenges could be perceived as the other way around. In other words, the craft of teaching and professionalism would require instructors to keep on their search for what works regardless of the students' proficiency levels. In so doing, the claim is, they can enhance their own experiences and equip themselves with additional teaching practices that are relevant to dealing with poorly motivated students.

More precisely, the above views about the students lacking the necessary 'university knowledge' or motivation are misleading in relation to claims of their negative impact on teaching practice. I read such views as problematic for instructors claiming that they are after professionalism in their teaching practices. For example, the notions of 'necessary knowledge', 'minimum knowledge' or 'university knowledge' the instructors use to refer to their students' proficiency levels are confusing, lack clear definitions and are quite often loosely used to signify dispute regarding learning and teaching. Since teaching and learning (as previously discussed) are mutually connected, the instructors are required to exert efforts to build up on what they have. They need to foster in their students their dedication and willingness to meet any difficult challenges. For example, they can build on personal ties through interpersonal contacts to teach students the necessary study skills; to listen to their academic and personal problems; to

motivate and empower, them among many other effective practices. As research literature and influential educators tell us, the students are the weakest and most vulnerable element in any educational system (e.g. Apple, 2001; Freire, 1989). In brief, the argument is, the students' low proficiency level could be perceived as challenging; nonetheless, this challenge should be positively directed or redirected to promote effective teaching practices that respond to all issues related to students' learning.

5.3.4.6 Socio-Cultural Values and Interpersonal Relations

Socio-cultural values and interpersonal relations are recurrent themes in several parts of the data. Although I have presented and discussed findings that are relevant to these aspects in former sections, it is necessary to deal with them in the present section since they have emerged as central themes relevant to challenges facing the teaching practices in the current context. Drawing on the findings, issues that reflect socio-cultural and interpersonal challenges could be optimised as follows: a) the major role of the society in determining the nature of the current educational culture including the instructors' teaching practices; b) the role of the society in determining criteria of the university instructors' excellence and success; c) the role of the social and interpersonal relations in shaping the human relations (e.g. competitiveness and lack of cooperation); the particular nature of the local region where the university is located; and the variation of the social and environmental setting and its influence on teaching practices.

The following extracts exemplify these subthemes:

Ahmad: For me, all learning and teaching practices are determined by our society. For example, it is quite impossible to discuss issues related to women's rights in an open manner in our society. I remember once when I alluded to this problem, students collectively expressed their opinions and judgements in the name of culture and traditions. We cannot teach or discuss such sensitive matters; we often use very indirect ways when talking about any problem that touches upon the students' culture and traditions and society. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Fahad: ... we are ruled by the tradition of our society; our society is influential; it dictates to us how we perceive ourselves as university instructors... I cannot fail a student whose father pays a visit to my office asking for his son to pass. (Instructors' interviews 6th)

Omar: We are governed by our tribal values and relations between extended families. Our region is still attached to kinship relation, traditions and religion. I spend much of the class time addressing issues that concern the local society. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Omar: I know the traditions very well. I always speak with the language that could be understood by the society. When I was teaching in AlMadina, my teaching and use of concepts and discourse were quite different. People are different and they impose the way onto how we teach. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Zaid: ...our region is primitive and the students are [sic] naïve; I always use simple language to talk with them. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

Our cultural values determine what we do; in the classroom, I cannot teach freely. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Our students are quite different from those living in cities; they are passive, shy and hardly talk in the classroom. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Socio-cultural context is always a significant factor that shapes the nature of educational practices, values and policies all over the world. In general, the social and cultural values directly or indirectly leave considerable influences on teaching practices. The interference of the socio-cultural factors in the current educational setting is mostly deemed negative. In fact, it is not possible to read the influence of the social aspects on teaching practice in separation from the educational values and policies as a whole. In general, the above views signpost an undesirable influence of society on teaching practice. Following the same line of argument, I find it necessary to read and analyse these views as reflecting a holistic image of the current educational context, which could reflect what Bourdieu, 1983) refers to as 'cultural capital' and 'institutional cultural capital'. The notion of 'cultural capital' is useful as it provides an understanding of the formation and perpetuation of these institutional practices. In the *Forms of Capital* (1983), Bourdieu delineates two kinds of capital: embodied and objective. While embodied capital is required through invested time and is accumulated within a physically circumscribed individual, objectified capital comprises the signs of distinction that correspond to 'conspicuous consumption'. In an intimate relation

to embodied capital, objectified capital comprises the goods that the individual consumes by virtue of their capital, and embodied capital is necessary to properly consume objectified capital.

Together, embodied and objectified capital, indicate what Bourdieu calls 'the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 20). The habitus occupied by an individual can be classified, but it is also, itself classifying. It reflects a hierarchy of values that are symbolic and have a social value. Furthermore, the concept of 'class' is pre-eminently a sociological concept: "If there exists a form of capital which is specifically symbolic or cultural, the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of this capital presupposes the division of society into groups that can be called classes" (Guillory, 1993, p. viii). Bourdieu's notion of sociology acknowledges such a division, but takes it beyond a purely economic account. Consumption, in the form of cultural capital, thus, produces a sociological 'mythical system'. In this sense, in institutions, there exists a class of representation and consumption which produces the distinction of a 'class-oriented habitus' (Ihlen, 2005).

In the current context, it is possible to exemplify the 'class-oriented habitus' by considering how the university instructors are socially advantaged by their perceived status and power as the elites of the society. They hold and propagate this role as a class of their own who are advantaged over the rest of the social groups. In the Saudi context, a university instructor assumes active roles in social matters, such as participating in social and governmental events and occasions. While this argument could reflect a healthy social and educational practice at the first level of reading, it could be argued that in the current context the instructors do feel their perceived power as the elites of the society, which projects a class of cultural capital, Bourdieu speaks about, that privileges them over their own societies. It could also be argued that this status impacts their roles as instructors and thus their teaching practices. Since what might be called the 'socio-academic' relations are bidirectional (i.e. the instructors influence the society as well as the society leaving its impact on them), - the instructors' teaching roles are shifted from professionals who are part of an educational system with all its norms and traditions into a class of social agents who patronise in social matters that have nothing to do with their academic and professional roles. In the current context,

the instructors are willingly consumed by participating in social invitations and occasions, which are too many in this part of the world.

Related to this, this class of cultural capital could be understood more fully when considering the socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia as a 'Third World' country. Saudi Arabia is a country with former experience of colonialism or classified as a 'Third World' country. Education, like other cultural, economic, and social spheres, is subject to a mono-directional flow of Eurocentric or Western educational models, and quite often educators establish these models as standardised and universalistic templates to be mimicked in their own contexts. Most university instructors in these educational contexts, who have received their education in the West, often find themselves unhappy with their social traditions and complain about their interference in their teaching. With the assumption that it is beyond discussion to change the social values, it becomes the responsibility of these instructors to accommodate these values rather than to denounce them. Although this argument might seem as outdoing the above narratives, I argue that the perception of the social values of these instructors is fashioned by explicit or quite often implicit and unconscious comparisons with established models in their minds. More importantly, the argument goes on, these perceptions reflect perpetuated appraisal and judgements about the 'best' social moral values. Since each culture has its own values, as Boas (1965) reminds us, standard or universalistic morals render cultural moral absolutism problematic. The assumption of standard or universal values claims that social moral values are universal in the sense that all cultures should share similar moral systems. While universal values claim for absolute universalism, cultural relativism, as Boas argues, is unique to each culture and it is not necessary that all cultures share similar values. Drawing on this discussion, as well as on the extract above, the socio-cultural challenge the instructors spoke about could be construed as constructive since it becomes the instructors' responsibility to search for effective policies and practices to meet the peculiarity of their socio-cultural context. For example, they can educate their students and the society about the negative impact of connectionism on promoting better learners. While they spoke of connectionism in negative terms, it could be argued that, in such a social context, connectionism could solve many problems such as those related to students' behaviour. In the Saudi context, there exists a form of social or tribal law

alongside that of the government, and in all cases those who apply this law are the tribal chiefs and the elitist class of the society. Additionally, rather than arguing with religious, social and traditional values, they need to devise innovative and original methods of matching their teaching with these values. Educators tell us that, without the social aspect of the educational process, learning could not take place (e.g. Labaree, 2001; Wechsler and Shields 2008). Therefore, for effective teaching practices that achieve students' acceptance, interaction and involvement, instructors are required to adapt their teaching practices to skilfully deal with socially or religiously sensitive matters. Omar's adaptation of his teaching methods, discourse and even dialect is a good example of how teaching practice should be responsive to social demands, and vice versa. In addition to Omar's remark, several other instructors reported examples of sensitive social matters that could become problems in the classroom. Among these, for example, the issue of women's right to work, travel and drive is always a dichotomous issue in the Saudi socio-cultural spheres and the educational settings are no exception. In brief, I aim through this discussion to engage with the instructors' views regarding the claimed influence of socio-cultural roles in a reflective and a critical manner. This critical stance is significant since it enables us to problematize the normalisation of perceiving native societies as 'naïve'. In general, the key argument is that a critical understanding of these apparent challenges could yield more productive and effective teaching practices.

5.3.4.7 Instructors' Professional Development

I understand professional development programmes in the present study as those in-service training programmes that offer relevant skills that promote the instructors' teaching practices. Although is not the chief interest of the present study, I wish to include this section regarding the instructors' professional programmes as closely related to teaching practices. While the study concerns itself with the instructors' teaching practices, I deem issues around professional development of immense importance as the instructors made connections between their current teaching practices and a lack of quality professional development programmes. The data revealed that there is a paucity of existing professional training programmes, and the lack of such programmes causes the instructors to depend on self-development. In general, data also revealed that the

instructors hold positive attitudes regarding professional programmes. The following extracts exemplify these findings:

Zaid: ... we sometimes hear about some training sessions from time to time. I feel a shame when speaking about these sessions; they are merely part of the formalities and the prestige of the university. They take place once in a year, usually during the first week. (Instructors' interviews 4th)

Omar: I believe that training programmes should be throughout the whole academic year and repeated at different times so that who misses one can make up for another. It happened that last year I needed to attend one of these programmes but I was quite busy and could not make it. (Instructors' interviews 5th)

Fahad: The training programmes are inefficient; the university does not pay enough attention to their quality. I mainly depend on self-development strategies. I read a lot in teaching methodologies to keep myself updated with the new trends of teaching. (Instructors' interviews 6th)

Ahmad: Unfortunately, our university doesn't pay attention to our needs of these programmes. I never saw experts visiting our university, there are no experience exchange programmes with international universities. (Instructors' interviews 1st)

Teaching training programmes, workshops, academic and professional conferences are the most urgent needs that our university needs to consider if we want to promote effective teaching practice. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

As instructors, we urgently need all the programmes that promote our teaching and academic skills. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Unfortunately, our departments do not offer any training programmes. Training programmes are not only necessary for our teaching practices, but also are vital resources for promoting our competence in our subject matter in the latest trends. This could be achieved through participating on live or online training discussions. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Professional training programmes equip instructors with all teaching skills which enable him to perfectly achieve his education mission. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Through online training seminars, we can exchange experiences with other colleagues in other parts of the world. (Instructors' open-ended questionnaire comments)

These views are among similar ones that confirm the perceived inefficiency or lack of professional development programmes in the emergent university. In fact, data revealed that some instructors were not aware of the concept of professional development and usually confuse it with their academic qualifications. Drawing on these findings, it could be argued that the lack of professional development programmes could provide us with a complementary picture of the educational culture previously discussed and teaching practices, in particular. The lack of these programmes and the belief that the university higher degrees are sufficient to carry out teaching responsibility remains a stereotype in the minds of policy makers and to a certain extent those of instructors. For the instructors to meet the demands of the ever-changing needs of students, the social challenges, the utilisation of technology, assessment techniques, etc., professional development programmes become a necessity.

It is essential to indicate here that, like the students, the instructors are disadvantaged as far as professional development is concerned. As evident from the above quotations, the instructors expressed their willingness to have these programmes in their institution and to actively participate in them. This might reveal that they are not content with their own teaching practices, and strive to enhance them through these programmes. As such it could be noted that the instructors are aware of the gap between their perceptions of effective teaching practice and what they actually do. Although some instructors mentioned that they practice self-professional development, there is still a crucial need for collective programmes where exchange of experiences could take place. Reporting the findings of in-depth interviews with 16 business school instructors regarding their views of the importance of relationships in professional life, Connie et al. (2000) identified that professional relationships, which are strategically chosen, are career-defining and help professionals to career

success and mobility. Similarly, drawing on the gift exchange theory, Antal and Rechebe (2009) explored the knowledge-based interactions among academics through interviewing participants from Germany and France. They reported that although several paradoxes are inherent in interactions among academic community resulting from relations of power, professional interaction remains a vehicle by which academic community members can promote their career. Furthermore, professional development programmes require experts to run them and evaluate the enrolled trainees at the end of the programmes to assure their efficiency. This articulated necessity could also reveal that the university administration and policy makers are not fulfilling their responsibilities towards their institutions, instructors or students. In sum, the lack of professional programmes a) is reflected in the instructors' teaching practices; b) is an indicative of the gap between the instructors' perceptions and practices; c) and is symptomatic of the traditional educational 'culture' that is followed in this institution.

5.3.5 Students' Perceptions of Teaching Practices

Since the study seeks a holistic understanding of the major aspects of the instructors' teaching practices, as well as providing a thick description of the case under exploration, it is essential to explore the students' perceptions and views of their instructors' teaching practices. The aim of including this concluding section is to juxtapose the students' views with those of the instructors regarding the role of the instructors' teaching practices in promoting learning. The rationale of this addition could also be perceived as a further investigation of the instructors' teaching practices from the perspective of the stakeholders who are directly affected by these practices. With the assumption that learners are central in the educational process, the present section responds to the question of how do students in the current context perceive their instructors' teaching practices, and how, from their point of view, do these practices promote effective learning? The findings of this section have drawn on the data from the students' semi-structured interviews as well as the answers provided to the questionnaire's open-ended questions. The reason for including the latter data is that the participating students, unlike the instructors, provided detailed answers to the questionnaire open-ended questions. Drawing on these two sources, the findings of the students' opinions are found to encompass several major themes including: the

students' views of effective and less effective teaching practices; the students' views of their own instructors' teaching practices; the students' reflections on themselves (their own learning behaviours) in relation to these practices; and their opinions of the challenges that hinder their active involvement, and, hence their learning. In my presentation and discussion of these themes, I encompass them in two sections: a) students' views of effective teaching practices, and b) their views of less effective teaching practices. I however divide the latter into some subthemes to highlight the particular issues and challenges the students reported as relevant to the instructors' teaching practices.

5.3.5.1 Students' Views of Effective Teaching Practices

The students' perceptions of effective teaching practice were similar to those of the instructors, though they were more oriented to their own learning and their academic and personal relations with the instructors. Students' views of effective teaching practices could be summarised as follows. The students perceived effective teaching as those practices that encouraged interaction and participation in the classroom; made links between the taught knowledge and the students' life; and responded to their aspirations of acquiring the skills to enhance their employability. *'Learning in an interesting manner'* is reported as another view of good teaching practice; for them, good teaching practices should not be didactic in nature, but should include the use of technology, dialogue, discussions. Students quite often referred to non-Saudi instructors' teaching practices comparing them with those of the Saudi instructors.

Students' desire to be involved in their own learning is a reiterated theme that most of the interviewed students' perceived as reflecting effective teaching practice that guarantees their learning. Naif, for example, saw good teaching as that which allows him to talk and actively participate in the classroom discussions.

Naif: I look forward to interacting with my instructors and fellow students. I do not like recitation and memorisation; I can't learn through these methods - the skills that are retained are the ones which we are actively involved in. (Students' interviews 3rd)

... I like classroom interaction - they develop good interpersonal relationship between instructors and students. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Bader: A good lecture should not be stuffed with information; our instructors mainly depend on talking and sometimes reading from resources... a good instructor should use a variety of methods and resources; the internet and the PowerPoint to help us to participate. For example, we can download an article from the internet, and bring it to the class for group discussion and criticism... The students will learn more if they are involved in discussions. (Students' interviews 5th)

I dream to be an instructor to promote dialogue between the instructor and the students. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

The students articulated most of these opinions while criticising their instructors' traditional methods (see below), which underlies that fact that those students, like their instructors, are aware of some aspects of effective teaching practices, despite the fact that these aspects are not often practised in the classroom. I read this similarity as a backdrop that labels a problem of lack of understanding and interpersonal relations between the instructors and their students. While both are fully aware of the need and value of student/instructor interaction - this aimed interaction is not materialised in the classroom, hence the need emerges to search for the possible techniques and strategies to achieve this aim. As I presented above, students' interaction requires building strong personal ties and mutual understanding rather than an exchange of blame and grievance. With this understanding, the techniques and strategies for building interpersonal relations should be perceived as substantial aspects of effective teaching practices. The instructors need to step beyond the mere presentation and delivery of knowledge into establishing a classroom environment through which both build necessary skills and repertoires that enable classroom interaction. Classroom interaction and learning are reciprocally related and feed each other. In other words, for learning to take place, interaction must occur, and when interaction is ensured, learning inevitably follows. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) perceive learning as 'bi-directionally' oriented activity of "a complex interweaving of language, interaction and cognition [... which] involves the sharing and testing of intersubjective meanings and the negotiation of interpretations through interaction and the exercise of empathy" (p. 117). As such, recognition of the innate potential of interaction in the learning process makes the learning process a holistic approach through which myriad elements of interpersonal, cognitive, responsiveness and openness are crucially needed.

In the whole corpus of data, a close reading of the instructors' and students' narratives regarding interaction elucidates dichotomous and contesting views. While both acknowledge the importance of interaction, both charge each other for the failure of promoting constructive classroom interactions. For those parties (instructors, learners, and others involved) to achieve vigorous interactive learning, there should be a need to develop dialogic repertoires that are based on shared understanding and appreciation. Dialogic interaction allows those involved in the educational process to challenge dichotomous conventions with the aim of dissolving the boundaries between them. It, furthermore, enables the acknowledgement of challenges of difference, not simply as inherent and socially or culturally constructed and defined, but rather as essentially human, which ultimately leads to a genre of critical pedagogy that celebrates multiple subjectivities and multiple forms of discursive practice (I discuss the concept of discursive practice as a means to meet these challenges more fully in Chapter 6).

