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An Investigation of Professional Communities amongst those responsible for English Teacher Development in Oman

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Education

College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow
June 2022

Abstract

Research into professional communities has grown internationally over the past three decades. Although there are a range of definitions, most agree professional communities provide an environment for professionals, including educators, to share knowledge, problem-solving and professional values, while developing networks. This research sheds light on two kinds of identified professional communities: ‘Communities of Practice’ (CoPs), and ‘Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs). The latter was recently adopted in the Omani educational context, as a model for improving the achievements of schools and students.

This study investigated the collaborative work (or lack of it) of English-subject teacher-educators acting as trainers, supervisors, and senior school teachers – roles which were created after educational reforms in 1998/1999. There is scant research regarding how these groups operate together as teacher-educators supporting school teachers. Embracing an interpretive approach over fieldwork totalling 6 months, I investigated the perceptions of 8 trainers, 12 supervisors and 11 senior teachers across three governorates in Oman and 5 senior staff from the Ministry of Education (MoE)’s Supervision and Training departments. I used semi-structured interviews, an in-depth analysis of national policies, and non-participant observation of group meetings for data triangulation.

The study highlighted seven key findings. The most salient revealed mixed attitudes in participants’ perceptions regarding their collegial workplace-relationships and collaborations. A number of participants highlighted the passive role played by their MoE leadership in terms of enhancing better relationships and communication between them. The findings also revealed an overlap in the roles and responsibilities of trainers and supervisors, which causes conflict between these two groups in some governorates. Finally, obstacles such as negative attitudes, differing cultural behaviours, an overwhelming workload and the extensive range of duties demanded were all highlighted as challenges that would hinder the implementation of professional communities. The study recommends that MoE officials consider addressing these obstacles to implement professional communities effectively in the future and calls for more collaboration between the three groups to enhance their working relations. The study extends our

understanding of how Western 'professional communities' principles work when adapted for use in the Omani context.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degrees at the University of Glasgow or any other institutions. I confirm that all published or other sources of materials consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the references list.

Salima Khamis Sultan Al-Sinani

Signature

Salima

Dedication

O Allah, to You is all praise and gratitude.

To the souls of my beloved mother and father.' You are in my heart and will never be forgotten from my prayers.

To Sultan Qaboos's Soul. Thank you for offering me this scholarship. May your soul rest in peace.

Acknowledgements

Having reached the end of the journey of my research, I would like to thank all those who have helped me in completing this piece of academic work. It is my pleasure to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all who supported me throughout my study.

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to my supervisors, Professor Oscar Odena and Dr. Ines Alves, for their illuminating advice and guidance throughout the various stages of my study without which I could have never done this research. Despite their busy schedules, they have always been of great support and encouragement to me. I do really appreciate all the efforts they made in providing me with their invaluable feedback and motivating discussions on the countless drafts of the work.

My beloved family- my husband and adored children, who warmly surround me with happiness and have been very patient during this study journey. They have been my partners through the long nights, the cold, the fears, the challenges, the efforts and ultimately partners of the success.

Of course, my appreciation goes to all the participants in the study for agreeing to be involved and devoting their time to make the data-generating process successful.

I also want to thank my brothers, sisters, colleagues, and friends who assisted me by their constant encouragement and advice. And special thanks to all friends and neighbours in Glasgow, who enlivened my social life and were always there to make my Ph.D. life enjoyable and fulfilled.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my thanks to the administrative staff in the Enquiries Office as well as the IT staff at the University and the School of Education for their kind cooperation and assistance during my stay at the University.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CoPs	Communities of Practice
PLCs	Professional Learning Communities
SETs	Senior English Teachers
ELT	English Language Teaching
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
OWTE	Our World Through English English textbook used previously in General Education System in Oman
EFM	English for Me English textbook used currently in the reformed Basic Education system
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
BA	Bachelor of Arts
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
PIRLS	Progress in Reading Literacy Study
INSET	In-Service Education and Training
C1	Cycle One = refers to primary schools in Oman (Grades 1-4)
C2	Cycle Two = refers to preparatory schools in Oman (Grades 5-10)
PBE	Post Basic Education= refers to secondary/high schools (Grades 11-12)
PD	Professional Development
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
SCPTT	Specialised Center for the Professional Training of Teachers
HRD	Human Resources Development

Chapter One: Introduction to the Research

1.1 Introduction to Chapter 1

No matter where the person is in their career, they are likely to have concerns, questions, and can learn more about their career path. Being part of a professional community may help resolve these issues, as such communities are advocated to provide a sustainable and safe learning environment (Louis, 2006). This research study focuses on two models of professional communities; Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and in particular, on how some of its principles have been adopted in the Omani context. As such, this introductory chapter briefly provides background information regarding these two models in 1.2 (with further discussion provided in Chapter 3). This chapter then explains the research rationale, and my reasons for conducting this study in 1.3. Section 1.4 identifies the aims and questions of the research; 1.5. clarifies the significance of the research; and finally, 1.6 outlines the thesis structure.

1.2 Setting the Scene

The term professional community consists of two words: professional - person qualified in a specific profession - and community, “group of individuals connected to each other by one or more attribute(s)” (Zamor, 2005: 1). In her study of changing the culture of schools, Louis (2006: 481-482) distinguishes professional communities in education by defining them as a “set of social relationships that create a culture of shared responsibility for student learning”. Bringing these together, I would say that professional communities would mean a group of professionals with shared responsibility collaborate together to learn with and from each other.

It would appear that the idea of professional communities was closely associated with ideas of organisational learning (Senge, 1990), which has led to the term Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), used by educational scholars such as Hord (1997) and DuFour and Robert (1998). This last concept, is one of the models of professional communities being explored in this investigation. Originally, the notion of PLCs began to be used in the United States of America in the 1990s, when their educational system was undergoing a series of reforms, as a result of public demands for holding schools accountable for student learning (e.g.