In addition to their desire to be interactively involved in their own learning, the students perceived effective teaching as promoting authentic skills that enable them meet the challenges of life and their aspirations to meet the demands of the job market. Mishari, for example perceived good teaching as:

The most updated that is related to the students' every changing needs. It should exceed the classroom to address real-life issues. For example, I study many subjects that until now I cannot perceive their relation to my life. (Students' interviews 4th)

Communicating knowledge to students in an interesting way is another view provided by Bader, who also perceived good instructors as those who:

...update their teaching methods through the use of technology and the internet... I believe that the university must connect with the job market to develop courses that allow us to find jobs as soon as we graduate. (Students' interviews 5th)

Likewise, Hamdan reported his perception of a good instructor as the one whose teaching is practiced through building connections with real-life situations:

I remember a non-Saudi instructor who taught us how to write and use emails to contact the public relation department in some local and international business establishments as part of a project we were doing... that was a unique experience ... I felt confident as I acquired good skills to communicate with people outside the university. (Students' interviews 16th)

As these narratives demonstrate, the students understand effective teaching practice to be practice that is made meaningful to them through connecting what they study to what they perceive as their vital interests. The above examples demonstrate that meaningful or relevant teaching must be directed to what the students perceive as meaningful. It is significant to recall that the instructors, too, have perceived that effective teaching should be meaningful to students. The means of promoting meaningful teaching and learning as actual practice is still far below the level desired by the students. In their interviews, as well as in their comments on open-ended questionnaire questions (see below), the students were principally discontented with the current instructors' teaching practices. Drawing on the same line of argument, I contend that the existing challenge for the instructors is very much related to the absence of communal ground between them and the students. In other words, the problem, I argue, replicates the intergenerational conflict that exists in many social spheres. While the students, for example, perceive meaningful learning to connect to the requirements of the changing job market, the instructors still mostly adhere to their conventional methods of perceiving the act of teaching as static knowledge delivery.

For the students, the use of techniques that promote direct contact with their future potential job markets is highly emphasised. Bader's narrative is among three other views that reported interesting learning experiences, through which they perceived that the skills they acquired were practical and related to their job aspirations. Saud narrated another effective learning experience when his instructor asked the students to download the websites of famous banks to be analysed for a research project proposal. He talked about the many skills that he acquired in the process, including the use of computer skills, the effective use of 'search' in the internet, the evaluation of relevant materials, the use of analytical packages, etc. Indeed, the act of contextualising learning in real-life and authentic situations is all encompassing since, in addition to the targeted skills, myriad other

skills are acquired in the process, which could not be achieved through artificial or strict in-classroom teaching.

In a similar vein, Sultan reported an effective learning experience when his instructor asked them to practice 'Holy Speech' skills amongst each other in a mosque rather than doing it in the classroom. He explained how standing on the pedestal of the mosque had provided him with confidence to meet the public and deliver his speech. It is evident that such narratives of the students' experiences of effective learning as reported from their own perspectives reflect effective teaching practices on the part of the instructors. Although these were just a few reported examples, they remain highly indicative of the value and efficiency of teaching practices that bring together theoretical and practical knowledge in real-life situations. It is significant to point out that such practice is not demanding on the part of the instructors since the major responsibilities are assigned to the students who are actively involved in these learning skills.

5.3.5.2 Students' Views of Instructors' Negative Teaching Practices

While the students reported that being actively involved through interaction enhanced their learning, they underscored that the majority of their instructors still adhered to traditional methods of teaching which resulted in students feeling marginalised, disadvantaged, and 'muted' as well as being denied their basic learning needs.

Theme One: 'They can see more than what we can'. I use this maxim to underlie the fact that others' perceptions of us or what we do is more realistic than our perception of ourselves. I read the students' perceptions regarding the instructors' teaching practices as reflecting their attentiveness and concern. Their stories were articulated with a striking passion when they narrated their experiences of marginalisation and the unique power and authority that were exercised over them. I report this theme to highlight that the whole case in the current educational setting does require an interventionist approach within the broader lines of critical pedagogy. Among the several reasons for the need for a genre of critical pedagogy, I highlight two aspects drawn from the data. On the one hand, there is a remarkably disparate, and to certain extent, contradictory, understanding between instructors and students regarding students' learning needs. On the other, the students appeared to be marginalised and disadvantaged resulting

from the instructors' teaching practices. I exemplify these two aspects with the following quotations from the students' semi-structured interview data and responses to the questionnaire's open-ended questions.

... [their teaching] is based on arrogance and egotism. Frankly, our Saudi instructors are self-centred, they often talk to themselves, use language that we cannot understand, and quite often they insult us with very offensive words. (Said, students' interviews 1st)

Saudi instructors practice exaggerated power on us; I don't like doing any course with them... they don't accept any sort of comments on their teaching, they talk all the time; we cannot say anything in the lecture. (Saud, students' interviews 2nd)

... they [instructors] ask us to interact as if they say do not interact, and they tell us to ask question in such a way as if saying you are not allowed to ask. We are confused, we don't know how to satisfy them. (Mishari, students' interviews 4th)

At the beginning of a course, there is an instructor who told us that the percentage of those who pass my course will never exceed 5 percent ... if anyone [student] misses an exam, even if he brings a medical report, he will fail. (Bader, students' interviews 5th)

For your consideration, not only their questions are insulting, but everything. I remember a student, very long ago, who answered a question wrongly, he wrote in the exam paper that the Red Sea lies in the Southern part of Saudi Arabia; you know the correct answer is Yemen. The instructor spent the whole lecture laughing and throwing sarcastic comments on that student. (Fawzi, students' interviews 11th)

... they [instructors] do not respect our privacies ... some instructors read loudly our exams' marks in front of other students to embarrass students with low marks. (Mohammed, students' interviews 8th)

I swear to Allah that most Saudi instructors are careless to us; they come to the class as if being pushed to teaching. All of them sit on the chair for the whole lecture, keep talking or reading, then they leave. (Hasan, students' interviews 14th)

... he [an instructor] focuses on one student; he starts every class by asking that student: "what about the sheep? Did you feed them? Are they happy?" Honestly, if I were that student, I would drop the course or leave the university. (Naif, students' interviews 3rd)

Our instructors are temperamental; sometimes they enter the classroom and the first thing they start with is insulting us - we don't know why. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

They treat us like animals; no respect to us as human beings. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

They do not trust us at all. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

... you feel that their evaluation as if fighting with us. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Their teaching is not real; it does not touch upon our lives. (Students' open-ended questionnaire comments)

Very unacceptable to me; they use old fashioned teaching methods, only lecturing. (Students' questionnaires, open-ended answers)

These are just a few examples of the students' stories and comments on their current education. As an academic and instructor, I feel the necessity to include such striking narratives for several reasons. Firstly, these views were recurrent themes; almost all students provided such narratives. I feel my obligation as a researcher and instructor is to address these views as they expose practices that, although common to our institutions, very few people would challenge. In fact, these narratives entail a crucial aspect of education in Saudi Arabia that is peculiarly under-researched as they involve political engagements at higher educational levels. Secondly, these narratives crucially suggest the absence of democratic education where, instead, the instructors maintain and practice their perceived power over the students who are marginalised and oppressed. They deem their own (teaching) practices as beyond question since the educational and social systems themselves would support such behaviours. It is interesting that all these narratives addressed the behaviour of the Saudi instructors while

no single statement was observed against the non-Saudi instructors. This reflects the outright power that Saudi instructors enjoy in the Saudi educational systems. Thirdly, and more importantly, the students' narratives underscore the need for a critical pedagogy. In Brazil very long ago, the situation was very similar to the current one in Saudi Arabia. The seminal educator, Paulo Freire through his critical pedagogy, managed to promote democratic education. His widely read texts *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Pedagogy of Hope* (1981), for example, have been enlightening to all those who concern themselves with better education in the future. For the Saudi educational system to promote such a change a top-to-down reform is required; the aims, policy and the whole philosophy should be subject to corrective revisions.

Since teaching practices are not isolated from their educational context, the above argument becomes relevant. In fact, the whole corpus of data indicate that the major problems and challenges that teaching and learning are subject to emerge from deficiencies in the current educational policy. An investigation of teaching practices at a macro level requires us to consider all aspects that impact these practices including political, social and cultural contexts. Additionally, since meeting the students' perspectives and needs remain the ultimate target of teaching practice, it becomes necessary to explore how these practices are received by learners.

Theme Two: Traditional and Outdated Teaching Practices. The second major theme that emerges from the students' narratives and comments is their perceptions of their instructors' teaching practices as reflecting old-fashioned teaching styles. While most of the students reported that their instructors are academically competent, they were unhappy with their teaching strategies. They reported that their instructors' teaching was old fashioned: mainly talking or reading from textbooks while sitting on their chairs. Interestingly, the students reported that instructors near the start of their careers enthusiastically used a wider variety of teaching methods and were passionate about their teaching, but over the course of time, they lost such enthusiasm and their teaching turned towards a much more traditional pedagogy characterised by: a) the delivery of information without reflecting on it; b) the use of outdated textbooks; c) the shortage or absence of the use of technology (some instructors still use handwritten hand-outs or those prepared by typewriters); d) assessment through

written exams; e) and a lack of discussion, group work or interaction. There appeared to be a consensus among the students in this study that their instructors' teaching was monotonous, repetitive and uninteresting. In addition, students reported that the instructors were often not well prepared for lessons; they often missed classes or condensed the classes into specific days and times (the students explained that since some instructors live in distant cities, they made their schedules on one or two days in the week).

Since I have discussed most of these themes throughout the previous section, I opt to utilise these findings to highlight several major points regarding the current educational tradition with some focus on the teaching practices.

Education is an apparatus of ideology through which certain social and cultural norms are perceived as the most effective and worthwhile. In the current context, the strict and out-dated teaching practices, as the above examples demonstrate, continue a tradition where certain chauvinistic and ideological behaviours on the part of educators are perceived as the best. As the data tell us, the instructors claim that they assign themselves the task of understanding their students and make use of such understanding. Juxtaposing the views of the instructors with those of the students, however, tells a rather different story: a story of educators who adopt what I call a *positivistic approach* in their teaching. Such a positivistic approach, loosely used, I argue, yields conventional ways of teaching. Since the basic sense of tradition entails the compliance that teaching practice is perceived as separable from all other contextual surroundings including students' learning, tradition would project itself as self-standing, isolated and trusted, hence, efficient in its own right. In other words, the argument is, tradition and positivistic approaches to knowledge (or positivistic practice in our case) would rely on a similar philosophical assumption; that both operate in isolation from all other active elements in their contexts.

Drawing on this, it could be argued, that the colossal gap between the world views of the instructors and the students could reflect a problem of constructive or shared epistemic stance. As Lather (1992) reminds us, positivist approaches should be questioned because they tend to serve 'dominating interests' reflecting 'lust for absolutes and certainty' in ways of knowing. After Foucault (1980), Lather attacks positivism as reflecting 'regimes of truth' that underpin a "dominant mode

of social science inquiry, a code word meaning, at best, 'bourgeois' and 'reactionary and supporting the status quo, at worst' (McCormack, quoted in Lather, p. 89). Although Lather and McCormack attack positivism from the perspective of research and knowledge production, I argue that teaching practices, too, are subject to the orthodoxy of positivistic traditions. As the findings demonstrate, the adopted teaching practice would mainly rely on the static delivery of knowledge in a strict and unidirectional way. Such a flow of practice, that is, from the instructors to the students (learners), denies any possibility of constructing shared ways of teaching and learning.

While most of the instructors' teaching practices reflect traditional or positivistic behaviours, the students' world views, embedded in their criticism, would reflect what I call a 'post-positivistic' understanding of the stance of learning. In our post-modern era, traditional ways of teaching would render the learning process on the part of the students problematic. Since the stance of knowledge has turned out to be dynamic and approaches to it have proliferated, and are changing and in constant flux, pedagogical practice should match the demands of contemporariness. The above students' narratives underscore the fact that they understand or are subject to the post-modernist condition where societies are fragmented, identities are emergent and hybrid and new forms of conflicts keep emerging. With the lack of response on the part of the educational system and instructors' teaching practices to meet these vibrant issues, challenges continue to prevail and theoretical solutions remain dysfunctional.

As such, teaching practice can be seen as a process that falls between these two models and therefore it becomes a necessity to adopt the repertoires of critical pedagogy. Most research literature adopts dichotomous narratives that mediate between traditional and progressive teaching practices. I attempt, through the above argument, to reread this dichotomy from another perspective, that is, from an epistemological or philosophical one, to address the question of traditional versus non-directive or progressive teaching practices. There becomes a need to draw on the epistemology (how we know what we know) to a) critically understand effective teaching practices as shared between two worldviews, our own and those of others; and b) based on such an understanding, concerned parties develop dialogic tenets through which such understanding is promoted into actual practice.

5.4 Conclusions

The study addresses Saudi instructors' teaching practices in an emergent university. The main thrust of the data is in harmony with the key investigation of addressing the many issues surrounding these practices. The findings reported in this chapter reflect a particular case of a higher educational institution where most of these findings are perceived as emergent. Several issues are observed from the participants' narratives in the semi-structured interviews: the instructors' perceptions of teaching practices, their actual teaching practices, and the challenges that hinder them from promoting effective teaching practices. From the students' perspective, several other themes emerged, including their description of their instructors' teaching practices (effective or otherwise), how their learning is affected as a result of these practices, and how they perceive effective teaching practices that accomplish learning. More significantly, other emergent themes reflect that the current educational context suffers substantial and inherent problems that influence the instructors' teaching practices as well as the students' learning.

For most of the interpretations in this chapter, I adopt a holistic reading of the corpus of data through comparisons between the worldviews of the instructors and those of the students. The rationale behind this approach is to offer a conclusive reading of the major aspects of social, cultural, educational, personal and interpersonal dimensions that directly or indirectly affect the instructors' teaching practices. Drawing on this approach, I conclude that: a) it is not possible to understand teaching practices in isolation from other operative factors which might seem irrelevant; b) there is a remarkable gap between theory and practice (or between the perceptions of the instructors' effective teaching practices and their actualisation of these practices); c) similarly, there is a noteworthy gap between teaching and learning (or between teaching practices that lead to learning); d) there are many challenges that hinder effective teaching practice operating on all levels including administrative, social, and personal levels and, notably, a lack of professional development programmes; f) most importantly, the students in the current context were found to be subject to a matrix of power relations so were often excluded from mainstream 'educational' practice. In Chapter Six, I discuss these themes, in addition to others, in an attempt to contribute to the educational research literature concerning teaching practices.

CHAPTER SIX

ENVIRONMENT AND DYNAMICS OF THE INSTRUCTORS’ TEACHING PRACTICES

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six I present a summary of the major findings of the study captured by my discussions of the findings and informed by the research questions. I begin the chapter by providing a brief overview of the problem under investigation, then summarise the key findings presented and discussed in Chapter Five. In this chapter, I juxtapose my principal findings with those of previous research and theory and explore areas where they confirm or contradict each other. I examine further possibilities for moving forward knowledge regarding teaching practices in higher education by investigating and discussing my own key findings in this research. Specifically, drawing on the research questions, the chapter is outlined as follows. Firstly, I provide my accounts regarding the nature and context-specific issues surrounding teaching practices as drawn from my exploration of the Saudi context. Secondly, I explore how these teaching practices are conceptualised, constructed and actualised by both instructors and students. Thirdly, in response to my arguments and discussions of the emergent theme of the context-boundedness of teaching practices, I examine the theoretical and pedagogical possibilities of a model referred to as Contextually Responsive Differentiated Teaching Practices. In light of my own findings, as well as the approaches (or models) already established in relevant literature, I deem the proposed model to respond to the demands of the sociocultural, personal and socioeconomic particularities of the current context. To avoid repetition and to maintain focus in this chapter, I focus on the key findings, and when other minor ones are needed for the discussion, I limit myself to referring to them in Chapter Five. Since I deem the aim of this chapter to optimise deeper discussions of findings; to explore how issues are interconnected and intertwined; and to see what sort of a story this can tell at an abstract or theoretical level, I refrain from adopting a linear discussion of the findings (i.e. the order they appeared in Chapter 5), but rather I adopt a strategy of navigating between areas and themes so as to build a more coherent and informed narrative that fulfils the purpose of a discussion chapter.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to capture key features and issues surrounding an understanding of teaching practices as reported by the research participants as well as my own interpretations and discussions. In other words, I respond to questions including: what counts as teaching practice(s)? Where can boundaries be drawn around a given practice to be deemed as a teaching practice or not? What external (or macro) factors are involved and how could they influence or shape teaching practices in the current context? What possible ways are there to introduce a common language for teaching practices in higher education? How are 'good/effective' teaching practices perceived and optimised in the current context? How are teaching practices conceptualised, optimised and actualised in the current context? What challenges are involved? What can answers to these questions tell us regarding an understanding of a context-specific teaching practices tradition? In order to produce answers to these questions, another set of questions could emerge, including: What perceptions do students hold of their instructors' teaching practices? From a student perspective, how can their instructors' teaching practices affect their learning? How far are instructors' and students' worldviews consistent, and what does this tell regarding their interpersonal relations? Other questions will inevitably arise; I address and respond to them in the course of my discussion.

6.2 An Overview of the Study

Within the tradition of exploratory case study, I have approached issues surrounding the instructors' teaching practices in an emergent university in the northern region of Saudi Arabia. The aim of the study was to reach a better understanding of the nature of the teaching practices as perceived and practised by the instructors in this university. In fact, as I mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, I have approached the topic without having any clearly established assumptions regarding 'what is there?' In other words, I deem my engagement in this research to be a journey of exploration of untrodden paths in my context since there is no single piece of research that has addressed this topic in the Saudi context; let alone context-specific studies that explore an educational context in a nomad and 'exotic' region in the country. However, based on reviewing related research literature in other similar contexts, I established the aims of the study as: a) to understand the nature of the teaching practices in the current context; b) to identify the roles of factors involved in fashioning these practices the way they

are; c) to explore the challenges involved; d) to examine the students' views of how their instructors' teaching practices affect them and their learning. To collect data that could achieve these aims, I developed two research instruments: a questionnaire (which included open-ended questions) and semi-structured interviews. When data were obtained, especially from the open-ended questionnaire and interviews, I embarked on reading and immersing myself in the huge body of diverse worldviews of the research participants. At the initial stages of my interpretations and analyses, I directed my attention to classroom teaching practices and institutional related issues or what I called micro (or intrinsic) matters. Data, however, illuminated other dimensions that I had not previously considered; namely the socioeconomic, cultural and personal dimensions and aspects related to the instructors' teaching practices. I read the data again, and did another round of searching and consulting literature concerning these emergent aspects. To my surprise, I came across abundant research literature that addresses teaching practices from sociocultural and economic perspectives. Following this, I engaged with the data again and started to read and connect ideas differently focusing on the special nature of my research context. I broadened my perspectives to read how the participants' worldviews revolve around issues which can be encapsulated within contextually laden matters. I directed special attention to the participants' construction of realities, beliefs, attitudes and epistemological stances and how these constructions could be read in connection with each other within a contextual understanding. I, therefore, started to develop a solid understanding of the instructors' teaching practices and to form a clear focus of the research aims and direction. I revisited my earlier research problem, research questions and aims so that I could move ahead with a piece of research that authentically addresses the challenges in my research context. This is how I optimised my journey of discovery in this research; a journey that has been shaped by a consistent search for constructing relevant and trustworthy knowledge that could be useful to policymakers, instructors, researchers and all involved in issues surrounding teaching practices in higher education.

6.3 Summary of the Principal Findings

In this section, I summarise the key findings of the study as previously discussed in Chapter Five. Since I introduced my discussions and arguments in Chapter Five, in this section I highlight the theoretical directions of the key findings of the study. I, however, elaborate on the major findings related to an understanding of the nature of the instructors' teaching practices as reflecting their boundedness to their educational, social, economic, and cultural context. As I mentioned above, I deem my findings and arguments related to contextual teaching practices of special importance as they could make an original contribution to knowledge. I therefore wish to postpone discussing and elaborating on this theme until later in this chapter.

6.3.1 The Nature of Current Instructors' Teaching Practices

Currently, issues surrounding teaching practices have become the major concern of all educational institutions and universities (e.g. Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Hall & Hooper, 2008; Keulen, 2006; Marginson, 2011; Sonesson & Sand, 2006), and research concerning itself with teaching practice has been copious (e.g. Bartram & Bailey, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2008; Lomas, 2004; Morley, 2012; Powers, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2011; Wong, 2012). Universities have had particular interest in enhancing the quality of teaching offered to their students. Many universities, including the ones in the current research context, have established specialised deanships for quality assurance, which concern themselves with achieving and maintaining excellent learning and teaching environments (Biggs, 2003). With reference to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education documents, since 2010 it has become a law that all Saudi universities should have specialised deans for quality assurance purposes (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). Nonetheless, myriad factors work separately or together to impact on teaching practices in the classroom. These factors include, but are not limited to; lack of a clear and agreed upon definition and terminology (Devlin, 2006; Taylor & Colet, 2010); changing the beliefs and habits of learners (Light et al., 2009); conflictual behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and intentions concerning what works held by both the instructors and learners (Hill, et al., 2003; Ho et al., 2001; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Norton et al., 2005); lack of definition of learners' needs (Joseph et al., 2005; McAlpine et al., 2006; Voss & Gruber, 2006;); the perception of teaching practice as a complex contextual and relational pedagogical phenomenon

(Lindblom-Ylancee, 2006; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999); and lack of systematic professional development programmes (Gilbert & Gibbs, 1999). In the present study, I addressed this issue by asking the research participants (the instructors) about their views of their own teaching practices. I also addressed the same question to the students in an attempt to obtain a more objective and holistic understanding of what is actually practised in the classroom.

Drawing on the findings of the study and for an understanding of the nature of teaching practices, three major threads can be highlighted. First, the instructors' perceptions of teaching practices contrasted against their attitudes (personal, sociocultural and academic positions, or what I prefer to call 'socio-academic'), epistemological and ideological positions, and economic status. The second dimension is the instructors' actual teaching practices, or what they actually do. This dimension involves several connected dynamics inside the classroom (e.g. teaching) and outside the classroom (e.g. planning, preparation, assessment and evaluation, communication, etc.). The third dimension is related to the nature of the practice itself when considering the interplay between 'what they know' and 'what they actually do'. In other words, what could obviate the actualisation of their perceptions into real practices? The fourth and most important highlight (finding concerns how external factors (outside the educational environment) shape and influence the nature of teaching practices (e.g. control over their teaching and students, power relations, conflicts and paradoxes, etc.). These key findings are summarised as follows:

First: An Instructor-Centred Teaching Practice

Probably the term teacher-centred (or instructor-centred) teaching practice could capture the instructors' perceptions of their roles in the present research context. In their interviews, they consciously or unconsciously reiterated ideas and narratives reflecting their dominant roles (see Sections: 5.3.2.4 "Teaching material selection" (strict textbooks); 5.3.2.5 "Teaching style" (lecturing); 5.3.2.6 "Assessment" (written exams); 5.3.3.1 "student-centred teaching"). These perceptions do not, however, rely on institutionally established and informed conventions, but rather ensued from personal and intuitive beliefs and visions of their roles. While this teaching approach could be read in terms of 'humanistic teaching' (Fuhrmann & Grasha, 1983); or as 'transmission-interactive-reactive' teaching strategy (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996); or as providing an example of

'collective responsibility' of instructors (Hattie, 2009), previously discussed, it could be argued further that such an approach resonates with dominant relations of perceived power, especially with the absence of protocols and codes that regulate the responsibilities and roles of instructors as well as their relations with their students.

It is possible to read the notion of 'teacher-centred approach' that takes the micro and macro dimensions of teaching practices as a compelling conceptualisation that resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist approach. This understanding of teaching practices takes up the socio-cultural approach as a noteworthy element for achieving good or effective teaching practices, which, in turn, facilitates students' learning. In addition to this, the reciprocated relationship between individuals (the instructors) and their pedagogical orientations is largely determined by the immediate social context. As Chan et al. (1992) conclude, the instructors' behaviours are a composite of several aspects including the instructors' 'social self', the 'pedagogical self' and the 'personal self', which operate together to project the variants of teaching practices. In the current context, there exists an evident distinction between two social settings or environments: the 'social self', which plays a major role in shaping the instructors' perception of teaching practices. The 'social self' is capable of identifying the interpersonal relationships between the instructors and the students, which are determined by a wider social context.

Drawing on my findings (see Sections: 5.3.2.1 "Instructors' duties"; 5.3.4.2 "Institutional expectations and constraints"; 5.3.5.2 "Students' views of instructors' negative teaching practices"), I argue that the other two selves Chan talks about (the 'pedagogical self' and the 'personal self') are determined and informed by the first, the 'social self', at both an epistemological and a practical level. Since our perceptions of reality are determined by our surroundings, the means through which instructors perceive themselves, their practices, students, and, hence, their students' projects, the distinctive concept that I may add to Chan is that of a 'socio-academic self-agency'. In other words, the instructors' self-agency' is constructed in a holistic and interactional socio-academic context rather than by separate and passive elements. In fact, if the current study has made a contribution to our understanding of teaching practices, it does so through considering two seemingly contrasting dimensions. On the one hand, it has called

our attention to consider the nature of teaching practices as a holistic phenomenon (or a corpus of myriad elements that constitute the ‘instructors’ self’). This holistic approach is not possible without paying close attention to the specific (micro and macro, visible and invisible) elements of this phenomenon. Added to this, our consideration of both should not take us away from studying the interactional aspect of these elements, both at holistic and specific levels. I will elaborate in this major and key finding below but, for now, I discuss the constituents of what might be deemed as ‘teaching practices’ as reported by the research participants.

Second: Planning Teaching

Since the study generally explores teaching practices, I approached the concept of planning to stand for planning teaching activities the instructors attempt while delivering their lessons. In addition to their diverse and conflicting views regarding planning, the instructors used the term to refer to an unidentified level of planning. To theorise this, it is important to highlight the fact that planning teaching is an indispensable phase of teaching (Eley, 2006) and a means of ‘reflection-in-process’ (Day, 1999) that requires interactive and reactive strategy (Chan, 2010). In part, the findings of this study represented by some instructors’ views confirm similar findings (see Section: 5.3.2.2 “Planning teaching”). Nonetheless, there was also evidence that instructors devalue planning since it is mostly not transferred to actual practice. In fact, this set of views is interesting as it relates to and reflects my conclusion regarding the first theme that holds the instructors are privileged and knowledgeable individuals who conduct their teaching from a position of personal intuition. In the current institutional ‘culture’, the instructors’ intuitive improvisation of teaching practices emerges from several factors including: a) absence of long-term planning that takes place at the institutional or national level; b) lack of clear learning objectives, and c) absence of feedback from previous students, which makes planning as a strict ‘template’ that instructors prescribe to themselves and hardly actualise into real classroom practice.

Although the findings of the study revealed two contradictory assumptions regarding planning, I argue that the problem of planning in the current context could be best understood when considering the nature of planning itself in this teaching culture. As I attempt to argue, while research literature perceives

planning as a continuous process entailing a cycle of actions and reactions throughout the teaching period, the current instructors perceive and handle planning teaching as a practice that is mostly governed by their individual intuitions and improvisations of 'what works' for them. This behaviour is consolidated by the broader institutional 'culture' that imposes abstract and irrelevant learning objectives and planning policies. Additionally, it could also be claimed that, like other teaching practice constituents, the notion of planning is subject to the instructors' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that are informed by their socio-academic status in this context. Whether or not planning was perceived as important, the instructors constructed their perceptions and views through the way their planning was perceived and received in their educational context. In other words, to plan or not to plan their teaching (e.g. lessons), involved the impact of a closed educational 'culture' that valued or did not value planning. In my case, the majority of the instructors' responses, as indicated in Chapter Five, showed a lack of trust in the system; hence, fearing their 'honesty' became an issue at stake (see Section: 5.3.2.2 "Planning teaching"). As such, the findings derived from the current study, and the way I approached the instructors' disparate opinions, should contribute to the research literature by emphasising a vision of planning based on 'reactive' and 'interactive' planning strategies, to use Chan's (2010) words.

Third: Teaching Management

The theme of teaching management or managing teaching captures the instructors' views regarding how they undertake their own teaching in the classroom or beyond. As I discussed in Chapter Five (see Section: 5.3.2.3 "Course or teaching management"), on the theme of teaching management, whether referring to handling curriculum, teaching materials, assessment strategies, teaching pedagogy or the several activities collectively referred to as 'classroom management', the instructors' responses underscored the need for activities that are meaningful to students' personal and academic lives. For students to make sense of learning, it is imperative to manage teaching within context-specific borders (William & Burden, 1997) where 'life-contexts', the students' local and regional special learning interests (Berns & Erickson, 2001), are valued and inform teaching practices and management. In short, based on my findings, I perceive managing teaching very much like the *organisations'*

enactments where protocols are discursively constructed to respond to changing customer demands, and are socially interactive between diverse stakeholders and the organisational personnel within and outside the organisation. As such, teaching management is understood as an aspect of 'differentiated' teaching and learning practices (Tomlinson, 2000), which is contextually responsive.

Teaching materials and textbooks are the cornerstone of any successful teaching practice; they are the link between the instructors and the students. They are tools by which learning can take place, and a venue where engagement (critical or otherwise) with knowledge production can take place (Cashin, 1995). They also reflect the role of the instructors and their teaching practices through the way they locate themselves in relation to the materials (Coate et al., 2001). These roles can vary significantly in different educational contexts; while the instructor could assume the role of facilitator by leading learners to various sources of knowledge and how to engage with them, in contexts like the current one the instructors practice a dominant role over all aspects of teaching materials such as selection, preparation, ways of teaching, etc.

As reported in Chapter Five, the responses of the instructors vary, and to some extent contradict each other. Their responses also contradict those of their students. What is most interesting about these findings is the fact that all the instructors used the word 'textbook(s)' to refer to *any* teaching materials they use. As I have attempted to discuss earlier, they depend on a single resource referred to as a 'textbook'. Whether compiled, copied or purchased, the overdependence on a 'textbook' could tell us a lot about this educational culture. On the one hand, it indicates the control of the instructors over teaching by assigning themselves the authority to select for the students what they see proper. The students, on the other hand, continue in their passive role as having no authority to speak of what is suitable for them in terms of their future career or personal or cultural suitability.

In fact, the containment of teaching materials (or more precisely, knowledge) in a bounded book indicates several issues with the way this aspect of teaching practice in the current context is handled. On the one hand, knowledge is deemed as an entity that needs to be transferred from its sources into students' brains. This, to a great extent, reflects what Gilbert (2005) refers to as 'knowledge societies' where knowledge is seen as a 'thing'; a 'product' is introduced as a

factual and true outcome that can be stored in learners' minds. As some instructors reported, the selection of the 'textbooks' is imposed on them by the university, which projects not only the students as being a disadvantaged category, but also the instructors themselves become subject to the strict authority of the institution.

I argue that centralised educational systems, including the current one, through the imposition of specific forms of knowledge, maintain power over the instructors as well as the students. The strict selection of textbooks, the lack of critical thinking on the part of the students, as well as other related issues, reflects the mainstream policy of a national establishment that maintains its power over education. Apple, in his seminal work *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age* (2000), argues that: "Knowledge is never neutral; it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power" (p. 42). He argues that educational policy and practice result from struggles among powerful groups and social movements to make their knowledge legitimate, to defend or improve their social status, and to increase their power in the larger social world. Hence, "it is naïve to think of the school curriculum as neutral knowledge" (p. 43). On a similar ground, Foucault (1982) argues that, in its distribution, educational systems are the sites of power of what they permit and in what they prevent. To him, every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and power that goes with it. Since this argument *could not* be the focus of the present study, I prefer to avoid getting into a more detailed critical argument regarding the relationship with the general policies of the country and education. This, however, could be a significant topic for further research.

Fourth: Students' Learning and Teaching Practices

Research tells us that the relationship between teaching practices and students' learning is not purely causal; myriad factors are involved, and there is a lack of consistency in the way they are related (Alauddin & Tisdell, 2011; Chong & Crowther, 2005; Handoyo, 2006; MacAlpine, 2001). Teaching/learning comprises a huge and complicated corpus of integrated components that inform each other in several directions. These components include but are not limited to: students' involvement (interaction, motivation, voice, interpersonal relations, aptitude and

competence); instructors' attributes (motivation, competence, professional training, and building rapport with students); teaching tools (courses, syllabus, media and teaching methods); instructional implementation (explanation of lecture materials, task assignments and evaluation); institutional policies (regulations, aims and facilities.); and socioeconomic and cultural particularities (workplace, social and familial values and beliefs). To limit the discussion of the above list, I understand the first component (the students) to exist in the centre of all other components (see below). To promote students' learning through teaching practices, there exists one fundamental practice accompanied with other less important ones. Based on existing literature, as well as the findings of this study (see Section: 5.3.3.1 "Student-centred teaching"), this principal practice could be captured through the degree of space and 'voice' allowed to students. Within the broader lines of critical pedagogy, the students' involvement and integration in the teaching/learning process can only be achieved through taking necessary procedures to promote critical thinking skills. In the present context, the instructors provided narratives of an awareness of the students' active role, yet they tended to blame their students for their passive roles. While the instructors articulated their eagerness to engage their students, the students reported a different story; their narratives showed their marginalised and disadvantaged position. As I have argued in Chapter Five, the instructors' 'personal judgements' (Hattie, 2009) and the absence of a 'logical act of teaching' (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005) on the part of instructors is reflected in the current context.

As for their teaching styles, the instructors reported that 'lecturing' or the use of lecture is the prevailing teaching style they adopt. Although in higher education lecturing is the most prevalent teaching style all over the world (Bligh, 1998; Brown & Race, 2002; Fisher et al., 1998), recent trends and research regarding classroom teaching methods have provided information about several other styles to serve and meet the requirements of students' learning. In the current context, however, the instructors did not talk about any of these styles. For example, when I asked about other teaching styles such as seminars, tutorials, workshops, laboratory sessions, field studies, etc., they confirmed that none of these were used by them or their colleagues.

It seems that the instructors use the concept of 'lecture' or 'lecturing' to refer to all teaching styles; they used it alternatively with the word 'class'. To use Terenzini and Pascarella's (1994) words, lecturing has turned out to delineate a 'myth', which is quite often associated with lower levels of skill, reflecting mere transfer of knowledge to students. It is also associated, as Terenzini and Pascarella claim, with teaching that is suitable for students with lower proficiency levels. According to Terenzin and Pascarella, this myth is based on the assumptions that all students are homogeneous and equally ready for the knowledge to be presented to them; that students' learning styles are the same; and that any difference in students' performance is due to their effort. With these assumptions, similar to the ones provided by some instructors, it could be assumed that the variable of teaching styles or the employment of extra strategies are minor to students' learning. Therefore, the utilisation of other teaching styles, such as seminar discussions or group work, is avoided as not suitable for what are perceived as low proficiency students. Furthermore, several students insist on direct talk or speech (some instructors deliver their lectures by reading from resources as students claimed) while lecturing. It is also surprising that for some instructors the use of computer-assisted lecturing, such as PowerPoint presentations, is deemed as an *unnecessary luxury*, to use an instructor's exact words (see Section: 5.3.2.5 "Lecturing").

In fact the previous analysis and argument should not be understood as an objection to using lectures since the lecturing technique remains a vital method for university teaching. Brown and Atkins (2005) remind us that, for the lectures to be relevant and effective, they need to entail three main components: a) coverage - that lectures should cover the appropriate information, knowledge, facts, and any other aspects; b) understanding - through which lectures should be utilised to generate extra knowledge through discussions; and c) motivation - where lectures should be designed and conducted in a way to guarantee stimulating students' interest. For them, lecturing is the all-inclusive teaching method that includes the presentation of information and knowledge, discussions and interactions to involve the students in responding to the delivered knowledge, and motivation through which the instructor keeps the students' interest in the topics presented.

Nonetheless, in the current context, lectures are used merely in the sense of delivering information to students with little or no chance of discussion. Some students described the lectures by maintaining that their instructors use only lectures during which they talk for the whole class; their instructors lack creativity and are always strict. Based on this reading of the data, I understand the use (or overuse) of the lecturing style as a pervading method employed by the instructors to avoid the challenge of teaching practices that require considerable effort of preparation and engagement. Additionally, the present lecture-dominant teaching style underlies wider educational assumptions of how learning should take place. Since the overwhelming majority of the instructors devalue the students' learning needs, critical thinking skills, self-learning abilities and their proficiency levels, they resort to lecturing as the safest and the handiest teaching style. On the other hand, some students prefer lectures as they feel more secure in the classroom since, as both the instructors and the students indicated, some other styles such as seminar discussion are very unusual for the whole Saudi educational system including the pre-university ones. This shows how change from a one-sided teaching style into a more participatory one could be received with discomfort as it could provoke feelings of anxiety with the unfamiliar pedagogical styles. Lectures, I conclude, could be perceived as the template or the norm for any teaching practice in the research institution.