Archer, 2012). They searched for an innovation that would help them improve student achievement. At that time, the notion of PLCs was being discussed as one of the newest educational reforms and since then, professional learning communities have slowly gained momentum as a school reform framework for helping schools meet the needs of their students and additional requirements (DuFour and Eaker, 1998, DuFour et al., 2008, Archer, 2012). They have become a well-known model for developing students' learning (Archer, 2012). As such, this model was adopted and practiced in Omani schools in 2016 through the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT), which was established by the government in 2014 in an attempt to transform the Omani educational system and its pedagogies. This is covered in detail in the following contextual Chapter 2, when I examine how PLCs were adopted through this training center, in an attempt to improve the quality of students' achievements.

The second model of professional communities being explored in this research, is the 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) which initially was developed by the theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. It specifically focuses on learning and development through membership of and participation in a community, which serves as the home of shared practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991). CoPs are also understood to rely on the situated theories of knowledge, which contend that knowledge is a property passed on by groups of people over time through shared practices, rather than the belief that knowledge is a cognitive residue situated within the head of an individual learner (Hoadley, 2004). Primarily, 'situated learning' theory comprised of the work of John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky, who believed that learners learn through active participation in their learning experience; it is a matter of creating meaning from the real activities of daily living and not by simply listening to lecturers (Clancey, 1995; Stein, 1998) .

Over the past three decades, CoPs also gained attention and significant ground as a model that facilitates and deepens the learning of knowledge, skills, and experiences in both public and private sectors (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lesser and Storck, 2001; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002; Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). This has developed not only in English-speaking countries, such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand, but also across Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, and is evidenced in a number of research reports within the field of education (e.g. Johnson and Khalidi, 2002; Salah et al, 2017). Hence, there has been a

particular interest in the Middle East to better understand the scope of CoPs activities and the environment which shapes their operations. And educators have begun to capitalize on the CoPs model in this region, exploring how this concept may be useful (e.g. Johnson and Khalidi, 2002, 2015; Salah et al, 2017).

On the other hand, there are some challenges faced by both PLCs and CoPs models and they have been criticised by some in particular aspects. For example, Middleton (2003), Mittendorff et al (2006) and Blankenship and Wendy (2007) have questioned whether these communities can actually have a positive impact on students' learning and whether their impact justifies the time, the effort or the expense required to make them successful. It is often difficult to evaluate the improvements in students' performance and attached them to one particular influence, because many potential factors can influence students' performance, including outside school factors such as parental support (e.g. Bottery, 2003; Philpot, 2017; Levine, 2019).

Wenger's CoPs- model has also been criticised for its failure in acknowledging individual's creativity. For instance, Drew (2021) has pointed out that people can learn knowledge through independent study and that creative people come up with alternative ways of completing tasks or new technologies that make life more efficient and prosperous. Others have criticized 'situated learning' theory for not taking into consideration the role of power in regard to an individual's identity (Varghese et al., 2005; Trent, 2015). Varghese et al. (2005) claim that Wenger's (1998) CoPs and situated learning theory focus solely on how the individual's identity develops within group practice, neglecting other factors that contribute to identity development such as experience and an individual's own potential. Murillo (2011) also stresses that the concept of CoPs has achieved wide diffusion, however users have adapted it to suit their own needs, leading to a proliferation of diverging interpretations and losing some of its coherence and analytical power. Murillo argued further that, as the definition of CoPs evolves and extends, it becomes increasingly more complex and multi-faceted, and thus more difficult to identify definitive characteristics. Linda et al. (2009) claim that the concept of CoPs was originally developed to provide a template for examining the learning that happens among practitioners within a social environment, but that over the years there have been significant divergences in regard to the focus of the concept. Linda et al. (2009) contends that:

“Lave and Wenger's earliest publication (1991) centered on the interactions between novices and experts, and the process by which newcomers create a professional identity. In the 1998 book, the focus had shifted to personal growth and the trajectory of individuals' participation within a group (i.e., peripheral versus core participation). The focus then changed again in 2002 when CoP was applied as a managerial tool for improving an organization's competitiveness” (Linda et al., 2009:4).

Regardless the shortcomings of both models (PLCs and CoPs), it is apparent that it is healthy for any theory to face constructive criticism; this should be viewed as crucial to the evolution and improvement of the theory, challenging any of its limitations. Furthermore, certain ideas and theories work in different places, contexts, and situations, and might not always fit in all. It is contended that there is strength in specificity; thus, the present study explores the emergence - and the status - of professional communities (including PLCs and CoP models) within the educational context of my home country, the Sultanate of Oman, between three different groups of teacher-educators (as outlined in the following section). Besides exploring the role of the relevant authorities from the Ministry of Education (MoE) in facilitating and supporting these three groups, in the particular context of teacher education and development.

Having provided sufficient background and introduced both models of professional communities considered in the study, I will now go on to discuss the rationale that have underpinned the research.

1.3 Research Rationale

To better understand my rationale of this research, I will briefly review a part of the Omani educational reform, which is the second phase of the educational system in Oman. Because this would help me first to introduce the three different groups of English-subject teacher-educators (Supervisors – Trainers –Senior English Teachers SETs) targeted in this research, and then state my motives of investigating this area.

Briefly, the educational system in Oman went through two major phases (all are discussed in detail later in Chapter 2: Contextual Background 2.2.1 and 2). The first stage started in 1970 and

ended in mid 1990s. This was when the formal and modern education started spreading in Oman and therefore the main aim and concern of the Ministry of Education at that time was providing education for all citizens around the country – hence it was a quantity aim (MoE, 2004a; Al-Lamki, 2009). The second phase is the 1998/1999 educational reform, which mainly focused on qualitative improvements in education including: Firstly, transforming the previous inspection system to a new educational-supervision system (MoE, 2001; Al-Kharbushi, 2005; Al-Lamki, 2009). Supervision system was reformed to move towards encouraging teachers to be reflective practitioners and was improved from being a ‘central inspection system’ to a more school-based collaborative and reflective approach (AL-Lamki, 2009).