As for the other constituents of the teaching practice, including assessment, and evaluation, the findings reported in Chapter Five confirm this line of argument. On the one hand, the instructors' overdependence on a single form of evaluation, namely written examinations, is indicative of the type of teaching (or delivering information) through lecturing that dominates the instructors' teaching practices. On the other hand, it gives information about the educational culture that abridges the learners' role into containers that need to be filled with 'proper' knowledge, and to assess 'learning', those learners are required to 'empty' this knowledge on the examination sheets. This second argument is important when considering the students' fear of these examinations, as they reported. Depending on examinations as the only assessment method, according to Biggs (2003), not only reflects the low quality of teaching, but is also indicative of weak learning outcomes. Similarly, Kember and Wong (2000) emphasise the relationship between assessment forms and the quality of higher education. For example,

peer assessment is strongly related to the students' ability to conduct interaction, debates, discussions and seminars.

As for the students' learning, based on the group of sub-themes (see p. 173), it could be argued that the students' learning in the current educational context takes a marginal space in the way the instructors actualise their teaching practices. The students lack active voice; the discrepancy between what is believed or said and what is practised; the false connection between teaching and learning; and what could be understood as meaningful teaching practice, – are all indicators of a particular educational culture that involves many paradoxes between what is believed and said and what is practised.

To elaborate on these themes, research literature is plentiful regarding the issues related to students' voice and position in learning. I, however, deem it necessary to read these findings in the context of Critical Pedagogy. Reconceptualising the major argument of critical pedagogy is significant in this particular context as it offers an understanding of the problem of the students' voice as a problem of society itself. As I have attempted to emphasise, the problems of instructors' teaching practices and some related ones such as students' lack of interaction, are problems informed by wider social and cultural ones. The seminal educator Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1985) reminds us that traditional and oppressive models of education continue to adopt totalising and static approaches to learning, and espouse rehearsal approaches to normalise and subdue the voices of learners. Freire believes learners who are excluded and made invisible in mainstream education are the most disadvantaged and oppressed category. The mainstream narrative of the instructors, as represented by strict and unyielding approaches, have appeared in several themes discussed so far. On top of these challenges is the instructors' perception of their students through which they judge them as immature and passive recipients of knowledge. They, however, expressed their dissatisfaction with this situation and aimed to empower students through their own teaching practices. For this to happen, teaching and learning need not be separated from each other, and the instructors and the students need to reflect on their problem and share the responsibility for overcoming it. Giroux (1992) calls for the development of a 'critical pedagogy', "through which [instructors] and students can think critically about how knowledge is produced and transformed in relation to the construction of social experiences

informed by a particular relationship between the self, others, and the larger world” (p. 98-99). Such calls need courageous decisions on the part of policy makers, and substantial transformation in the epistemology of the whole society regarding the roles of the students as well as the instructors. Although this is a demand in pre-university education, it would be feasible to practice this kind of democratic education at the university level. The practical means to achieve democratic education are quite possible to find as long as the will is there.

As for the sub-theme of the existing paradox between theory and practice, or what is believed and what is attempted, it is important to reconsider the instructors' 'socio-academic self' and agency. Since the instructors provided significant conceptualisations of the effective teaching that brings about learning, then what are the means for actualising this knowledge? Knowing and understanding ideas of effective teaching should be motivating for instructors, they should to promote a sense of achievement and enable self-initiated innovations that are based on strategic decisions. Strategic teaching is a form of teaching that is dynamic in the sense that instructors change or modify their teaching styles. In addition to strategic teaching, the instructors' personal attitudes and beliefs are significant in relation to initiating dynamic 'models' of teaching. Thompson (1992) enlists several notions within the realm of instructors' beliefs including "[instructors'] conscious or sub-conscious beliefs, concepts, meanings, rules, mental images, and preferences" (p. 132). Drawing on these arguments, as well as my findings (see Section: 5.3.3 "Instructors' perceptions of effective teaching practices"), I believe that since the instructors' conceptual schema is in favour of a teaching that leads to learning, there is a need to utilise what Hattie (2009) calls "professional judgements" and "clinical predictions" where the teaching process moves beyond the act of a mere delivery of knowledge into an analytical and diagnostic approach, in order to discover the dysfunctional elements of not only their teaching practices, but also of the overall educational system. I would add to this the fostering of a self-critical and evaluative approach within the broader repertoires of critical pedagogy previously discussed.

In theory (or according to the instructors' perception) effective teaching should involve learning, but the question that remains unanswered is: what guarantees that learning happens? Fenstermacher (1986) contends that there is no teaching if there is no learning and, although teaching might look a straightforward activity,

learning is a far more complicated activity and the relationship between teaching and learning may not be causal. He maintains:

“...the term ‘learning’ functions in both a task and achievement sense..... and thus [it is easy to] contend that the task of teaching is to produce the achievement of learning, when it in fact makes more sense to contend that a central task of teaching is to enable the student to perform the tasks of learning” (Fenstermacher, 1986, p. 39).

The third related sub-theme that emerged from considering the combination of the instructors' teaching practices and the students' learning is the view of teaching as an aspect of learning. Viewing teaching as an aspect of learning requires making sure that the students have achieved learning regardless of what teaching practices are used. As can be elicited from the data above, although the instructors explicitly claim the need to engage students in decisions regarding their education, the challenging task for these instructors remains how to actualise these claims in practice. Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) argue that, even if learning does not take place, teaching is still there, or there is no guarantee that teaching will bring about learning. As the data suggest (see Section: 5.3.3 “Instructors’ perceptions of effective teaching practices”), teaching from the instructors' point of view occurs, but learning does not necessarily ensue. Data however confirm Fenstermacher's and Richardson's analysis of what they describe as 'good teaching' (see Section: 5.3.3 “Instructors’ perceptions of effective teaching practices”). The instructors attested their understanding of the gap between teaching and learning. As Fenstermacher and Richardson contend, for good teaching that ensures learning, three aspects of teaching practices must be present. First, there must be a "logical act of teaching" (e.g. activities such as explaining, correcting and demonstrating); "the psychological acts of teaching" (e.g. motivating, encouraging and rewarding); and "the moral acts of teaching" (e.g. exhibiting and fostering honesty, courage and fairness). On the part of the students, there is a need for "willingness and efforts"; a "social surrounding supportive of teaching and learning"; and "opportunity to teach and learn" (p. 190). As such it can be concluded that the instructors' perceptions regarding students' learning are compelling and persuasive as they demonstrate an understanding of most of the elements Fenstermacher and Richardson talk about. Therefore, their theoretical 'knowledge' when utilised and transformed into real practice could lead, over time, to learning. This is, however, conditional on a

supportive educational and social environment. For such a professional community to exist and prosper, an upheaval of the social, cultural and institutional existing concepts of teaching need to take place.

In short, I contend that what contributes to the core of the problem of the paradoxes between the current instructors' teaching practices and the students' learning, on the one hand, and the instructors' perceptions and their actual practice, on the other, is the unique nature of the current educational environment. The assumption is that the instructors are the ones who decide what to teach, how to teach what is selected, and when student learning is to occur. What adds to the existing problem is the absence of open channels or mutual understanding between the instructors and their students which results from the instructors' negative perceptions of their students. It is obvious through the reported findings that the instructors' teaching styles, including other related practices (e.g. assessment), and the students' learning go in different directions. While the instructors celebrate their adopted teaching styles as the most suitable for their students, the students feel the dysfunctionality of these styles and, hence, remain, the disadvantaged element of a matrix of power relations (I will discuss this theme more fully in Section 6.4 below).

Fifth: Existing Challenges of Teaching Practices

In the current context, the challenges of teaching practices as reported by the instructors are numerous and related to almost every aspect of the educational environment including the socioeconomic context. In fact, the particular contextual and regional factors of the current research setting cause serious challenges to attempt effective learning and teaching practices. As reported in Chapter Five, (pp. 177-197), these challenges range from the physical teaching environment (classroom facilities, far distances, hot weather, etc.); institutional constraints (instructors' workload, lack of correspondence between the instructors' specialisations and the courses they teach, shortage of required instructors, absence of clear regulations, etc.); financial challenges; students' prior aptitudes; socio-cultural values and interpersonal relations and professional development programmes. In fact, the challenges reported are entangled, and do not result from one single factor or group of factors, but rather inform each other in several directions. Rather than rehearsing my previous discussions regarding each of these challenges addressed earlier, I wish to attempt to diagnose the

symptoms and origins of these challenges in a collective manner. Higher education in Saudi Arabia is relatively very recent compared to established ones in the region, and the current research context - addressing an emergent university in a nomad region - makes the investigation of the challenges the instructors encounter an informed one. That is, directing attention to the fact that newly established institutions existing in a nomad region could explain many of the reported challenges. For example, the harsh nomad environment, social values and beliefs, the nature of the enrolled students, and the institutional practices are dynamics that construct much of the reality of the existing problems. Above all, they construct the individuals' values and beliefs and how they approach their activities, and, ultimately, they project an evolutionary framework of contextual practices that is still far less than successful. In the next section, I elaborate on how the amalgam of these factors and others could be understood within the theme of context-bounded teaching practices.

6.4 Understanding the Dynamics of Teaching Practices in Higher Education

With the huge body of existing literature that partly or exclusively addresses questions regarding the nature and perspectives of teaching practices or, more precisely, what could count as teaching practices, I deem the challenging task in engaging with this question is to avoid the tradition of merely rehearsing established arguments in previous research. I realise my task of approaching such a question emanates from my commitment to further the existing discussions that address the nature of the dynamics of the instructors' teaching practices. Thus, in reiterating the existing literature regarding a perception of teaching practices as a loose amalgam of perspectives, outlooks and aspects (e.g. Bhatti, 2012; Yoo et al., 2013), I limit myself to finding a short way attain a larger view of these discussions and elaborate my findings to meet my announced purpose in this chapter.

Since the present study locates itself as 'generic exploratory research', (i.e. globally investigating the nature of teaching practices in a given context and from various aspects), similar research literature reports a multitude of perspectives involved in a study of teaching practices. These perspectives can range from instructors' and students' beliefs and attitudes, conceptions (or epistemological stances); institutional regulations and policies; physical environment (e.g. location of the university, class size, facilities, etc.); curriculum, textbooks, and

teaching materials; content and subject matter; assessment, feedback and evaluation; interpersonal and human relations; social, economic and cultural perspectives (of both the instructors and students); learners' characteristics (including their academic level, socioeconomic background, etc.); instructors' administrative responsibilities, workload, research, etc.; their involvement in professional development programmes among several others (e.g. Bartram & Bailey, 2009; Brown, 2010; Cashmore et al., 2013; Debowski, 2012; Gibbs et al., 2008; Little & Locke, 2011).

Indeed, research into teaching practices could involve several, or in some cases all, of the items listed above. The findings of this research confirm this unbounded and floating nature of the topic. I wish to engage with this issue by responding to the core nature of the topic in a different manner. Rather than adding to this list, I use my findings to examine the possibility of putting forward more concise perspectives of approaching the topic of teaching practices. Specifically, I conceive an answer to the question of how teaching practices exist and operate in the milieu of a given environment (or educational and social context). Since the current study limits itself to exploring the instructors' teaching practices in a special kind of context (a Saudi emergent university), I deem the task of addressing the current context not only important for an understanding of the nature of this specific context, but also to stretch out the scope of my current context to comprehend, at a more abstract level, how teaching practices exist and operate in their different environments.

In addition to the lack of a concise approach to the concept, the tradition with most researchers is to either add to the list or acknowledge the challenges of the nature of teaching practices as an amalgamated concept with loosely defined borders (Bhatti, 2012; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Yoo et al., 2013). Drawing on a global reading of my findings, I propose an understanding of the dynamics of the current teaching practices as a vertical and multi-layered cluster of practices rather than perceiving them as operating on a horizontal and flat level. This metaphor of vertical versus horizontal, so to speak, is useful not only to capture an understanding of the concept of teaching practices, but also to reveal how the myriad and multi-levelled aspects and perspectives are involved and interconnected, and how they influence and shape each other. Ultimately, I argue that this proposal would invite a more compelling understanding of the

notion of teaching practices rather than opening or stretching out the boundaries of the concept.

Not far from the findings of previous research, (e.g. Bartram & Bailey; 2009; Bhatti, 2012; Cashmore et al., 2013; Debowski; 2012; Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2008; Little & Locke; 2011; Yoo et al., 2013), the instructors in the present study perceive teaching practices as overarching behaviours influenced by several factors and operating at different levels. For example, phrases such as: 'teaching practices can involve everything' or '*is a mixture of everything*' can inform us how instructors perceive their roles as an all-inclusive component including several aspects and operating at several levels. While these responses are interesting to address, I highlight another set of responses which deem teaching practices as 'a component of three main elements: the student, the instructor and the environment' as well as perceiving teaching practices as a 'form of artistic work'.

Based on these and similar findings addressing the instructors' and students' perceptions of teaching practices; interpersonal and social relations and university regulations, I argue that the notion of teaching practices is a multi-layered component that operates on three levels: students, instructors and environment. The relationship between these three components composes a structure or a framework with defined boundaries informed by a context-bounded or context-specific practice that reflects the already established educational, academic, institutional, social, economic, cultural and physical environment. The relationship between these three components is also dynamic and interactive as they inform each other in several directions. Before elaborating on my discussion of this proposed understanding, I introduce a diagram representing a model of Environment and Dynamics of Instructors' Teaching Practices (EDITP) previously introduced in Chapter Four. In my discussion, I use the EDITP model to represent the structure (or framework) of the instructors' teaching practices including the myriad components of this structure, and the interactive movement between these components. Prior to introducing the EDITP model, it is useful to emphasise the fact that the proposition of this model emerges from my critical engagement and interpretation and discussion of the qualitative data of a small-scale exploratory case study exploring the nature and challenges of teaching practices. It is also important to stress the fact that this model represents the dynamics of

the instructors' teaching practices in a distinctive higher educational context in a rural emergent university in Saudi Arabia. The EDITP model captures the socio-cultural contextual factors, the institutional factors, the personal and interpersonal factors, which together emerge as a distinctively different educational environment referred to as a 'small culture' after Holliday (1999).

In fact, the proposition of the EDITP model is a result of the integration and interconnectedness of most of the themes addressed in the previous section. Whether micro or macro factors or elements, the interplay between these elements in a specific socio-academic context remains the prevailing feature of the instructors' teaching practices. For example, the instructors' adopted teaching style (lecturing) results from their belief of the functionality of this teaching style where students are considered as passive and lacking the willingness or ability to carry out extended classroom discussions. Likewise, as they reported, the instructors' negative attitude regarding the importance of planning is a result of the institutional 'culture', including their colleagues, that considers planning superfluous. Similarly, the instructors' inclination to adopt a single assessment technique (written exams) and the students' intimidation by these exams result from the interplay of several academic, institutional, personal and socio-cultural factors. The instructors' unquestionable domination and perceived power informed by their socio-academic locale results in adopting strict and authoritarian assessment methods. The same could be said about the way they manage their teaching and impose the teaching materials (textbook). As for the theme of the instructors' teaching and the students' learning, the integration of this great variety of factors results in a remarkable gap between teaching and learning.

Lastly, the model emerges from my transformational personal and academic journey through which I have achieved a holistic understanding of the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics, and this has enabled a comprehensive outlook on the instructors' teaching practices and students' learning. My personal attitude to the research, reflexivity and adaptation provide the main impetus for making a difference in my own context. Through stepping beyond the mere description of the topic in hand, I have utilised my own personal experience as a former student and current instructor at the university to provide first-hand experience from several perspectives (personal, academic, institutional and

personal). Figure (6.1) illustrates the teaching practices as based on the findings of the study:

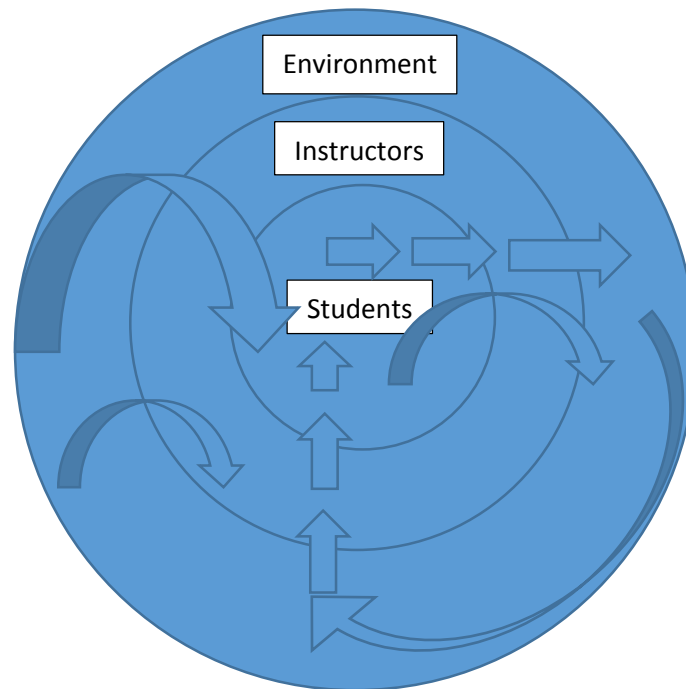


Figure (6.1). Environment and Dynamics of the Instructors' Teaching Practices (EDITP)

As I argued above, the proposed model comprises an all-inclusive reading and analysis of the themes and elements related to the topic of the instructors' teaching practices. Since the study adopts an exploratory case study methodology, it is useful to emphasise the fact that the above model stands for an emergent 'case' of a specific higher educational 'culture' (environment). For an analysis and discussion of the EDITP model, as illustrated in Figure (6.1), the environment (institutional, socioeconomic, interpersonal, cultural and physical) comprises a framework or structure that represents a context-bounded social and educational environment that inclusively embraces, informs and, shapes all conceptions and practices in the inner circles including those of the instructors and the students. This environment (or institutional, sociocultural and physical context) confines and draws boundaries informed by an extended list of elements such as institutional regulations, instructors' epistemological stances, beliefs, attitudes, conceptualisations, interpersonal, social and cultural relations, physical

atmosphere. In other words, the outer circle comprises an embracing framework wherein all components exist and interact. As represented by the arrows, the components of the environment (institutional, socioeconomic, physical and cultural) directly and indirectly influence and are influenced by the other two components (the instructors and the students). As represented by the arrows on the left, the environment directly influences the instructors and the students through the operation of extrinsic elements such as social and cultural beliefs and socioeconomic conditions that influence teaching practices in several directions. Findings of other research as well as the current one demonstrate the impact of the environment (or context) on teaching practices. As I reported and emphasised in Chapter Five in the whole set of data, the instructors reiterated the theme that their teaching practices were inextricably intertwined with the broader social, institutional and academic context (I will elaborate on these findings in the sections below).

These findings confirm the findings of a huge body of research literature that underscores the fact that teaching practices are context-bounded or context-specific, and a consequence of the operation of several dynamics, all of which are interpreted within a given contextual scope referred to as 'context'. For example, context as socio-cultural values and social surroundings (Alves et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & McCrae., 2004); context as knowledge transfer to life-contexts (Berns & Erickson, 2001); context as family beliefs, the marketplace, and the socioeconomic factors existing in the country (Shamsid-Deen & Smith, 2006); context as cultural attributes and social bonds (e.g. collective vs. individual thinking and 'power distance') (Djojoputro et al., 2005); context as socioeconomic background of learners (Campbell, 2004; Hofstede and McCrae, 2004); and context as the academic discipline, physical environment (e.g. class sizes), department role and collaborative management (Martine et al., 2003; Ramsden, 2000; Ramsden et al., 2007).

Notwithstanding the established arguments regarding the role of educational environment (or context in all its forms) in shaping teaching practices, there is a need to probe further to understand the complications associated with this process, or how teaching practices are contingent on what I shall call '*contextual dynamics*'. The arrow on the right side of Figure (6.1) represents the indirect influence of the environment that is itself influenced by the inner circles (the

students and the instructors). The provisional nature of teaching practices is inhibited and subdued, and to certain extent, defined by the three components at the same time: the students, the instructors, and the environment (the institution and the social context). The students (occupying a central location in this framework) influence the instructors' teaching practices in different ways. The arrows on the right side of the diagram (both the straight ones and curved one) represent a reverse direction of influence, that is, from the students to their instructors, as well as to the context in general. In fact, research literature has explored the way the learners are involved in affecting instructors' teaching practices (e.g. Alauddin & Tisdell, 2011; Denson et al., 2010; Nasser and Fresko, 2002; Hussin et al, 2009).

In the current study, as reported by the instructors, in one way or another, their teaching practices *respond* to the nature of their students (including their academic level, performance, social background, etc.). Their teaching practices are also shaped by their own attitudes and perceptions of their students and by interpersonal relations with them (see Section: 5.3.4.5 "Students' prior attainment and attitudes towards learning"). That is, the instructors' teaching practices cannot be seen as existing in a vacuum but, rather, are mutually related and directed to students; they respond to myriad issues surrounding the student/instructor relationship previously discussed, whether inside or outside the classroom. To substantiate this argument, several instructors reported that their teaching practices should be directed to students: to those distinguished and talented or those of low performance; they should also touch the students' milieus and prospects for a good future; and they should produce individuals who are capable of serving their communities, etc. In other words, teaching practice is a process that achieves the involvement of the students in their own learning (Anderson, 2000; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Joseph et al., 2005). In this manner, I deem this bidirectional channel of influence (from the students to instructors and vice versa) as resonating with a 'student/learning centred approach' which, according to Devlin (2006), requires an active construction of learning to be practised by both the students and the instructors.

Based on this outlook, I argue that theorising the notion of a 'teacher-centred approach', for example, is subject to challenge. The basic assumption of this notion is that instructors use a strategy of 'transmitting information to students'

(Ramsden et al., 2007). The underlining idea of this definition attests that the students are merely passive and have no role whatsoever in influencing the instructors' teaching practices. Another underlining assumption, as drawn from this key idea, is that instructors' teaching practices are totally detached and isolated from the students, despite the fact that they are 'transmitted' to students as if operating in void. Probably the fundamental narrative that the instructors in the current study have provided is that, in whatever they do, their practices respond to the characteristics of their students, whether social, economic and academic. This not to say that other factors do not influence their teaching practices or that their response is always positive (I will discuss these issues elsewhere in this chapter).

As for now, let me argue that, in order to reach a common language that describes our educational concerns and practice, old concepts should be reconfigured and probably deconstructed. Students are there, in the centre of any educational environment in any social and cultural context, and willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, educational policies and practices including instructors' teaching practices must respond to them in one way or another. For example, students' learning characteristics, whether seen as of high or low performance, are involved in the ways instructors take decisions regarding their teaching practices (Denson et al., 2010). In the present study, the instructors reiterate the theme that their teaching practices are influenced by the academic level of their students.

Another example is the consideration of the students' socioeconomic and regional background, and how these variables are intensely involved in determining and defining teaching practices (Arnesen et al., 2008; Brennan et al, 2013; Cletus et al., 2014; Cochrane & Williams, 2010; Devlin, 2012). In the present study, some instructors report that they change their teaching behaviour and approaches as they change their universities. In the current university (the research site), they highlight the fact that the students come from a nomad society quite different from those in metropolitan cities, and, hence, believe this an important issue to respond to. They believe that the socioeconomic background of their current students informs their low performance, which requires an adaptation in their teaching practices (see Section: 5.3.4.5 "Students' prior attainment and attitudes towards learning"). To avoid confusion, the phrase

'respond to' could mean *any* change or adaptation of teaching practices that is informed by whatever is relevant to the students or to any other factor involved in the educational setting. For example, the belief that holds the practice of 'transmitting information' as 'naïve conceptualisation' on the part of the instructors (Schommer as cited in Marouchou, 2007) misses the fact that the practice of 'transmitting information' to learners is not a mere ontological construction, but rather an epistemological stance shaped by myriad factors such as how knowledge and beliefs about the students is socially constructed, and students' role or 'share' in this belief construction is no exception. In short, I understand that for a better investigation, hence, understanding of teaching practices, we need to profoundly consider the role of the students that, mostly indirectly or even implicitly, influences the instructors' teaching practices. I deem the importance of this argument to reveal some aspects of the complications of the students/instructors component (or relation) in a given educational context. Expanding our attention to the almost *hidden* role of the students in a given educational context could invite educators and researchers to reconsider some aspects of this complex and implicit relationship that exceptionally impacts the instructors' teaching practices.

The second component in the proposed framework, illustrated by the second circle, represents the instructors' own role in deciding upon their teaching practices. The key feature of their role is that it *intermediates* between the other two components (the students and the outer environment). Although there exists a direct relation between the inner circle (the students) and the outer circle (the environment), it remains that the instructors are the ones whose direct contact with students is considered the main feature of teaching practices. A review of research literature indicated that generic studies of the teaching practices could be loaded with topics, perspectives and issues that lead to extended discussions. Drawing on my findings, as well as my reviews of related literature regarding the roles of the instructors in determining the nature of their own teaching practices, several aspects could be identified, including: the instructors' conceptions, attitudes, beliefs, sociocultural values, academic specialisation, workload, involvement in administrative work, research, and professional development. Since space is too limited to consider all these issues in detail (see Chapters 3 and 5), I restrict my discussion to address: a) the nature of the dynamics of the

instructors' teaching practices, b) their location in the proposed framework, c) how they interact with the other two components - the students (the inner circle) and the environment (the outer circle). In so doing, I explore how different institutional and sociocultural dimensions, including the instructors' own conceptions and beliefs about themselves, their students and their context, influence or shape their teaching practices.

Probably, two ways in which the instructors' teaching practice dynamics are interconnected with the other two components can be identified: a) a direct input and interaction with the outer environment (e.g. social, personal, cultural), and b) an indirect input informed by the students (and students/instructors) interaction, but via the outer environment (especially the institutional and academic contexts). While the arrow on the left in Figure (6.1) illustrates the direct influence of the outer environment, the arrow on the right, which starts from those coming from the students, is altered and fashioned through its passage in the outer circle (the environment) and ultimately arrives to the second circle (the instructors). In other words, the construction, evolution and mobility of the instructors' teaching practices involve interplay of several factors that operate at the same time. Drawing on this perception of the instructors' teaching practice dynamics, two categories of factors can be identified: firstly, those which directly emerge from the outer environment, which I might call, '*macro*' or '*extrinsic*' aspects or factors. This category could include factors such as the instructors' conceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and sociocultural values. Secondly, those which emerge from the circle in the centre (the students), but altered by the environment, which I refer to as '*intrinsic*' or '*micro*' factors (e.g. educational policies, pedagogy, content, assessment, regulations, physical environments, workload, involvement in administrative work, research, and professional development).

Rather than addressing the elements of the two types of aspects (micro and macro) in a detailed manner, I limit my discussion to unpack the 'complexity' and boundaries of conventions, protocols and idiosyncratic elements of teaching practices within and outside the classroom. Themes that may capture this aim include: an all-encompassing approach to the instructors' epistemological stance; an interrogation of human agency; disrupting conventional narratives of interpersonal and power relations and a reconfiguration of the concept of environment itself (mainly the institutional). In addition to adopting these

approaches to tackle these themes separately, I need to accentuate the fact that all of these themes and others alike should be approached as interconnected and intersected dynamics. They should not be understood as static, fixed or consistent, but rather in constant motion and mobility *inwards* (impacting themselves as teaching practices, e.g. planning, course materials selection, assessment strategies, etc.) and *outwards* (impacting other adjoining elements e.g. learners' behaviours, institutional policies, academic disciplines, etc.). Although, I detailed these themes in Chapter Five, I will recall parts of my previous discussions to foster a holistic argument regarding my proposed model.

6.4.1 The Instructors' Epistemological Stances Regarding Teaching Practices

To start with the instructors' epistemological stance (or how they construct knowledge and perceptions about themselves, their teaching practices, their students, and their context in general), we need to underline the fact that university instructors' *'reality'* (or identity¹⁰), including those in the current research context, is constructed through an interaction of several social, cultural, institutional, and academic thrusts. In a collective manner, research literature often uses several related terms when instructors' epistemology is under exploration, or more precisely, when investigating the connection between the instructors' epistemology and their teaching practice, such as perceptions, conceptualisations, beliefs, theoretical framework and even attitudes (Devlin, 2006; Marochou, 2007, 2011; Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2006). In the present research context, the instructors' perceptions and beliefs of teaching practices represented by their responses on the questionnaire items and interview narratives raised important issues regarding their teaching practices. The instructors' approaches to teaching or their teaching practices (how they teach), and their conceptions about teaching (what they believe about teaching) as well as the connection between the two magnitudes are the core of understanding the nature of any teaching practice. Thus, an investigation into instructors' conceptualisation of teaching practices raises important questions including: What are the instructors' conceptions of good teaching practice? What do instructors consider important in their teaching? What is the relation between

¹⁰ Since the term of 'identity' is problematic, controversial and entails extended discussions, I limit my use of the word 'reality'.

instructors' conceptions and the approaches and practices actualised in the teaching setting? How is their epistemological stance influenced by micro and macro environments, and how does this affect their teaching practices? I realise answers to these question would assist in elucidating and unpacking complex issues surrounding the instructors' teaching practices in the current context.

In the Saudi context, and based on the findings of the present study, some answers can be offered. Not only does the instructors' epistemology seem to influence their teaching practices, but also the social 'norms' including the students, marketplace, family, 'tribe' (or extended family). A corpus of all stakeholders appears to have their share in fashioning the instructors' conceptions, hence, their teaching practices. In fact, the instructors in the current context are conscious of their location in their environment including institutional and social context. As I discussed in Chapter Five, (Section: 5.3.4.6 "Socio-cultural values and interpersonal relations"), university instructors hold a privileged status in Saudi society and are often referred to as the elites of the society. I understand this position emerges from what I refer to as '*socio-academic*' context; a co-construction of instructors' attitudes, beliefs and conceptions optimised by the all-encompassing term 'epistemological stance' that results from the interaction between the instructors' academic status and their position in the society as well as their reciprocal interpersonal relations with students and peers. The fact that most of the instructors in the current context received their education in the West not only fashioned their academic 'identity', but also, upon their return, their highbrow status in society and, by virtue of this, their 'reality' continues to be constructed as that of privileged individuals. In a closely related area, Ayoubi et al. (2009) investigated academic, social and cultural challenges that returning academics in the Syrian context encountered once they returned to their home universities after finishing their studies abroad. In what they call 'reverse cultural shock', they concluded that, upon their return, the academics experienced feelings of disintegration in their home cultures. The academics reported that their home-culture inversely caused repatriation dissatisfaction, anger and distress resulting from disintegration. Ayoubi et al. also called on researchers in the whole Arab World to further explore this area.

In the Saudi context, the proposed concept of '*socio academic*' construction of the instructors' 'reality' results from the interplay between two interconnected dimensions: their academic and institutional status and, by virtue of this status, the way they come to be perceived (or the way they come to perceive themselves) in their society. It is important to remind ourselves that the sociocultural context wherein this argument finds its currency is mostly a tribal, nomad and closed one (see Chapter 2). The result of this co-construction is a privileged 'reality' that locates them as the elite not only in their institutions, but also in their society at large. This argument can be substantiated through considering the themes of 'power relations', 'human agency'; and conventional narratives of interpersonal relations. I will shortly refer to these themes, but as for now, I wish to pursue my discussion of how the instructors' 'reality', in the manner I described, is involved in their teaching practices.

Whatever the terms used, research literature emphasises the fact that instructors' conceptions, beliefs and attitudes (or epistemology) are strongly tied with their actual behaviours and teaching practices. For example, to Marouchou (2007), teaching practices are 'belief-driven'; Ho et al. (2001) insist that 'developing' teaching conceptions leads to 'improving' teaching practices; and Gibbs and Coffey (2004) call for encouraging instructors to improve their conceptions to promote their teaching practices. Rather than disputing with or confirming these arguments, I deem the relationship between instructors' conceptions and actual teaching practices to be an established one regardless of its direction. In the current context, the direction of the relationship between the instructors' conceptions and their actual teaching is 'complex'. On the one hand, the instructors provided compelling narratives regarding how they perceive 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices, yet, these narratives are hardly verified by their students. Moreover, when considering their 'privileged' status, the very narrative they provided regarding their awareness of 'good' or 'effective' teaching practice could be disrupted and interrogated. The instructors' 'theoretical' knowledge of effective practice seems to be copious when they address issues related to students' learning. For example, they described how they favoured teaching with a student-centred approach; talked about their shared responsibility with students; and claimed that their teaching was directed to students' learning goals, etc. (see Chapter 5, Section: 5.3.3.1 "Student-centred teaching"). Examining their

discourse, as a way (or 'loose system') of constructing knowledge in a Foucauldian sense (1972), the instructors' consciously or unconsciously tend to position their students and themselves in a framework of power relations. While they reiterated and emphasised the students' involvement in teaching and learning, they kept referring to them with blame, discontent and apathy. For example, when they talked about lack of classroom interaction, it was the students, among other elements, that were blamed. They directed their criticism to the pre-university education and to familial and social conceptions. Specifically, they considered the students' low level of academic achievement, lack of critical thinking and lack of interaction and classroom participation to other external factors (social and institutional) as determining factors that influence their own teaching practice. Moreover, the instructors, through their narratives, demonstrated an awareness of the students' academic and learning problems, but rather than perceiving these problems as wholly or partly related to their teaching practices, they tended to attribute them to other factors, including the students themselves. As such, the argument is, the way the instructors construct their conceptions (or the way they are constructed by other factors), which ultimately informs their teaching practices, is another manifestation of the potential of context-specific norms and epistemologies. I will discuss the role of the society and outer context in the next section.

6.4.2 Human Agency and Relations of Power

In addition to the theme of the instructors' constructed reality, the dynamics of teaching practices in the current context could be understood through the influence of 'human agency', power relations and conventional narratives of interpersonal relations. As I have argued in the EDITP model above, the role of the instructors in the dynamics of teaching practices is largely informed by the specific socio-cultural context. The socio-cultural or, as I referred to it, the socio-academic context anchors a type of agency to those instructors. Not only the way they perceive their power as drawn from their immediate socio-cultural environment, but also their position in their institutions have located them in a privileged position. It is important to perceive that this power that is entrusted to them is a result of the interplay of several agents and factors at the same time and how they respond to these directives. The instructors' space, then, emerges as a result of several forces, and on the top of these are the interpersonal

relations especially with their students. In other words, the instructors' perceived power emanates an agency that derives its force from the societal behaviour that places them at the top of the social class. Furthermore, the institutional 'culture' imposes a specific 'norm' of interpersonal relations where the students'/instructors' relations are governed by relations of power for the interest of the latter group.

Drawing on Bourdieu's 'cultural capital' (1998), I have discussed how the instructors are involved in a perceived relation of power, not only in their relation with their students but also through their relations with other contextual elements such as institutional policies and other social aspects. To expand my discussion, I wish to utilise Bandura's argument regarding 'human agency' and 'self-theory' (1999, 2001). Human agency, understood as the capacity of human beings to make choices and impose those choices on the world, is embedded in 'self-theory', which encompasses self-organising, proactive, and regulative mechanisms (ibid). It is exercised through shared beliefs of intermediaries or by a 'collective agency' that operates in group aspirations and incentive systems; thus, individuals are "producers and products of social systems" (Bandura, 1999, p. 21).

Drawing on the research participants' narratives, especially those of the students, it can be concluded that the students are the most disadvantaged group. Their narratives are informative of how we can understand how power relations, human agency and normative interpersonal relations determine the instructors' teaching practices. As discussed in Chapter Five (see Section: 5.3.2.7 "Students' feedback", also see pages 162, 173, 181, 188 and 196), unlike the instructors' narratives, the students shared their stories with a striking passion and sincerity; they provided concrete evidence attesting to their marginalised and disadvantaged position while narrating their views of their instructors' teaching practices. As I argued in Chapter Five, although the instructors could be deemed as primarily responsible for enforcing such kind of human relations, it remains that the whole education system severely suffers from the lack of democracy. I also find it important to rehearse my previous call for further research that addresses political engagement in higher education in Saudi Arabia. As for now, I utilise these findings drawn from the students' narratives to address how the relation of power seems to construct the nature of teaching practices in this

context. The fact that the instructors insist that their teaching practice is beyond question reflects serious problems in the Saudi educational system through which the perceived power and authority of the university instructors is seen as unproblematic. For example, students reported that their instructors' perception of their students is seen as more trusted than the students' perceptions of themselves (see Chapter 5, Section: 5.3.4.6 "Socio-cultural values and interpersonal relations"). In other words, the instructors seem to 'invent' and construct the students' academic and social 'realities' based on their own authoritative positions which are affiliated with power and elitism as well as their own reality that is situated in the socio-academic context in the same manner.