Secondly, a new department of Educational Supervision was established, and ‘inspectors’ job title was changed to ‘supervisors’ with new job description. This term ‘inspector’ has been changed to the term ‘supervisor’ as the first was considered to carry negative meanings in Oman and implied that ‘inspectors’ were people who use their authority to catch teachers’ mistakes in the classroom and aim only to judge their performance (Al-Sinani, 2009). In other words, the inspectors' main role was to inspect whether teachers followed what had been prescribed to them by the Ministry and whether they are performing well in classrooms. The support provided for teachers by inspectors then at that time was mainly achieved through inspection visits and observations of lessons and getting direct feedback on their performance. This then led to a lack of shared meaning, and assumptions regarding teaching and learning, resulting in a lack of agreement between the inspectors and the teachers. So, English-subject supervisors instead now are responsible for observing, mentoring by supervisors, providing professional development opportunities, and evaluating teachers through observations, post-observation meetings, and oral and written feedback about how to improve their teaching practice (Al-Abri, 2009).

Thirdly, a new post of Senior English-teacher was introduced in each school with at least four teachers of English in the same school (AL-Lamki, 2009). This new role of Senior English Teachers (SETs) was initiated to improve English teaching and learning practices for both teachers and students alike in Oman. In cooperation with supervisors, the general aims for SETs were to mentor English teachers, provide them with guidance and support throughout their teaching, with professional learning experiences, and work as a leader to elevate teaching and

learning on site. It was designed to be the role of a more experienced teacher, working as a mentor for teachers in schools. They support and guide where appropriate, provide feedback, participate in writing teacher reports, and assist with admin work and any problems teachers face. The idea was to make the school system decentralised to be able to make necessary decisions that fit the school situation and needs. In other words, to make the SETs like resident supervisors in schools who are capable to support, monitor and evaluate both teachers and the educational process. Educational reform in Oman focused on the four skills of the 21st century, the 4 Cs, with SETs as a job role created for this purpose. Thus, SETs can work with creativity, cooperation, communication, and critical thinking skills. Finally, the third group of teacher-educators targeted in this research are English-subject trainers. Who were also assigned at the period of this reform to train the English teachers and provide them with professional development courses for teachers including methodology and language courses.

Regarding the work between these three groups of teacher-educators. Ideally, SETs post helps supervisors and trainers to identify training needs accurately, and assist them in providing precise support for teachers, either in training halls or when visiting schools. Trainers provide professional development for teachers, but with this reform, SETs can work towards achieving this aim by providing teachers with weekly professional development, with the help and guidance of a trainer and a supervisor. At the same time, SETs can play the role of supervisor, where they can facilitate, guide and provide support to teachers while in practice. Thus, in theory, we can say that these three posts were set to widen the opportunities for teachers to get support and guidance, and at the same time, to help enable the plans and long-term goals of trainers and supervisors, to be accomplished with teachers.

However, the query that guided and motivated this current study was, to what extent these three groups of teacher-educators work closely together? or to what extent do they smoothly communicate and work collaboratively to support teachers and that the plans set to them by the Ministry was achieved. I believe that there is a lack of research investigating how these teacher-educators operate together in the field. And recently, after the adoption of the PLCs model by the Ministry of Education in their training courses, through the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers mentioned in Section 1.2, which started operating 2014. I became

interested in this subject, and reading more about professional communities, PLCs and CoPs consolidated my decision to study and research the professional communities in my educational field and context. Having worked since 1996/1997 academic year in a number of roles, including an English teacher, a senior-teacher, a training-specialist and most recently as a subject-trainer for the Ministry of Education. In my Master's dissertation I researched reflective interactions between teachers and SETs (Al Sinani, 2007, 2009). For my doctorate I wanted to connect the idea of professional communities with the work of the three groups of English subject teacher-educators because I believe that these three groups would need to work as one professional community as their work is closely connected and builds on each other. It was from this perspective that I decided to explore the notion of professional communities in the specific context of these three groups of Omani English teacher-educators. This was undertaken in the hope to contribute to the educational system and policy in Oman, by exploring developmental ideas concerning teacher education. A number of objectives and research questions directed this study, as outlined below.

1.4 Research Questions

The overarching question guiding the study is: *What is the status of professional communities amongst English teacher educators (Trainers, Supervisors, and Senior teachers) in Oman?* In order to attempt to answer it, the following three research questions have steered the research:

RQ1: What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers are required to work?

This research question explores the background of the present guidelines and the Ministry's standards these teacher-educators rely on. It also examines the extent to which these guidelines encourage English-subject teacher-educators to cooperate and build strong relationships with each other for the benefits of helping teachers, and how these educators are expected to work in order to more strongly support teachers. Furthermore, it examines the role of relevant authorities in supporting the current policies or supporting any collaboration between these groups of teacher-educators.

RQ2: How do these three groups of English teacher-educators (Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers) work within and across groups?

In light of the policies interrogated within RQ1, this research question explores the relationships and collaboration between the members of each group and across the other groups. It also examines the extent to which these teacher-educators possess the characteristics of professional communities (e.g. PLCs or CoPs) within their relationships. This question also would help to investigate any effective practices they believe and adopt in managing human and financial resources such as their innovative, projects and potential work. Besides, it explores whether they create time and opportunity for shared professional learning and development CPD.

RQ3: How do Trainers, Supervisors and Senior Teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional community models (such as CoP and PLCs) within and across their groups?

This question explores what the implications may be from developing better collaborations among the three groups through successful use of professional community models, including their potentialities and any drawbacks from the participants' viewpoint. Furthermore, it examines the role of relevant MoE authorities in supporting any current and future professional communities.

Having stated my research questions, the following sections discusses the significance of my research.

1.5 Research Significance

Investigating professional community models in Oman is a new area of study, and therefore still in its early stages. While there may be starting research exploring the effectiveness of PLCs in the Omani schools since its official adoption by the MoE in 2016, the CoPs model, on the other hand, could be still undisclosed well. So far, I have come across only one recent research study, which focused on the CoPs model, conducted in 2018 by Abatayo. This research targeted 11 expatriate tutors of English from a number of universities and colleges in Oman, to explore how language higher education teachers in Oman develop communities of practice through their involvement in Language Teachers Associations (LTAs). The study provides a number of

recommendations on how such associations could provide effective and beneficial professional development to teachers. I would contend that Abatayo's (2018) study is limited to the specific context of higher education teachers; this highlights the need to unpack and understand such a phenomenon, if any, in the Omani context, from the angle of teacher-educators within the MoE. As discussed earlier in the current study, there exists a lack of research that explores how these three groups operate together.