The interpersonal relations and 'conventional narratives' are largely determined by the constructions of the students' and the instructors' realities that are informed by the perceived power of the latter group. In fact, the narratives of both the instructors and the students confirmed dissatisfaction with the manner in which interpersonal relations are approached. Yet, each group provided different rationales while describing this situation. According to the 'conventional narratives' of the instructors (I use this term to denote the fact that the narrative provided by the instructors is predictable as it revolves and rehearses previously established or stereotypical worldviews), the students desist or have inadequate interpersonal communication skills. As I discussed in Chapter Five, although the participants expressed an awareness of the importance of interpersonal relationships, this 'awareness' had never materialised in practice. As I have argued, this status quo is a result of the interplay between the way the realities of the students and the instructors is constructed (a perception of the students as a 'periphery' while the instructors are privileged). Based on this, the current condition of interpersonal relations results from the diverse, and to certain extent, conflicting understanding of the students' and the instructors' epistemological stances developed from the construction of their realities.

Not only is this current condition a result of the direct relation between the instructors and the students, but also a result of indirect influence of the fact that this human relationship exists in a 'socio academic', institutional and physical context that augments and extends the status quo. That is, the instructors themselves and the students are subject to several contingencies informed by the context, which impose challenges at different levels. In other words, rather

than merely directing my critique to the instructors, I argue that the context itself becomes an influential actor in shaping the instructors' teaching practices. For this outlook, the instructors provided compelling narratives of challenges that hinder them from actualising their perceptions into real practice. For example, they reported challenges related to a) the physical environment (e.g. timing of classes as related to hot climate and far distances; lack of IT facilities and class sizes). They underscored challenges related to the institutional roles (e.g. workload; lack of correspondence between their specialisations and the subjects they teach; and being fully occupied by administrative responsibilities). Other reported challenges involved university legislation and lack of financial support and training programmes, etc. In addition to these, the study revealed other challenges related to the instructors' research roles and students' proficiency level as well as the impact of socio-cultural values.

Based on these findings, I argue that these challenges would further contribute to the construction and evolving dynamics of the instructors' teaching practices in the current context. While a counter argument to this conclusion might say that this narrative is typical of *any* social and education context, I contend that an understanding of the context-specific peculiarities could be the initial step to address and unpack its nature and complexities for the ultimate purpose of meeting these challenges and fostering outlets that pay attention to all actors in the educational environment. I perceive an understanding of these dynamics in the manner I explained an imperative one, since it invites researchers to maintain focus while exploring issues related to teaching practices. It is also important to offer a possible guide to decision-makers and instructors to address and reflect on issues related to teaching practice. To avoid sweeping generalisations, the above argument underscores the importance of understanding the location of all those involved in the process, the students, the instructors, and the context.

6.5 Contextually Responsive Differentiated Teaching Practices

A huge body of research literature has addressed teaching practices in higher education within a *contextual* understanding with the aim to refine and confine context-based teaching practices. In the current study, I have attempted to provide an analysis of the concept of context as related to teaching practices; unpacked the components and factors that function within the current context and emphasised their role in determining the dynamics of teaching practices as well

as meeting the reported challenges that influence students' learning. Based on these discussions and my reviews of related research, I wish to engage further with the theme of '*contextual teaching practice*' in order to offer an original contribution by exploring the intersecting areas of the topic so far believed to be discrete: instructors' perceptions and practices, students' approaches to learning (their epistemological stances), students' and instructors' academic, interpersonal and professional experience, and as well as the confluence between these areas and the external national, economic, social and cultural environments.

Specifically, I use the insights drawn by previous research, particularly those related to *contextual teaching practice*, challenges of teaching practice in the Saudi and regional context, alongside the findings of this study, to propose a theorisation of what I refer to as '*contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices*'. In fact, the concept of 'contextual teaching practice' is addressed by some scholars from different perspectives. For example Shmsid-Deen and Smith (2006) use the term to refer to relating the subject matter to real world situations and Smith (2010) uses the same concept to inform 'instructional strategies' that respond to workplace demands, in addition to previously reviewed arguments regarding the academic context, regional context and socio-cultural and economic context. Drawing on my findings and previous research, I wish to expand the boundaries of the notion of 'contextual teaching practice' to propose theoretical underpinnings to what I refer to as *contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices*. Before I elaborate on the proposed model, I wish to highlight the justifications of why 'contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices' is important for the current context in particular.

I perceive the rationale of proposing a 'model' (or theoretical underpinnings) of contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices of immense importance for two interconnected reasons. On the one hand, in Saudi Arabia and in other similar contexts, especially those in the region, there is a striking lack of research that responds to the specific peculiarities of these educational contexts at national, social and cultural levels. On the other hand, the absence of national or 'contextual' models invites policy makers and practitioners including university instructors to uncritically '*import*' prototypes of teaching practices and adopt them in their local contexts. Such adoption is mainly a result of the absence of research

projects at local, national or regional levels. Therefore, the tradition is that universities adopt standards produced in different contexts and publish them in the form of teaching ‘*Guides*’ for ‘best’ practice. The absence of research would also compel instructors to depend upon their intuition to attempt what they believe are workable solutions.

Furthermore, as I have argued earlier, the tradition of higher education insists on adopting *foreign* models, standards and criteria to address its local challenges, and university teaching practice is no exception. In a report entitled “*The Politics of Higher Education in the Middle East: Problems and Prospects*” (2009), Romani points out that the fact that many Arab countries, especially the GCC¹¹ countries, have opened their academic systems to foreign standards and frameworks has been problematic. Although billions of USDs have been spent to promote quality assurance in these institutions, in their search for Western accreditation, they could not raise their teaching and research standards to those international standards. Part of this failure, as Romani argues, is that these projects overlooked the crucial role of national, social and geopolitics. Since its establishment in 2004, The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment in Saudi Arabia has limited its role to applying criteria and standards of foreign accreditation organisations, mainly those established in Western countries, the US-based Council for Higher Education Accreditation, in particular. In a similar manner, the Ministry of Higher Education initiative of Creativity and Excellence Project for Faculty (Instructors) launched in 2006 is based on US standards. Addressing the challenges of accreditation in higher education in the Arab World, including Saudi Arabia, Hammoud (2009) argues that ‘failure’ is due to “1) a reliance on bureaucratic models in quality management and assurance; and 2) a direct borrowing from systems used in countries or organisations outside the region without serious attention to establishing foundations and frameworks that are specific to the Arab region and suit this part of the world” (p. 62). Similarly, based on analysing official documents available from international organisations and Arab universities regarding conditions of employment, promotion and working conditions, Salame (2009) concludes that efforts to enhance career paths in higher education are deficient and misconstrued, and he calls for “an urgent need for a radical change in the current situation, if teaching personnel are

¹¹ Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab countries of the Gulf.

to play an active role in meeting the challenges of higher education quality in the Arab States” (p. 319).

In general, the concept of ‘differentiated teaching practice’ underlines the theory that teaching practice should adapt and vary its approaches to respond to the students’ diversity (Hall, 2002). It recognises that learners are different in many ways, such as culture, social and economic background, learning styles, prior knowledge, interests, etc. Differentiated teaching, as Artiles et al. (2005) describe, education systems which are culturally responsive and predicated on the belief that learners from different cultures can access learning, including their social and cultural heritage and experiences. Differentiated teaching practice emphasises a key theoretical stance, that is, that there is no specific teaching style or recipe perceived as the ideal practice. There are, however, principles that are involved in differentiated teaching practice. Tomlinson (2000) argues that first among these principles is that of ‘equality’ and ‘inclusiveness’, that is all the learners have the right to equal learning opportunities regardless of their diverse learning skills, social background, academic level, etc. In short, differentiated teaching practice relies on the belief that “whatever the issues or problem a student might face, with the right teaching approach the student can and will learn” (Metropolitan Centre for Urban Education, 2008).

Since our social experience shapes our values, attitudes and behaviour, forms our experiences, and affects how we interpret the defining constructs surrounding us, university instructors, policymakers and students bring their social experiences and perspectives into their everyday decisions and actions (Gay, 2000). In the present study, socially determined constructs seem to mould the instructors’ perceptions and actualisations of teaching practices as well as the students’ perception of these practices and their own learning styles. Throughout the whole set of data, specific contextual issues, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, have created a framework or a ‘small culture’ for its own sake which is found to be responsive to the outer social, economic, regional and cultural context. The concept of ‘small culture’ captures the particular nature of the present context as the status of teaching practices, including the factors and challenges involved, are determined and have acquired their nature through the operation of several sociocultural and regional factors. For example, challenges reported about the institutional regulations are related to the particular regional nature. The

instructors express their dissatisfaction with centralised university regulations which cannot meet the demands of the emergent university. Additionally, since the emergent university under exploration is located in a nomad region where the students (as reported by their instructors) are substantially different from those in major cities in terms of their academic level as well as other influential differences, the instructors' teaching practices will respond to this variable. This could go for most of the reported views regarding the status and nature of the instructors' teaching practices, which ultimately produce a kind of specific nature or a 'culture' of its own.

Furthermore, in this particular context, many challenges that instructors and students face are reasoned to be a direct or indirect influence of these contextual factors. Even those challenges which appeared to be far from these constructs, such as those related to university regulation, content and assessment, originated from the wider sociocultural and economic context. In this sense, the proposed understanding of '*contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices*' directly responds to various challenges reported at all levels ranging from students' particular learning styles, academic levels, their social and economic backgrounds, the instructors' personal, academic and social beliefs and attitudes, the institutional policies, as well as the relationship between all these components.

At cultural and socioeconomic levels, the proposal of a culturally and socially responsive differentiated teaching practice owns the power to take difficult and courageous decisions at advanced levels of the institutional hierarchy. This could be achieved through the integration of the local social actors and it could open spaces for genuine discussions and dialogue to address the symptoms of these socially embedded challenges. As I have attempted to argue throughout this thesis, the cultural and social values represented by religious beliefs and practices; familial and tribal characteristics (e.g. close strong family bounds, influence of the extended family, etc.) and economic conditions and marketplace demands all have a strong impact on moulding the educational environment, including the instructors' teaching practices. I have also argued that the social responsibility of the university is not only almost absent, but also involves tensions and conflicts represented by disputes with local social values on the part of the universities. In its attempt to meet such challenges, the proposed model

attests to the university's role in promoting societal responsibility and partnership. University social integration can be achieved through diverse programmes, including instructors' teaching practices, through which a multitude of aims could be achieved, including: a) dissemination of social and cultural values; b) knowledge and skills related to citizenship; c) tolerance and the acceptance of others; d) as well as intellectual skills. It further engages with the role played by the instructors to create a classroom environment as a cultural space that constructs bridges between the university and society. Furthermore, a responsive differentiated teaching practice deems the university instructor to be a member of an academic elite in a positive sense, and a social professional who pays special attention to social values. For this particular research context and similar ones, which is subject to social and economic inequality, a responsive differentiated teaching practice prioritises the inclusion of the students rather than merely practising a 'culture of blame'. With contextually differentiated teaching practices, the students' socioeconomic background is handled with immense care and responsibility. Through the practice of a responsive differentiated teaching practice, it directs its focus and attention to create opportunities for investigating through negotiating challenges related to future job opportunities and marketplace prospects. This could be achieved through a careful and flexible selection of teaching and learning resources and teaching practices that secures adequate time and space to practise teaching in real-life situations and to maintain academic standards that fulfil the demands of the marketplace, as well as opening channels into public and private job markets. In brief, the question of social responsibility could be met through a development of culturally and socially (contextually) responsive differentiated teaching practices, which minimise the dispersion of practices and the non-optimal use of resources and time.

At more micro levels, including interpersonal and human relations between instructors and students as well as between instructors and their colleagues, contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices is of colossal value since one of its basic underpinnings is to ensure, through perceptions and practices, the attainment of 'respectful' activities for students (Tomlinson, 2000). In the present context, I have argued that the absence of mutual understanding and worldviews of both the instructors and the students underpins the dissatisfaction of both regarding the ways interpersonal relations are practised.

Although the instructors claim that they attend to interpersonal relations, the students negate this standpoint and point to their disadvantaged position in their relationship with the instructors. Through critical reflections and thorough and ongoing discussions between the instructors and the students, they could unpack and analyse the symptoms of such unhealthy human relationships. In this sense and to fulfil this aim, the role of contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices could be deemed significant as it offers contextual and down-to-earth discussions that respond to the immediate challenges including the lack of mutual understanding. The students' internalisation of the negative images, such as their inability to engage in dialogue, and the instructors' construction of such reality are addressed through meaningful discussions where prejudices and feelings of intimidation are removed. Through meaningful discussions, the proposed model of contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices, firstly, acknowledges the presence of the problem as a distorted and negative image of academic and human relations. Secondly, through acknowledging the roles of all local and context-specific factors including social, institutional and personal among others, differentiated teaching practice could create spaces to deconstruct bureaucratic and negative images of both the instructors and the students. In a social constructivist educational environment, and through the creation of these spaces, a holistic approach including social, cultural, educational and personal dimensions could be negotiated and addressed.

Contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices also speak directly to the diversity of students' learning needs and problems. The students' diversity and context-specific characteristics are carefully studied as a basis for planning teaching. Through this diagnostic and planning stage, several pre-teaching procedures are attempted including a careful analysis of students' academic level, pre-university potential including their prior knowledge and experiences, and learning disabilities, among others. On the basis of analysing the learners' needs and special learning characteristics, the instructors decide upon relevant teaching practices including the selection of teaching materials as context-specific; planning lessons and setting learning objectives; instructional management and variation (e.g. lecturing, seminar discussions, problem-solving teaching, etc.); assessment and evaluation strategies (e.g. exams, assignments, students' research, etc.); negotiating outcomes through feedback and dialogue;

surveying students' worldviews through various channels; surveying learning outcomes at a contextual level through alumni and marketplace feedback; and, accordingly, implement an ongoing sequence of adaptations and reforms.

At a classroom level, contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices, instructors can differentiate four key procedures based on the students' learning profiles and the other contextual elements. I adapt these elements from the Metropolitan Centre for Urban Education:

(1) Content – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information;

(2) Process – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content;

(3) Products – projects that ask the student to demonstrate what he or she has learned in a unit; and

(4) Learning environment – the way the classroom works and feels.

In addition to these practical strategies, contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices revolve around certain main building blocks or principles where instructors can add or adapt according to their contexts. These principles include the following themes:

The First Principle is “*know your student*”. The belief that all students, coming from the same educational and social background, are homogeneous and having equal capacity to learn misses that fact that diversity is a key characteristic of students. A differentiated teaching practice requires instructors to know their students, not by forming stereotypes and prejudices, the manner the instructors in the present context do, by rather through open dialogue and discussions through which both the instructors and the students get to know each other better. This basic principle requires challenging rehearsed narratives about students' low academic profiles and pre-university skills. Although instructors seem to be comfortable with the status quo and feel the risk of change, (i.e. following strict and informed teaching practices such as using the same teaching materials and homogenous ways of disseminating knowledge, etc.), their first move should be to get to know their students and then be open to change their teaching practices according to this knowledge, and this should save them from future complications

resulting from their clash of worldviews. As I discussed earlier, the knowledge gap between the instructors and the students in knowing each other remains a salient characteristic of dominating discourses of power relations wherein the students' learning is compromised. The claim to know is not an easy one, and to avoid normative discourses of knowing, a self-reflective approach on the part of the instructors should be maintained to challenge their prejudices and their 'culture of blame'. Therefore, the proposed model of contextually differentiated teaching practices perceives the 'act of knowing' as having the potential for building mutual understanding and trust as well as setting them on a path to the future success of teaching and learning practices.

The Second Principle is the *creation of a classroom learning environment*. The idea of a learning environment attests to the fact that not all classroom environments are learning environments. The 'standardised', conservative, and conformist environments where teaching practices are perceived as delivery of knowledge do not assure that learning has taken place. Based on the key idea of contextually differentiated practice, a learning environment can be created through balance, adaptation and flexibility of teaching practices based on an ongoing diagnostic assessments and feedback. Managing instruction therefore responds to interest-based learning choices on the part of the students. It should not sound strange to explicitly ask the students about their learning choices, expectations, readiness, interests and learning profiles. For students coming from a similar educational and social background, their learning choices (or the teaching practices they feel comfortable with) should not create an arduous challenge to attempt. The outcome of this principle is to create a shared responsibility where students can have input into their own learning where effective teaching and learning is assured (Hattie, 2009). It is important to emphasise here that instructors should minimise the controlling aspect of their roles and maintain a genuinely responsive position to the students' share. In short, the creation of the learning environment should be underpinned with the idea that the ultimate purpose is to enhance students' learning.

The Third Principle is *harmonising teaching practices*. To harmonise teaching practices, the proposed model maintains a balance between the locality of the educational context and the international trends of teaching and learning practice. In this respect, the outer components of the context should be involved, including

educational policymakers, social actors, and educational leaders as well as the students themselves. This principle should respond to the failures of adopted models as informed by accreditation programmes. As I pointed out above, many of these borrowed programmes seem not to achieve their stated aims of enhancing teaching and learning. The unreflective and conservative adoption of these programmes often excludes local social and economic actors from sharing their perspectives. More importantly, in the Saudi context, the students are also often excluded from providing feedback regarding procedures perceived as achieving quality assurance and accreditation (Arafeh, 2009).

In the course of my previous discussions regarding national teaching practices (see Chapter 3), I argued that local societies have increasingly become aware of their national and cultural identities, hence, a development of national principles that guide higher education practices is an inevitable demand. However, in the Saudi context as a developing country this creates a dilemma when adopting foreign or international standards. To address this tension, a differentiated practice through its dynamicity and multidimensional reality could create grounds to cope with the global aspect of teaching practices. In other words, since in the current times societies are fragmented and open to each other through media and the Internet, it becomes easier than ever to absorb international social and cultural values in a local context. With the belief that differentiated teaching practice offers principles rather than recipes to address specific matters, it becomes attainable to synchronise the two dimensions through adaptation, flexibility and reflexivity. Furthermore, since teaching practices are mostly concerned with micro elements (or what takes place in the classroom e.g. lecturing, discussions, assessment, etc.), the stipulation of synchronising international trends to local ones should be perceived as a less challenging task. In general, as I have mentioned earlier, there is still a crucial need for research to address this issue, and differentiated teaching practice could be perceived as an initial outlet for such research.

The Fourth Principle is *making the most of available resources*. Contextually differentiated teaching practices take up the context as the key guiding principle including whatever resources are available. In the present research, it has been reported that the available facilities including IT services, email communications, computer based programmes or any other facilities are not fully used. Some

instructors abstain from using them for many reasons, including the limited availability of these resources. Since all educational contexts have their own resource challenges, and a complete elimination of these challenges is unattainable, it would be wise for teaching practices to adapt to what is available. It, however, remains a demand that a differentiated teaching practice maintains focus on prioritising the adequacy of resources. This could be achieved through adapting the list of priorities so that context-specific learning challenges are placed on the top of the list.

The Fifth Principle is *relating teaching practices to real life and the marketplace*. Probably among the most important principles of contextually differentiated teaching practices is to make teaching a meaningful task through connecting learning and teaching practices to the immediate life of students now and in the future. Since contexts vary in terms of their socioeconomic and job prospects for the students, it becomes wise to open channels between what takes place in the classroom wherein teaching practices become responsive to the demands of marketplace. In fact, the findings of research literature, including the present research, expose how contextual teaching practice is not only based on adjustments of teaching practices but also the philosophy of teaching where the instructors' role is one of listening, questioning, guiding, discussing, and clarifying. Lynch and Harish (2002) identified seven approaches that support a contextual model of learning and teaching including problem-based learning, project-based learning, work-based learning, service learning, and cooperative learning. Based on the findings of the present study, both the instructors and the students valued practices which can be described as contextual learning and teaching; for example, both emphasised that the students should be actively engaged in their learning where learning is meaningful and relevant as it is related to real life, to simulated issues, or to meaningful problem-solving situations. Moreover, contextual teaching practices assure self-regulated learning, the use of a variety of resources, and authentic assessment.

Relating teaching to students' real-life and the marketplace increases the opportunities for a successful teaching and learning environment. As I have argued, when the material world that is contextualised in relevant concrete teaching and learning practices is involved, the students become highly motivated, involved and interested. In fact, perceiving the real-world relevance

where, when and how learning and teaching practices take place is crucial for students to master subject matter, to improve achievement, and to develop skills of problem-solving and higher order thinking (Smith, 2010). Smith (2010) summarises the benefits of contextual learning and teaching practices as follows:

Students are more responsive when using their own knowledge and skills in real-world situations.

Students are more likely to engage in their own learning if it applies directly to their lives as family members, citizens, and present/future workers; and

Parents, students, and community members can all use and relate to these ideas (p. 26).

Probably the most valuable gain students, instructors and the society at large can achieve from contextually differentiated and responsive teaching practices is that teaching becomes closely and meaningfully related to the improvement of the society and marketplace. The shared responsibility between all of these components when directed to this ultimate aim calls actors to establish and promote a philosophy of common language and discourse to address their existing and future challenges. Specifically, through teamwork, cooperation and self-reflection, it becomes possible that instructors perceive their roles as empowering, sharing and responding to their contextually determined education.

In the current educational context, there exist myriad barriers and challenges to the promotion of contextually differentiated teaching practice. In fact, the step of transferring the contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices model from a mere articulation of recipes to a practical reality involves many challenges. The foremost of these is to address the instructors' philosophies, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of all components including themselves, their students and their teaching practices. They should be convinced that, to promote their teaching practices, genuine and thorough reforms should take place including challenging the construction of their realities as the elites of society with their perceived power. The students, on the other hand, need to be emancipated and empowered so that they assume more active roles and responsibilities in their education. Furthermore, there should be flexibility and adaptation of university policies and regulations; reform of academic programmes; reasonable instructors' workload; promotion of training programmes, etc. In addition to this, as I mentioned above,

there is a need to adjust other components such as managing time and resources, careful selection of relevant teaching materials, diversifying teaching methods (e.g. lecturing, seminar discussions, problem-based learning, field trips, real-life or simulated teaching, etc.); ensuring motivating activities; and developing meaningful and diagnostic assessment techniques, among others.

In short, the proposal of contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices involves a transformation of instruction, knowledge and skills to make them relevant to family, career and society. It redefines teaching and learning practices, subject matter content, and specific activities to local real world situations; therefore, teaching is anchored in students' diverse life-contexts (Shamsid-Deen, 2006). Although contextual teaching practice is implemented in several parts of the world, it remains a strikingly under researched area in the Saudi context. As I attempted to argue, the response to the plethora of challenges reported in this study require a reconsideration (or re-contextualisation) of teaching conceptions and practices through substantial reform of teaching and learning environments at all levels. Thus, the essential message of this research, substantiated through its findings and reviews of related literature, is an invitation to educators to prioritise and value the context as a critical factor in explaining the quality of teaching practices that promote meaningful and relevant learning. In the Chapter Seven, I elaborate the possible recommendations based on the findings of this research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, I have addressed the nature of the instructors' teaching practices including the instructors' and the students' perceptions of these practices; the several factors that contribute to shape these conceptions and practices; the challenges that instructors and students encounter; and several other related issues. Based on the findings of the study, the emergent themes of the contextual social, economic and cultural dimensions were found to largely shape and determine all of these topics under exploration. In my discussions in this chapter, I emphasised the role of the context in any understanding of teaching practices and how challenges can be understood and addressed. I also proposed a contextually responsive model through differentiated teaching practice to address and respond to the challenges teaching practices encounter in this context. In Chapter Seven, I present the implications, recommendations and limitations of the study and the possible implications of the research findings in the field of teaching practice in higher education. Chapter Seven shows how the findings of the study constitute another step towards the advancement of both theory and practice of teaching practices in higher education.

In addition to providing practical implications, the present chapter ties together what it perceives as an advancement of teaching practices in the given context (Saudi emergent universities) in line with the theoretical tenets of critical theory and social constructivism. Prior to enlarging on these recommendations, I wish to introduce another more 'interventionist' model to address the challenges and dysfunctionality the result from the interplay of the several directives and factors discussed in Chapter Six. I prefer to introduce the 'interventionist' model in this chapter as a form of recommendation that emerges from another step to critically reflecting on the status of teaching practices in the current context. The "Socially Responsive Teaching Practice; a Critical Pedagogy Perspective" model (Figure, 7.1) constitutes a case of a distinct higher educational environment that emerges (a Saudi emergent university) that is based on my critical engagement with the findings of the study. The model draws its practical and theoretical underpinnings from a further attempt to stretch out a holistic reading of the findings of the study, my personal and academic experience as well as my engagement with the core

philosophies of Critical Pedagogy and Social Constructivism. Specifically, I draw on the multitude of socio-cultural, institutional and personal factors that distinctively shape and impact the instructors' teaching practices in Saudi emergent universities. In Figure (7.1) below, I attempt to introduce a model of teaching practices that critically respond to the three main elements of the dynamics previously introduced in Figure (6.1) (the socio-cultural environment, the institutional 'culture' and the students). The 'interventionist' aspect of the model is thus a response to the socio-academic dynamics that have projected an institutional 'culture' with many challenges. Through the utilisation of a critical pedagogy that is socially responsive, I wish to conclude this research by introducing theoretically and empirically oriented recommendations for a) policy makers, b) university instructors, and c) researchers. However, the introduction of the model could not be perceived as an end point to the challenges previously reported and discussed in this study. For the latter group (the researchers), the proposed model and recommendations that are based on it rather open several research channels in several directions to address the dysfunctionality of teaching practices in Saudi emergent universities. I will elaborate in discussing further aspects of the proposed model in the course of articulating the recommendations below:

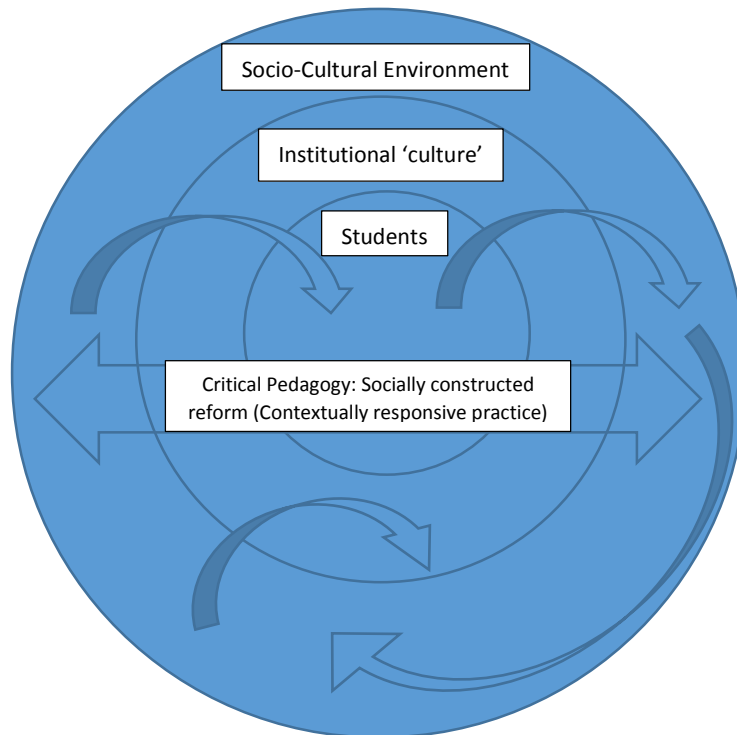


Figure (7.1). Socially Responsive Teaching Practice; a *Critical Pedagogy Perspective*

7.1 Implications of the Study

Drawing on the findings, arguments and conclusions of the present study as well as on the above model (Figure, 7.1), the following implications can be drawn.

7.1.1 Implications for Policymakers:

The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia maintains centralised control over all institutions of higher education in the country. This control is exerted by the authority of the Higher Education Council, which makes all decisions related to Saudi universities. Since its publication in 1995, the Unified Regulations of Saudi Instructors has acted as a governing law that determines all aspects of the Saudi instructors including their salaries, financial benefits, workload, academic

ranking, etc. This *'book'* is deemed as the only reference point for addressing all matters relevant to Saudi universities, and since its publication, no single change of the laws has been registered. It is important to know that in the last twenty years a lot has changed in the Saudis' lives, the country, and the recent expansion of the number of new universities (the number of the universities is increased five times in the last 7 years). While the announced aim of this expansion is to decentralise higher education from major cities to nomad and rural towns, the Ministry preserved the use of the old laws, which have become applicable to all Saudi universities including emergent ones. The majority of the Saudi universities nowadays are multi-campus ones established and scattered across the regions of the country, and originally developed from community colleges.

Based on the findings of the study, we have seen that the challenges of teaching practices, which are related to institutional practices and informed by regional social particularities, partly resulting from unsuitable policy regulations and laws. It is therefore believed that the proposed model of contextually differentiated practice responds to the context-specific challenges through reforming these laws to conform to the regional particularities. Evidence from the present study shows that, in order to make teaching practices meaningful and promote students' involvement and learning, they need to be directed to their specific regional social values, real life and marketplace prospects. The decisions – regional or institutional – on how teaching practices should be directed to address the immediate local concerns of the community require reconsideration and reform. Additionally, as reported by the research participants, among the challenges they face is the shortage of instructors resulting from the desire that most instructors are inclined to leave these new universities and join others in cities. This partly results from the fact that these regions are not fully developed and lack the facilities of modern life which impact both the instructors and the students. On the part of the instructors, they see their career and family future in the big cities where there is good schooling for their children and health care, among other services are available. For the students, these regions lack work prospects and therefore they also aim to migrate to bigger cities. Based on this elaboration, I propose that the expansion of higher education should be accompanied with comprehensive regional development at all levels, which

requires serious reform at a national level. In short, as I have argued in this thesis, university teaching practices cannot be removed from their regional contexts, therefore, in order to enhance teaching practices and to reduce the challenges surrounding them, an inclusive programme of reform is required that touches upon every aspect of the life of the community.

Related to this, mandates and prescribed recipes for best teaching practices require reconsideration so that they become grounded in context-specific idiosyncrasies. The reviewed studies, as well as the reported concerns of the research participants, show that the adoption of frameworks developed in other contexts that aim to achieve quality assurance are mostly unworkable. Evidence-based research, including this one, argues that national socioeconomic and cultural values and determinants are effective in deciding upon the success or failure of this adoption. It is therefore imperative that any adoption or development of teaching practices frameworks take in consideration the social and economic status of their local educational contexts. This is not to say that foreign frameworks of teaching practices are rejected in the current context, but to recognise that the promotion of teaching practices should recognise and conform to the special nature of the host context. The act of harmonising of the potential adoptions takes into consideration macro social and economic factors in addition to specific classroom teaching practices. In this respect, professional training programmes for instructors should expand their scope to include economic and social aspects of the region. Additionally, the act of harmonising should involve students as social and economic actors, in addition to influential educational policymakers.

Further to this, within the philosophical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, the educational policies in Saudi Arabia and in those emergent universities are required to reconsider the role of the students, that is, from mere passive recipients of prescribed knowledge to a more active role through which students share the responsibility for their own education. Giroux (2010) insists on perceiving educational practice as guided by passion and principle, saying that it should help students realise their freedom and recognise the authoritarian nature of their educational institutions. He also insists on connecting knowledge to power and therefore any reform should be based on socially constructive action. In the current context, since the 'habits of thought', 'dominant myths', 'official

pronouncements', 'received wisdom', 'mere opinions', 'social context', and 'personal consequences of any action' (Hopkins, 2013, p. 129) – are all practices that require a passionate reconsideration from those in power.

7.1.2 Implications for Instructors

Ultimately, university instructors are *educators*, and to prove the full sense of the term, they are invited to maintain a reflective professional position where they evaluate and re-evaluate their teaching practices, strategies, attitudes, beliefs and conceptions of how they could achieve the noble aims of their profession. Drawing on the research findings, there exists a noticeable gap between the instructors' teaching practices and the students' learning. Their worldviews of what works are conflictual and channels of dialogue seem to be closed between them. To reflect, the implication is that the instructors need to take a critical-self position wherein they listen to their students and allow them space to articulate their concerns and suggestions. The invitation also requires that interpersonal relations are prioritised where the students' sense of intimidation and fear is removed, and strong personal and social ties and mutual understanding are built between the instructors and their students. Specifically, the intimidation caused by exams and the success-failure notion should be critically examined, and a sense of sharing of responsibility developed, which means that student success is closely linked to the success of the institution, including the instructors. Students' feedback, interaction and classroom discussions, diverse learning styles, different academic levels, integration, motivation, academic interest and learning stimulations – are all components of meaningful teaching and learning practices. In short, for the instructors to sustain reflective positions they should view their teaching practice as an ever evolving cycle of 'give and take' with their students; they are invited to professionally communicate with them with the simplest language possible that is infused with feelings of empathy, understanding and responsiveness.

The study showed that a gap exists between the instructors and their peers, their leadership and their institution. This has the potential to amount to a serious challenge to their teaching practices. Most of the instructors reported that they do not have opening channels of discussions with their colleagues; they work and solve their problems individually, and do not exchange professional experience. This research provides empirical evidence on how sociocultural values share in

the construction of the instructors' identity as an active component of their 'socio-academic' realities. This reality not only projected them as privileged in their institution and community, but also induced feelings of superiority. As a result of their 'reverse-culture shock' and individualised professional orientation, they miss the value of the creation of a cooperative and supportive professional environment, which negatively impacts their teaching practices. Drawing on this, I perceive the implication of this argument is to involve special training programmes that directly address and respond to the instructors' social life, which can be achieved through open discussions and workshops.

Additionally, since the instructors' perception of themselves, their attitudes towards their community and students are socially situated, their teaching practices are largely informed and constructed through their interaction with these elements. Their socially constructed behaviour emerges in a distinct socio-academic environment and, thus, projects an institutional "small' culture of shared artifices and meanings" (largely attributed to Lev Vygotsky). Their socio-academic narratives constitute a 'discourse' (or conventions) through which they come to perceive their students, community and, thus, their teaching practice. It is therefore an invitation to the instructors in the current context to reconsider their constructed knowledge and to positively respond to their community including its social concerns and economic prospects. Furthermore, the instructors are invited to endorse their students' ability to think critically about their education and socio-academic situations. Through the employment of a critical gaze, the instructors may empower their students to recognise the connections between their individual problems and their surrounding social context.

7.1.3 Implication for Concerned Researchers

The present research is only on *initial* step that explores the nature of the instructors' teaching practices in a Saudi university. It is determined by several boundaries informed by scope and limitations, and the claim of providing answers to all questions and issues surrounding teaching practices is far from possible. In fact, I deem the present study as an opening venture to a strikingly under-researched area in the country, and I should admit that it has raised more questions than offered answers. Furthermore, as the study locates itself in the exploratory generic research tradition through its investigation of myriad aspects of teaching practices, it has opened several areas of potential research. Drawing

on the findings of the study, I next summarise areas where future research, with suggested research methodology, is needed.

Since the findings of the study projected the importance of contextual factors (e.g. social, familial, economic, regional, personal, cultural, etc.), and an inclusive coverage of all of these factors was not possible, researchers are invited to address these factors in individual studies. Such a focus is expected to provide more compelling understanding and implications to enhance teaching practices that are contextually bounded. In order to achieve this aim, researchers are invited to utilise the theoretical tenets of social constructionism through expanding the scope of their research to include critically oriented analyses of the metanarratives concerning the instructors' teaching practices.

Researchers are also invited to expand and explore the suggested model of *contextually responsive differentiated teaching practices*, and to examine its trustworthiness through relevant empirical research. Based on the methodological limitations of the study, the model has not been tested through empirical evidence, but rather through theoretical engagements and reflections on previous research, connected with parts of the obtained data. In this sense, I suggest that future research aims to test or examine the proposed model, to design more relevant data collection instruments such as participant observation, focus group discussions and workshops, action, and interventionist research. For action and interventionist research, it could be possible for instructors themselves to design a course that is informed by the principles of differentiated teaching practice followed by interviewing students to explore their worldviews regarding the used teaching practices.