Within my Literature Review of the PLCs local studies there are few studies investigated this model, yet there are research areas left uncovered, such as the process and the relationship between these groups of teacher-educators (e.g. Al-Yahmadi and Al-Shammakhi, 2021; Al-Mekhaini, 2018). For example, a recent study by Al-Yahmadi and Al-Shammakhi (2021) examines the implementation of PLCs in five Basic and Post-basic schools throughout Muscat, Oman. They investigate the impact of the PLCs on the professional development of teachers in the schools, and any obstacles that hinder teachers from implementing their activities. The findings of this study shows that the implementation of PLCs is still weak in these schools, due to obstacles such as overloaded teaching timetables and administrative paperwork. However, their study focused on the teachers themselves as members and did not deal with their educators, who this study targeted as participants.

I believe that the significance of this research would come from providing increased understanding of how professional development ideas such as PLCs and CoPs models which originally developed in the West countries or in other words in different contexts would work in the context of recent educational reforms in Oman. Therefore, this work is significant because it has aimed to add some new insights to the field of research on Teacher Education (and English Language Teaching) within an Arabic Educational context. I believe that the current study holds practical significance for Omani teacher trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers - as well as Omani teachers themselves. Besides extending their knowledge about professional communities' notion and its kinds, this study would make a significant contribution to pedagogical knowledge, particularly in terms of the correlation between employing a form of social activity, such as professional CoPs and PLCs, and improving learning and knowledge.

Regardless the professional communities' models, my own study would unpack and uncover the different aspects of these Omani English-subject teacher-educators work in field: such as the kind of cooperation and the nature of the workplace relationships between them, and the ways of communication these three different groups utilise to communicate with each other. This investigation then would help to understand the relationship between the three groups of teacher-educators and identify some of the factors which affect (either positively or negatively) their relationship and highlight any useful recommendation from its findings. In other words, this study provides the opportunity to explore ways for improving communication and developing collaborative partnerships between these teacher-educators. It highlights the need to focus on the process of developing collaborative partnerships rather than concentrating merely on individual department working themselves and the importance of working collaboratively to seek contextually appropriate solutions.

At a policy level, the current study has the advantage of identifying other contextual factors that may influence English teacher-educators' learning and professional development. In practical terms, this investigation would ultimately provide the Ministry of Education in Oman with information regarding how Omani English teachers-educators believe how they work together as professionals of English Subject. And how they perceive themselves working in professional communities together with other colleagues from the other related-departments. Such information, could be useful in assisting the Ministry to rethink and evaluate the nature and quality of professional communities and explore ways of their applications within the field of teacher-education, which are geared towards developing teacher-educators professionally. This new and significant research would help to promote change in the educational policy within Oman, and that the findings would contribute to an overhaul of the educational system in its current form.

Having discussed the significance of this research, I will now move on to present the structure of this thesis.

1.6 Thesis structure and outline

This thesis consists of seven Chapters, including the current Introductory Chapter. The Second Chapter provides the Background Educational Context within Oman. This involves some discussion on the educational system from the 1970, and the new reforms since. The discussion of reforms provides an overview of the General Education and Basic Education system in the Omani context. This chapter moves on to examine English Language Teaching (ELT) and teacher education in Oman, and the structure of the three groups of English teacher-educators (Trainers, Supervisors, and SETS); the targeted groups of this research participants.

The Third Chapter reviews relevant literature; providing a theoretical background to the study by presenting a review of the literature on both the Communities of Practice (CoPs) and the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Thus, this Chapter is divided into four main parts, apart from its introduction and summary. The first part of the chapter focuses on the CoPs. It starts by reviewing the CoPs approach history, then comparing between different definitions of the concept of different authors. It also discusses the CoPs different activities, processes, and its levels of participations and investigates the CoPs three main features: the domain, the community, and the practice. It also highlights the main benefits and challenges faced by the Communities of Practice. The second part of this Chapter focuses on the ‘Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs)- it also starts by reviewing its history and definitions characteristics, and then discusses its benefits and challenges as well. The third part provides a theoretical comparison between these two models of professional communities, while the fourth part reviews a number of local research studies conducted on both CoPs and PLCs models.

Chapter Four is a reflective and detailed account of the decision-making process of the design and the methodology adopted for this qualitative research. It starts by providing a detailed overview of the research paradigm, research methods, the design of instruments. It then describes the research participants and the rationale or reasons for their involvement and offers a timeline for data collection besides explaining the research approval process. It then moves to clarifying how the ethical considerations (including, and validating all research participants’ rights of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity) and issues related to research quality assurance

and trustworthiness were addressed. Besides, it includes a reflection on my role as an 'Insider' Researcher, the chapter then presents a detailed account of the process of recruiting the research participants and piloting the research data gathering tools and instruments. Finally, it concludes with discussing the data analysis procedures, which produced the findings of this research.

Chapter Five lay out and present a detailed account of the findings of the study that I collected from the different data gathering tools (semi-structured interviews, non-participants' observations and research diary notes and ministerial documentary analysis). This chapter shows how these different data sources meet to support each other and how they diverged. The Chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings. Chapter Six analyses and discusses the major findings of the research. It contains a discussion of six key findings in relation to the research questions, literature, and the context of the study. Hence, this chapter aims to synthesise the key findings of the present study in relation to how they address the research questions and to show how these findings can contribute to a fuller understanding of the development of professional communities in the Omani English Language Teaching Context.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents an overview of the research and provides a summary of its main findings and addresses its research questions. The Chapter then highlights where they may be of particular significance of this research and how it may contribute to the educational theory and practice. It also discusses the research implications and recommendations for practice. On the other hand, the chapter discusses the limitations of the research and suggests directions that future research could be taken into account by researchers in the Omani educational field. The chapter ends with a discussion of the professional development of the researcher and reflecting on what I have gained from the research process.