Similar to the present researcher, researchers are often preoccupied with exploring teaching practice with a focus on micro or intrinsic levels, including those tactics and techniques instructors use in their classrooms. While, research investigating these areas is abundant, the focus on the human element is still largely unexplored when related to teaching practices. Issues concerning instructors' socio-academic construction of identity, human and interpersonal relations, agency, relations of power, students' voice and marginalisation are all potential and informative research areas that respond to the ultimate aim of promoting effective examples of teaching practices.

Another direction for future research regarding university instructors' teaching practices is the exploration of the tenets of Critical Pedagogy. Such a *critical* theoretical approach to researching teaching practices is almost missing in this area. As for a possible methodology, critical theoretical frameworks such as critical realism, postmodernism, poststructuralist, (critical) feminism, critical hermeneutics, and deconstructionism are all relevant to respond to the proliferation of 'post-conditions' of contemporaneity where learners' and instructors' worldviews and realities are always dynamic and in flux.

In fact, the current study bears the genealogy of an exploratory case study, and, accordingly, the need for critically oriented research appeared in the process of revealing the myriad challenges that impact teaching practices in the present context. Drawing on this, it is highly recommended that future research takes up the end point of this research to further investigate the context by combining the assumptions of both critical pedagogy and social constructionism. As I have argued above, there is a need for a socially responsive approach that addresses the context-specific challenges including the personal, institutional and socio-cultural. The proposed approach of contextually responsive teaching practice allied with critically oriented studies would substantiate much of the claims advanced in this research.

7.2 Contribution to Knowledge

There are several assumptions through which the present study claim an original contribution to knowledge. First, the study is the first to address teaching practices in higher education in Saudi Arabia. The paucity of research in the Saudi context was the main directive in carrying out such a study. In addition to this, through fostering my personal and academic experience, I claim that the uniqueness of this study germinates from providing a first-hand experience of a topic and research context. Secondly, through the utilisation of an exploratory case study methodology, the contribution to knowledge can be perceived through the application of an in-depth investigation that provides a holistic understanding of the instructors' teaching practices. This approach makes it possible to go beyond the mere rehearsing of 'good'/'effective' teaching practices into a more critically reflective research. This methodological orientation made it possible to

consider the under-researched socio-cultural aspects of teaching practices in Saudi higher education. In fact, I contend that the key contribution in this study remains in proposing the socio-academic aspects as the main factors that shape and impact the instructors' teaching practices. In line with this, I deem the proposition of a contextually responsive teaching practice model, as well as the "Environment and Dynamics of Instructors' Teaching Practices" and the "Socially Responsive Teaching Practice; a Critical Pedagogy Perspective" models, an original contribution to this field. Both models are based on the findings of the study and emerged from my critical engagement with the socio-cultural, personal and institutional dynamics of the instructors' teaching practices.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

In this study, I have attempted to explore the nature of instructors' teaching practices in a specific regional context represented by an emergent university in the northern district of Saudi Arabia. Since the study places itself as a generic exploratory case study, it has gone through informed departures from the initial aims established in the researcher's mind. It has passed through several turning points resulting from my academic, professional and personal engagements with the topic. I conceptualise this academic journey as an ongoing process that is characterised by personal devotion, openness and reflection, but not free from contestations, impediments and courageous decisions. Although the path into this journey was uncertain at the initial stages of the research, once I obtained data that represented the open and sincere narratives of the research participants, and I immersed myself with these narratives, I started to find my outlook directed to one aim: how to sincerely and openly provide a project that responds to many unanswered questions in my research contexts. I deem this research an emancipatory venture through which I have challenged and resisted my prejudices, stereotypes and normalised doctrines regarding how teaching practices can be understood and approached. Through consistent reflective engagements with the participants' stories and dedicated research, I managed to provide a different narrative that deems contextually differentiated practice as the core of success for educators and instructors. I addressed the very nature of the issue represented by the construction of epistemological realities of the instructors and how they engage with their teaching. I adopted an inclusive approach to consider and put under examination all actors and components

which could influence the teaching practices ranging from physical environment, regional particularities, university regulations and socioeconomic and cultural factors. I have attempted to explore the dynamics of these factors and how their interconnectedness determines and shapes the instructors' teaching practices. With a courageous decision, I included the students to see the 'other' point of view, which provided a holistic set of data and provided a rounded approach to the topic. In fact, through the involvement of the students in the research, I managed to fill in the many gaps and discontinuities surrounding the exploration of the topic.

Yet, rarely the path of this academic journey was straightforward; barriers were many and required circumnavigation and in some cases endurance. Therefore, although the research has reached its end point, the end of the journey is still far off. In my context, in particular, myriad questions remain unanswered and require further exploration in several directions. Despite the fact that the study is oriented to instructors' teaching practices, I attempted to highlight the voice of the students. Still, it is imperative that future research should address this aspect through interventionist studies that provide innovative and context-specific and differentiated teaching practices to examine the possibilities for enhancing practice in this research context and similar ones. In short, I wish to conclude this thesis by raising some key questions that could be a transitional step towards future research: 1) What is the current status of teaching practices in Saudi universities across the country? 2) Why do educational systems still sustain old fashioned legacies? More precisely, why do universities in Saudi Arabia still privilege strict regulations that are adopted as if unproblematic? 3) What might this tradition embrace or promote in terms of national or regional aims? and 4) Does the perseverance of this tradition obviate the need for meticulous reform regarding other alternatives? I perceive answers to these questions an endeavour to move the educational debate regarding what works into further alternatives by means of opening up horizons of authentic dialogue involving those marginalised, voiceless and oppressed stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

Appendix (1)

Instructors' Questionnaire

Introduction

The main aim of the current study is to investigate the teaching practices of Saudi university instructors at colleges of social and human sciences. The current study aims particularly to achieve the following: (1) explore Saudi university instructors' perceptions of their teaching practices, (2) investigate Saudi university students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching practices, and (3) find out the challenges encountered by Saudi university instructors in their teaching practices as perceived by Saudi university instructors. This is an entirely voluntary study, all Saudi university instructors at colleges of social and human sciences are being asked to fill this out. I will follow this up with some interviews. The questionnaire will be anonymous, and I would be grateful if you would complete all the questionnaire items. All the information you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only.

Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

Kind Regards,
The researcher

Category (A) Teaching Practices

Sub-Category A1. Planning and Organisation

How frequently do you do each of the following procedures in your teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your practice.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

As a university instructor, you		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	State instructions clearly at the first lecture of the module	5	4	3	2	1
2	Provide students with a study guide	5	4	3	2	1
3	Are well organized and prepared for every lesson	5	4	3	2	1
4	Take students' evaluation of your teaching. (e.g. oral, written, questionnaire form)	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A2. Clarity of Teaching

How frequently do you do each of the following procedures in your teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your practice.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

As a university instructor, you		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5	Start the lesson on time	5	4	3	2	1
6	Take attendance at every lesson	5	4	3	2	1
7	Preview the topic of the teaching session	5	4	3	2	1
8	Relate today's lesson to the previous one	5	4	3	2	1
9	Provide students with different teaching materials (e.g. handouts, articles, newspapers, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
10	Use traditional aids (e.g. blackboard)	5	4	3	2	1
11	Use modern technology (e.g. PowerPoint, whiteboard, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
12	Use various teaching methods	5	4	3	2	1
13	Clarify areas of misunderstanding	5	4	3	2	1
14	Take students' learning needs into account	5	4	3	2	1
15	Discuss the content knowledge in an organized way	5	4	3	2	1
16	Define new terms, concepts and principles clearly	5	4	3	2	1
17	Present abstract ideas clearly supported with examples	5	4	3	2	1
18	Focus on understanding and skill mastery	5	4	3	2	1
19	Use a variety of questioning techniques to probe students' knowledge and understanding	5	4	3	2	1
20	Allow students to learn cooperatively (e.g. pair work, group work, etc.).	5	4	3	2	1
21	Check comprehension of what is taught	5	4	3	2	1
22	Support students for independent learning (e.g. coursebooks, resources).	5	4	3	2	1
23	Use appropriate opportunities to enhance students' learning	5	4	3	2	1
24	Review the teaching session	5	4	3	2	1
25	Finish the lesson on time	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A3. Interaction and Communication

How frequently do you do each of the following procedures in your teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your practice.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

As a university instructor, you		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
26	Have good control of the class	5	4	3	2	1
27	Use various strategies to engage students in the lesson (e.g. question techniques, activities, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
28	Hold small group conferences with students	5	4	3	2	1
29	Motivate students to learn	5	4	3	2	1
30	Encourage students to ask questions in class	5	4	3	2	1
31	Encourage students to discuss ideas in class	5	4	3	2	1
32	Listen and respond to students	5	4	3	2	1
33	Allow students to respond to other students' questions or ideas	5	4	3	2	1
34	Deal with students with respect	5	4	3	2	1
35	Treat students fairly	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A4. Assessment

How frequently do you do each of the following procedures in your teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your practice.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

As a university instructor, you		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
36	Provide students a list of assessment criteria (Rubrics)	5	4	3	2	1
37	Use various assessment methods during the semester (e.g. tests, quizzes, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
38	Use various homework assignments during the semester	5	4	3	2	1
39	Assess students' understanding of the course contents	5	4	3	2	1
40	Grade students' work fairly	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A5. Feedback

How frequently do you do each of the following procedures in your teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your practice.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

As a university instructor, you		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
41	Provide each student with oral feedback on his work	5	4	3	2	1
42	Provide the whole class with oral feedback	5	4	3	2	1
43	Provide students with written feedback on their work	5	4	3	2	1

Kindly, state any comments regarding teaching practices.

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Category (B): Instructors' Challenges

How challenging is each of the following factors to your teaching at university? Please circle the number that best suits your opinion.

Very Challenging (5) Challenging (4) Unsure (3)
 Unchallenging (2) Not Challenging at all (1)

As a university instructors, how is each factor below challenging your teaching		Very Challenging	Challenging	Unsure	Unchallenging	Not Challenging at all
44	Physical teaching environment	5	4	3	2	1
45	Teaching load	5	4	3	2	1
46	Large classes	5	4	3	2	1
47	Teaching aids	5	4	3	2	1
48	Professional development programmes	5	4	3	2	1

What other challenges do you face that affect your teaching practices?

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DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Would you please fill in the following personal details?

Name: (Optional)

If you are willing to be interviewed, please write your e-mail address and mobile number below.

E-mail:

Mobile No:

Appendix (2)

Students' Questionnaire

Introduction

The main aim of the current study is to investigate the teaching practices of Saudi university instructors at colleges of social and human sciences. The current study aims particularly to achieve the following: (1) explore Saudi university instructors' perceptions of their teaching practices, and (2) investigate Saudi university students' perceptions of their instructors' teaching practices. This is an entirely voluntary study, students of colleges of social and human sciences are being asked to fill this out. I will follow this up with some interviews. The questionnaire will be anonymous, and I would be grateful if you would complete all the questionnaire items. All the information you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only.

Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

Kind Regards,
The researcher

Category of Teaching Practices

Sub-Category 1. Planning and Organisation

How frequently do your instructors do each of the following procedures in their teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your instructors' practices.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

Your Saudi university instructors,		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	State instructions clearly at the first lecture of the module	5	4	3	2	1
2	Provide you with a study guide	5	4	3	2	1
3	Are well organized and prepared for every lesson	5	4	3	2	1
4	Take your evaluation of their teaching. (e.g. oral, written, questionnaire form)	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category 2. Clarity of Teaching

How frequently do your instructors do each of the following procedures in their teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your instructors' practices.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

Your Saudi university instructors,		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5	Start the lesson on time	5	4	3	2	1
6	Take attendance at every lesson	5	4	3	2	1
7	Preview the topic of the teaching session	5	4	3	2	1
8	Relate today's lesson to the previous one	5	4	3	2	1
9	Provide you with different teaching materials (e.g. handouts, articles, newspapers, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
10	Use traditional aids (e.g. blackboard)	5	4	3	2	1
11	Use modern technology (e.g. PowerPoint, whiteboard)	5	4	3	2	1
12	Use various teaching methods	5	4	3	2	1
13	Clarify areas of misunderstanding	5	4	3	2	1
14	Take your learning needs into account	5	4	3	2	1
15	Discuss the content knowledge in organized way	5	4	3	2	1
16	Define new terms, concepts and principles clearly	5	4	3	2	1
17	Present abstract ideas clearly supported with examples	5	4	3	2	1
18	Focus on understanding and skills mastery	5	4	3	2	1
19	Use a variety of questioning techniques to probe your knowledge and understanding	5	4	3	2	1
20	Allow you to learn cooperatively (e.g. pair work, group work, etc.).	5	4	3	2	1
21	Check comprehension of what is taught	5	4	3	2	1
22	Support you for independent learning (e.g. coursebooks, resources).	5	4	3	2	1
23	Use appropriate opportunities to enhance your learning	5	4	3	2	1
24	Review the teaching session	5	4	3	2	1
25	Finish the lesson on time	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category 3. Interaction and Communication

How frequently do your instructors do each of the following procedures in their teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your instructors' practices.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

Your Saudi university instructors,		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
26	Have good control of the class	5	4	3	2	1
27	Use various strategies to engage you in the lesson (e.g. question techniques, activities, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
28	Hold small group conferences with students	5	4	3	2	1
29	Motivate you to learn	5	4	3	2	1
30	Encourage you to ask questions in class	5	4	3	2	1
31	Encourage you to discuss ideas in class	5	4	3	2	1
32	Listen and respond to you	5	4	3	2	1
33	Allow you to respond to other students' questions or ideas	5	4	3	2	1
34	Deal with you with respect	5	4	3	2	1
35	Treat you fairly	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A4. Assessment

How frequently do your instructors do each of the following procedures in their teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your instructors' practices.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

Your Saudi university instructors,		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
36	Provide you a list of assessment criteria (Rubrics)	5	4	3	2	1
37	Use various assessment methods during the semester (e.g. tests, quizzes, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
38	Use various homework assignments during the semester	5	4	3	2	1
39	Assess your understanding of the course contents	5	4	3	2	1
40	Grade your work fairly	5	4	3	2	1

Sub-Category A5. Feedback

How frequently do your instructors do each of the following procedures in their teaching? Please circle the number that best suits your instructors' practices.

Always (5) Often (4) Sometimes (3) Rarely (2) Never (1)

Your Saudi university instructors,		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
41	Provide you with oral feedback on your work	5	4	3	2	1
42	Provide the whole class with oral feedback	5	4	3	2	1
43	Provide you with written feedback on work	5	4	3	2	1

Kindly, state any comments regarding teaching practices.

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DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Would you please fill in the following personal details?

Name: _____ (Optional)

If you are willing to be interviewed, please write your e-mail address and mobile number below.

E-mail:

Mobile No:

Appendix (3)

University Instructors' Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your teaching experience at university?
 - A. How long have you been teaching?
 - B. What are the positive and negative aspects of your teaching?
 - C. What do you like most about teaching?
 - D. What don't you like about teaching?
2. What does a good teaching practice mean to you?
3. Can you explain your teaching philosophy/approach?
4. What teaching materials do you use? What do you think of them?
Probes. Course books, handouts, articles, newspapers, etc.
5. How do you interact with your students in the classroom? Give examples?
Probes. In groups, in pairs, individually, ask questions, share knowledge, discuss, etc.
6. What teaching methods do you use? What do you think of them?
Probes. Lecture, discussion, Project, workshop, presentation, etc.
7. What assessment techniques do you use during the course? What do you think of them? Why?
Probes. Lecturers' assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment, etc.
8. What kind of feedback do you take from your students? What do you think about it?
Probes. Oral, written, etc.
9. What challenges do you face in your teaching relating to teaching environment, professional development, and other challenges?

Appendix (4)

University Students' Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is a good university instructor from your point of view?
2. Can you describe a typical bad lecture that you attended?
Probes. What makes a lecture bad?
3. Can you describe a typical good lecture that you attended?
Probes. What makes a lecture good?
4. What do you think of the different teaching materials used in classroom?
Probes, are they good or bad and why?
5. What teaching methods do your university instructors use? What do you think of them? Do you like them? Why/why not?
Probes. Lecture, discussion, debate, Project, workshop, presentation, etc.
6. How do your university instructors interact with you in class? What do you think of this?
Probes. Individually, in pairs, in groups, whole class, etc.
7. What assessment techniques do your university instructors use during the course?
Probes. Written assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolios, etc.
8. How do you feel about your university instructors assessment techniques? Why? Give example?
Probes. Fair, shallow, useful, useless, unfair, biased, etc.
9. What kind of feedback do give to your university instructors? What do you think of it?
Probes. Oral, written, etc.

Appendix (5)

Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS

You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the 'Student Documents' web site.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Musaad Mohammed Alfalah

Your student no: 560030023

Return address for this certificate: 4A Gladstone Road, Exeter, Devon, EX1 2EE

Degree/Programme of Study: Doctor of Philosophy, Teaching in Higher Education

Project Supervisor(s): Ms Sue Chedzoy and Professor William Richardson

Your email address: ma321@exeter.ac.uk and c_crescent@hotmail.com

Tel: 07860558348

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:

date: 23/03/2010

NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must **not be included** in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: August 2009

Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 560030023

Title of your project:

Investigating the Teaching Practices of Saudi University Academics: Implications for Academics' Professional Development

Brief description of your research project:

The main aim of the current study is to investigate the teaching practices of Saudi university academics. The current study aims particularly to achieve the following: (1) investigate Saudi university academics perceptions of their teaching practices, (2) investigate Saudi university students' perceptions of their academics' teaching practices and (3) find out the challenges encountered by Saudi university academics in their teaching practices as perceived by academics.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

All faculty members (male and female) and all undergraduate students (male and female) of social and human Sciences College at a Saudi University will be asked to voluntarily participate in the current study.

Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs

All faculty members' and students' personal details and data will be kept confidential and anonymous. All faculty members and students will be asked to fill in a consent form to tell us that they are happy to volunteer in the research.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The methods to be used are a mixed survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. All data will be stored safely away from any misuse by anybody.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

All recorded data will be stored securely. All completed questionnaires will be used for study purposes only.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

There might be some difficulties interviewing the female participants in Saudi Arabia.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: *March 2010* until: *Sept 2013*

By *Bill Bleedzom 20/3/10*
(above mentioned supervisor's signature):
.....date:.....

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

SELL unique approval reference: *D/09/10/68*

Signed: *Sally J. ...* date: *1/4/2010*
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: August 2009