Chapter Two: Contextual Background

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

This chapter provides background information regarding the educational context within the Sultanate of Oman, where the enquiry took place. The chapter consists of seven sections. After this introduction, the second section of this chapter offers relevant background information about the Sultanate of Oman, leading to a discussion regarding the Omani educational stages. Describing the progressive nature of the schooling systems and highlighting the most significant educational reform (the Basic Education system, which began in the academic year 1998/99). The third section of the chapter seeks to shed light on English language teaching (ELT) within Oman and its practitioners, while the fourth section reviews a number of evaluations of the reforms and addresses some action procedures undertaken by the Ministry of Education. The fifth section discusses teacher education in Oman and sheds lights on the responsibilities of the three targeted groups of this research participants. The sixth section gives an account of the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers. Finally, the chapter finishes with a summary of the main ideas discussed.

2.2 The Sultanate of Oman and its Educational System: on-going reforms since the 1970s

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arabic-speaking Muslim country, situated on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula; with a land area of 309.500 sq. km, it is the third largest country in this Peninsula. As displayed in Figure 2.1 below, Oman consists of eleven governorates: Muscat (the capital), Musandam, Dhofar, Buraimi, Sharqia South, Sharqia North, Dhakhliya, Batinah South, Batina North, Wusta and Dhahira. Each governorate is divided into several sub-governorates (Willayat), and each has a governor (Wali) (The Ministry of Information, 2013).



Figure 2.1 Map of the Sultanate of Oman with Governorates' boundaries and capitals.
<https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/oman>

Oman holds a strategically significant position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf; it borders the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the southwest, and shares marine borders with Iran and Pakistan (see above Figure 2.1). Although Oman's past is ancient and well-known historically, it is still a developing country because its renaissance began in 1970 under the leadership of the recently deceased Sultan Qaboos bin Saeed, when Oman experienced substantive growth with the discovery of its oil and gas resources, which now drives its economy (Al Zadjali, 2017). Oman's population was approximately 4,159,102 million inhabitants in 2015 (The Annual Educational Statistics Book, 2014-15).

Oman has possessed traditional educational system throughout its history. Before the year 1970, students studied the Holy Quran and the basic principles of reading, writing and arithmetic through informal teaching in mosques. The beginning of formal modern education in Oman started in 1930 (MoE, 2004b). However, there were only around 900 male students studying in three elementary schools in the whole of the Sultanate by the year 1969 (MoE, 2002). The formal modern education started spreading in Oman in 1970 under the guidance of the recently deceased Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

In order to contextualise the current research, the following part of this section considers two significant educational developments and reforms in Oman since the 1970s. These are General and Basic Education Systems.

2.2.1 General Education System (GES) – Education for all stages

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the governmental body responsible for the educational system and all its related issues in both national and private schools (preceding higher education). Before the 23rd of July 1970, Oman's education was limited to Islamic Quran schools, with only three formal national schools teaching approximately 900 male students. However, following Sultan Qaboos' rise to power in 1970, schools began to spread across the country, with a rush to compensate for the lack of formally educated Omanis; the educational target was to reach all parts of Oman, including the mountainous and rural regions. Oman possesses a range of geographical variation which challenges the government's efforts to expand the provision of education for all students. Oman is geographically vast, with small villages spread across Oman's mountainous terrain; as such, it was difficult to provide basic infrastructure such as roads and electricity and challenging to find the human resources required to support teachers and administrators in mountainous, rural suburbs and isolated villages. Such challenges were concrete and tangible, particularly in improving the quality of the teaching and learning process, as well as the quality of student outcomes in an information-driven world. However, a follow-up to the exerted effort being undertaken to improve education in Oman

acknowledges the tremendous and remarkable achievements being made in regard to the provision of education across the changing country (MoE Oman, 2005; AL-Masroori, 2014).

The table below (2.1), illustrates the development in the number of schools, teachers, and students between the years of 1970 to 2015.

Academic Year	Schools	Teachers	Students
1969/1970	3	30	900
1999/2000	993	26,416	554,845
2015/2016	1,647	67,901	724,395
2019/2020	2,046	71,469	843,598

Table 2.1: Comparative numbers of Schools, Teachers and Students in Oman from 1970 to 2020 (The Ministry of Information, Oman, 2015: 416; 2020: 402).

These efforts were part of a responsive action to a speech undertaken by Sultan Qaboos in 1972, which emphasised the importance of educating Omanis - even if it was simply under the shade of trees. Therefore, the target for the MoE was to administer a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of education, and to develop high levels of education throughout the country as quickly as possible (MoE Oman, 2005).

The focus on the development of 'Education for All' in Oman began in 1970 and continued up until 1998/99, when the Basic Education system began. During this period, education was termed General Education (GE) and consisted of three stages. The first is primary, involving Grades 1-6; the second is preparatory for Grades 7-9; and the third is secondary, for Grades 10-12. Various national, political, and contextual aspects drove education during this period, which involved an undertaking by the MoE to educate Omanis on the importance of education - particularly for girls (Al Zadjali, 2017). After these efforts, Oman witnessed a significant growth in literacy levels through an investment in formal schooling and its substructure.

2.2.2 Basic Education System (BES) – Reforming education stage

In the academic year 1998/99, the education system in Oman was reformed and became the Basic Education system (BES). The MoE introduced this new ten-year school system which operated concurrently with the previous three-level general education system (primary,

preparatory, and secondary) as there was a need to improve the quality in education and develop a critically thinking population ready for the demands of the 21st century. As a result, this new reform included 10 years of Basic Education (Grades 1-10 ages from 7-16), followed by two years of Post-Basic education (grades 11-12 ages 17-18). Table 2.2 below demonstrates the structures of both GE and BE. The schools teaching BE run two cycles: Cycle one for grades 1-4 (mixed gender), and Cycle two for Grades 5-10 (not mixed gender).

General Education from (1970 until 1998)		Basic Education (from 1998 onwards)		
12	Secondary	12	Post Basic Education	
11		11		
10		10	Basic Education (Cycle Two)	
9	Preparatory	9		
8		8		
7		7		
6	Elementary	6		Basic Education (Cycle One)
5		5		
4		4		
3		3		
2		2		
1		1		

Table 2.2. Structures of General and Basic Education School Systems in Oman (from Inclusive Education in the Sultanate of Oman, MoE, 2008: 9).

The Basic Education System was therefore applied in Oman as part of the overall educational development plan which generally aimed at updating and renovating the quality, content, and practice of education in order to match international standards. The BES aimed to equip all Omani students with the required knowledge, skills and qualities to become capable and independent citizens, to then to be able to join workforces or continue with further education through two-year Post-Basic education. In empirical research that explored the impact of curriculum prescription on the development of English Language (L2) teachers 'professional identity (TPI) in Oman, Al Zadjali (2017) outlined that the two years of Post-Basic education are intended to prepare students to join universities, in order to be fully equipped to best serve their country and contribute to its continuing development.

These transformations of the new BES involved moving away from traditional teacher-centered methodology, to adopting a more learner-centred approach, with learning that includes technological information and resources. Moreover, English was introduced from Grade 1 (when children are 6 years old), rather than Grade 4, when children are nine or ten years old. English is studied daily: five times a week for a period of 40 minutes. It was stated by a World Data on Education report in 2011 that students in Basic Education now have:

“...opportunities to learn through a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including activities involving individuals, pairs, small groups, whole classes, and out-of-school work. The strategies employed by teachers aim to develop skills and attitudes such as autonomous and cooperative learning, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, research and investigate techniques, creativeness, innovation, and the development of an aesthetic sense. The overall aim is to provide students with the required tools for life learning” (World Data on Education, UNESCO 2011: 9).

Furthermore, new subjects were introduced, such as Information Technology and Life Skills, and the reforms ensure that children have access to resource centres with computers, books, and other learning materials. After four years of being in Cycle One schools, boys then go on to Cycle Two schools, taught and led by men at a school solely for boys. Girls progress to Cycle Two schools solely for girls, taught and led by women. As mentioned earlier, Cycle Two schools consist of Grades 5-10; they are comprised of five years of schooling to further develop students’ linguistic, physical, intellectual/cognitive, social and behavioural skills, as well as other technological and computing skills (Issan and Gomaa, 2010; Al Zadjali, 2017).

The two-year Post-Basic education programme included both core and elective subjects. They focus on employability and career planning skills, such as the development of technological, communication and work-related skill sets, as well as problem solving and social skills. At the end of grade 12, students sit a national exam for all subjects; as a result, they are awarded a grade that acts as a foundation for a Diploma in Secondary Education. Afterwards students can then apply to national and international higher education institutions.

Finally, since the outcomes of any reform are only recognisable after several years of its application, the Omani Basic Education reform has gradually revealed a number of achievements, accompanied with some challenges. The achievements are numerous, such as the increase in school enrolment for learners and the building of new schools, as well as the

continuous efforts to ‘Omanise’ (i.e., replace foreign workers with trained Omani nationals) teaching jobs across the country. Also, the focus on the quality of education, which began with the reform itself. Figure 2.2 illustrates the development in Education and a comparison between schools in Oman in 1970 and 2013.



Figure 2.2: Developing education: Omani schools in 1970 and 2013 (Muscat Daily, 2013). <https://www.muscatdaily.com/>

A challenging journey took place between the two very different educational reforms or systems in Oman, during which the Omani Government paid particular attention to education. Since 1970, the Ministry of Education has exerted much effort to achieve the aims of the government through three recognised developmental stages of education within Oman. Stage One emphasised the rapid quantitative development of education. Stage Two started in the early 1980s, when the Ministry of Education initiated serious efforts to improve the quality of education. Stage Three began in 1995, after the 2020 Future Vision Conference on Oman’s

Economic Future, when a number of reforms were introduced in order to cope with the educational requirements of the country's future (Ministry of Development, 1997).

In a report on educational reform in Oman, Rassekh (2004a: 12-20) outlined that all of the educational achievements were fulfilled within the framework of the national five-year development plans. The early five-year plans from 1976 to 2000 continued the expansion of education services throughout the Sultanate, replacing old and temporary schools with permanent, modern schools - providing them with libraries, laboratories, and workshop facilities. Besides focusing on continuing to improve the quality of the services provided, promoting the Omanisation (i.e. replacing expatriate workers with trained Omani Personnel) of the teaching staff and developing appropriate quality programs to prepare citizens for the 21st century, including the introduction of basic education, was prioritised. The later five years plans from 2001 to 2015 continued this expansion of education to make it available to all, introducing and developing the implementation of the Basic Education program and developing quality education services.

This was in addition to minimising the quality gap between basic education and general education and expanding and improving teacher training. A strategic plan was initiated in 2001 to ensure that students will be adequately prepared for the requirements of higher education and the labour market through restructuring secondary education. Furthermore, it aimed to achieve a higher quality of education services and curricula, increasing the efficiency of evaluating student performance, expanding the employment of technology in education, and raising the efficiency of human resources. Thus, an operational plan was implemented in Post-Basic education in 2007 to improve the quality of education provided for future Omani generations (Al-Lamki, 2009).

2.3 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Oman

The Sultanate of Oman values English as a crucial international language, and as a tool for achieving multiple purposes as evidenced by English Language being a separate subject since the education system first developed in 1970. According to Atkins and Griffiths (2009), the royal directives towards learning English derive from Islamic principles relating to peace and harmony, and the importance of communication with other nations around the world.

Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) claimed that the government assigned huge budgets and resources for its implementation through formal education. Al-Issa (2013) further extended that the government has invested heavily in developing English language teaching (ELT) at the general and higher education level, which demonstrates the status and recognition given to English as a crucial requisite for the country's development and continuing modernity (see also Richards, 2015). Many fields such as, economy, media, industry and even the Ministry of Health, utilise English as their domain and medium for communication.

Consequently, English in Oman is akin to success at either a personal or a professional level, and Omanis learn English to pursue higher education, to travel abroad, for cultural analysis, communication in non-Arabic speaking countries and to get a white-collar job - promoted through American films and other English-speaking programmes (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012).

Furthermore, students experience the use of English alongside Arabic (the official language of Oman) through road signs, car number plates, on TV and satellite channels, in cinemas, and on the internet. This proliferating cultural exposure to English language is presumed to help non-native learners cope with English language textbooks in schools. However, despite all of these efforts and the recognition of English as a vital language for communication globally, English is still rarely used by Omanis outside of the classroom, and studies show that Arabic remains the language used by most students at home or with their peers (Al Zadjali, 2017).

ELT is highly appreciated by the Omani government and the country's subsequent culture and is considered crucial for educational success and consequently a successful career. The 1999 English Language Curriculum Framework strongly stated, regarding the role of ELT within the reform: "The Government of Oman has embarked on an ambitious new programme of educational reform and development, with English Language teaching being identified as pivotal to the successful achievement of the reform." (English Language Curriculum Framework, 1999).

2.4 Evaluation of the educational reforms in Oman

Oman participated in a range of different evaluations, assessments and international studies as part of a comprehensive evaluation plan and framework with the Education Council, in order to increase the significance of its educational systems for its development stages and the overall

reform (Muscat Daily, 2013). For example, the Ministry of Education invited the World Bank to conduct some review studies of the educational system, who described the development of Oman's education system in the years 1970-2000 as "unprecedented," and "unparalleled" by any other country" (World Bank, 2001: 23). The 2010 Human Development Report also highlighted that the Sultanate of Oman showed the quickest progress in the Human Development Index between all the nations included in the report, while emphasising that Oman witnessed a rapid evolution from being a very poor country in 1970, to becoming a very rich country in the 21st century (United Nations, 2010). Therefore, the development of Oman's educational system in terms of increased enrolment rates has been remarkably rapid within global comparisons.

However, despite this evident progress in the growth and the rapid increment in students accessing education, the educational system throughout schools continued to show poor student outcomes. For example, between 2006 and 2009, Sample Based National Assessments took place, which targeted Grades 4, 7 and 10 in the subjects of English, Arabic, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. This was described as a large-scale assessment as it involved all of the 11 governorates of Oman: it took a sample of 6,817 students from both General and Basic Education from governmental schools, and 173 students from private schools (Al Balushi and Griffiths, 2013; Al Zadjali, 2017). The findings of these assessments performed in the years 2006/07 and 2007/08 for Grades 7 and 10 showed that students did not reach expected levels, although Basic Education learners performed better in Arabic than their counterparts in General Education schools. The findings also indicated that English levels for Grades 7 and 10 were 29 points lower than the expected level (World Bank, 2013). According to Al Zadjali (2017), these national tests items were developed locally by MoE staff; the Ministry did not want to make rash conclusions based on the findings solicited from national tests. As at that time there was a recommendation to conduct international and external evaluations of the new system in order to ensure its attainment of the expected outcomes.

In 2011, Oman joined two international tests which were 'Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study' (TIMSS) and the 'Progress in Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS), to measure students' achievements and progress against the expected learning outcomes, in contrast to other educational counterparts based on international standards. Again, Omani students performed very poorly in these international evaluations of learning outcomes in all three subjects: Literacy

(PIRLS), Mathematics and Sciences (TIMSS). TIMSS assesses student proficiency across three types of cognitive skills: knowledge recall, the application of knowledge in solving problems, and the ability to reason in working through problems (Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018). Unfortunately, Omani students did not perform well in any of these three dimensions, and in the two programmes PIRLS and TIMSS, the young Omani students performed at a lower level than the students in top-performing countries in the subjects of Language, Mathematics, and Science. Table 2.3 below offers further details of these evaluations.

Assessment/Country	Advanced (625 and above)	High (550-624)	Intermediate (475-554)	Low (400-474)
TIMSS				
International average	4	28	69	90
Oman	1	5	20	46
PIRLS				
International average	8	44	80	95
Oman	0	5	21	47

Table 2.3. International Benchmarks for TIMSS in Grade 4 Mathematics, and for PIRLS in Grade 4 Reading in 2011: Percentage of Students at four Proficiency Levels in Oman (Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018: 264-265).

As presented in Table 2.3 above, only 20% of the Omani students reached the intermediate skill level, which is considered to be a minimum acceptable level in a modern global society, in comparison to the international average of 69% (Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018: 264-265). Only 5% of Omani students reached the high level, and only 1% were regarded as advanced in Mathematics. More than half (54%) of Omani students were below the low level, whereas only 10% of the international student population fell into this category. Likewise, PIRLS includes international standards for four performance levels; as shown in Table 2.3 not one single Omani student achieved the advanced level, and only 5% were in the high category. Finally, more than half (53%) of Omani students failed to attain the basic reading level, the low standard.

Besides the aforementioned evaluations, as a kind of collaborative work with the Ministry of Education, a number of international organisations also participated in measuring the progress of the Omani educational reform (as part of the Ministry's comprehensive review of its educational system). These included the World Bank's evaluation in 2008, UNESCO 2008's evaluation of the Arab World, titled 'Sharpening Our Tools', the UNICEF 2012 Annual Report for Oman, and

the World Bank again in 2013. All of these international assessment studies indicated that, although there was much success achieved within Oman's educational systems, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed. For example, as stated by the World Bank's report:

“The key challenge facing the education sector in Oman is to improve the quality of student learning outcomes and that enhancing quality and relevance should be the Government's main priority in education” (World Bank, 2013: 23).

Therefore, it is true then that Oman has made big efforts in expanding access to education; however, it seems that this was ineffective in improving standards and the quality of learning and students' individual achievements. Reports and studies highlighted different challenges faced by the Ministry of Education. Firstly, it was argued that the curriculum is overcrowded and heavily content-laden, making the means of delivery narrow and dull (New Zealand Education Consortium, 2013). Secondly, the need for more practical and effective teacher training rather than just academic was identified, which helps to assist new teachers in their role (World Bank, 2012). Furthermore, teachers continued to prefer using teacher-centred learning rather than using the developed student-centred learning approaches. Furthermore, it was claimed that assessments were primarily concerned with summative purposes, rather than being dedicated to formative assessment (University of Cambridge, 2010; Al-Zidjali, 2017). Finally, it was argued that Oman is facing these educational problems due to three main factors: an increase in the educational differences within countries, a decrease in the quality of education (despite high per capita education expenses), and a mismatch between labour market needs and the output of educational systems (United Nations, 2002; Chapman and Miric, 2009).

In response to the above-mentioned evaluations, the Ministry of Education carried out a number of fundamental and series initiatives in an attempt to transform the pedagogies and the education system as a whole (Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2017). These are, firstly, developing curriculum and performance standards that would provide benchmarks for the educational levels, and ranges of students of all ages and grades in order to help evaluate the performance of schools, students and staff. Secondly, developing professional standards for teachers and staff involved with schooling, in order to help clarify roles, evaluate staff performance and develop methods for further improvement. Furthermore, establishing a National Assessment Centre to be responsible for the delivery of assessment and qualifications systems through the production of

valid and reliable assessment instruments, supported by high quality statistical analysis and research capabilities, and an online platform for assessment. Finally, establishing the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers to be responsible for the training of all staff that work in the education sector (see 2.6 section for more detail).

Having provided an overview of the Omani educational context and reforms, the next section discusses teacher-education in Oman; then sheds light on the three different roles of teacher-educators (this research targeted groups of participants).

2.5 Teacher education in Oman

During the period of rapid educational expansion in Oman, since the 1970s when Oman's formal modern education system started spreading until about the 1980s, and throughout this period, there was a need for large numbers of teachers to help educate Omani nationals and increase access to education as quickly as possible. Most teachers were recruited at that time from outside of the country, in the 1970s, for example, with nearly 90% of the teaching staff for all subjects including English being expatriates from countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Algeria, India and Britain (Atkins and Griffiths, 2009). Besides to a small number of Omani teachers with low qualifications were recruited: those who had completed their secondary education abroad, and those who had completed their preparatory education inside Oman.

The Ministry of Higher Education take the responsibility of teachers' pre-service Training and Education in Oman. In this sense, the Omani pre-service Teacher Education began only in 1977, when the Omani government established the construction of the Teacher Training Institutes (TTIs) for both men and women. These Training Institutes awarded two-year diploma qualifications in teaching for Omanis who held preparatory certificate levels, to become teachers of subjects including English (Al-Zidjali, 2017). These TTIs were transformed to become Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges (ITTCs) in 1984, which still continued to offer two-year diploma certificates. Then these institutes again transformed in the mid-90s to become Colleges of Education offering a four-year bachelor's degree in Education (Ministry of Higher Education; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Zidjali, 2017). Hence, Al-Zidjali (2017: 25) claimed that the above-mentioned situation regarding recruiting expatriate teachers changed with time as the

Omani teachers “outnumbered their expatriate counterparts, except for some male Post-Basic education schools”, where there are still expatriates teaching English.

Presently, the Ministry of Education has different sources for pre-service teacher education and for preparing newly qualified teachers such as the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Besides to private institutions in Oman, and institutions abroad, as also prefer to get their teaching degrees from neighbouring Arab countries such as Jordan, Egypt and UAE, or from English speaking countries like Britain, America and Australia (Ministry of Higher Education; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012).

As the participants of this study are English Subject teachers Educators; my discussion throughout this chapter will focus on English-subject and English Language teaching context. The above discussion then meant that, most English subject teachers were Omanis with Bachelor’s degrees graduated either from SQU, or from the previous colleges of education in Oman and/ or from abroad. Or they were diploma certificates holders (two-years pre-service education) who were trained locally in either teacher-training institutes or colleges. However, the Ministry of Education thought that these two-year diploma holder teachers might face challenges in teaching the Basic Education curriculum (or the new reform curriculum at that time). Therefore, a development plan took place for all in-service Omani diploma-holding English language teachers. The plan aimed to upgrade all Omani English language subject teachers to the level of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). To establish this, a contract was signed between the Ministry of Education in Oman and the University of Leeds in the UK, to train and equip around 1050 Omani diploma-holding teachers with a three-year in-service BA programme in the field of TESOL. Al Lamki (2009: 21) stated that the participating teachers in this project were put into six cohorts studying a three-year in-service programme and the first cohort of teachers started the programme in 1999 and the last one finished in 2009. However, in their report about the background to this BA (TESOL) Programme, Atkins and Griffiths (2009) reported that the targeted number of teachers to be trained decreased to 921 teachers due to various different reasons, such as teacher retirement, personal circumstances and transfers.

This in-service BA (TESOL) programme with the University of Leeds is considered to be one of the major projects and achievements of the MoE in Oman for its English language teachers (AL-Lamki, 2009; Al-Zidjali, 2017). Participants were put into groups of roughly 15 teachers studying in training centers in their regions and were taught by qualified native speakers of English appointed jointly by the MoE and the University of Leeds. Atkins and Robinson (2009) pointed out that this project was externally evaluated by experts in the field of second language learning and teaching, research, and teacher development over four stages of its ten-year lifespan (1999-2009). They claimed that evaluations reported successful findings in relation to their focus areas. Findings showed, for example, a link between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practice and disclosed significant progress in the teachers' knowledge and understanding of both the teaching and learning process, as well as research and teaching young learners. Besides, positive influence on teachers' use of English and in adapting curriculum, activities, and materials to meet their students' needs and interests. However, there were also some recommendations suggested by the evaluators and actions that took place by either the University of Leeds or the Ministry of Education to improve (Atkins and Robinson, 2009).

Until recently, the Ministry of Education - through the Directorate General of Human Resources Development - had the sole responsibility for delivering in-service training for teachers in Oman. It provided courses at the central, regional, and school levels, with training organised in a cascade approach. This involved identifying trainers at the regional level, training them centrally, and then sending them back to their specific regions to implement centrally developed training programs for teachers, senior teachers, principals, and subject supervisors.

2.5.1 English in-service Teacher Training

In order to prepare teachers to implement the Basic Education reform, one of the first steps taken by the Ministry of Education was to launch an in-service training programme to help teachers already in the system to understand the reform, and teach in accordance with the new exigencies (update them on its objectives, processes and requirements). Hence, this led the Ministry to open a training centre in each of the 11 educational governorates and create a department for Training and Professional Development, in response to the increasing educational training needs and

responsibilities. This department gradually transformed and developed into the current structure below (see Figure 2.3 for the structural position of the Main Training Centre).

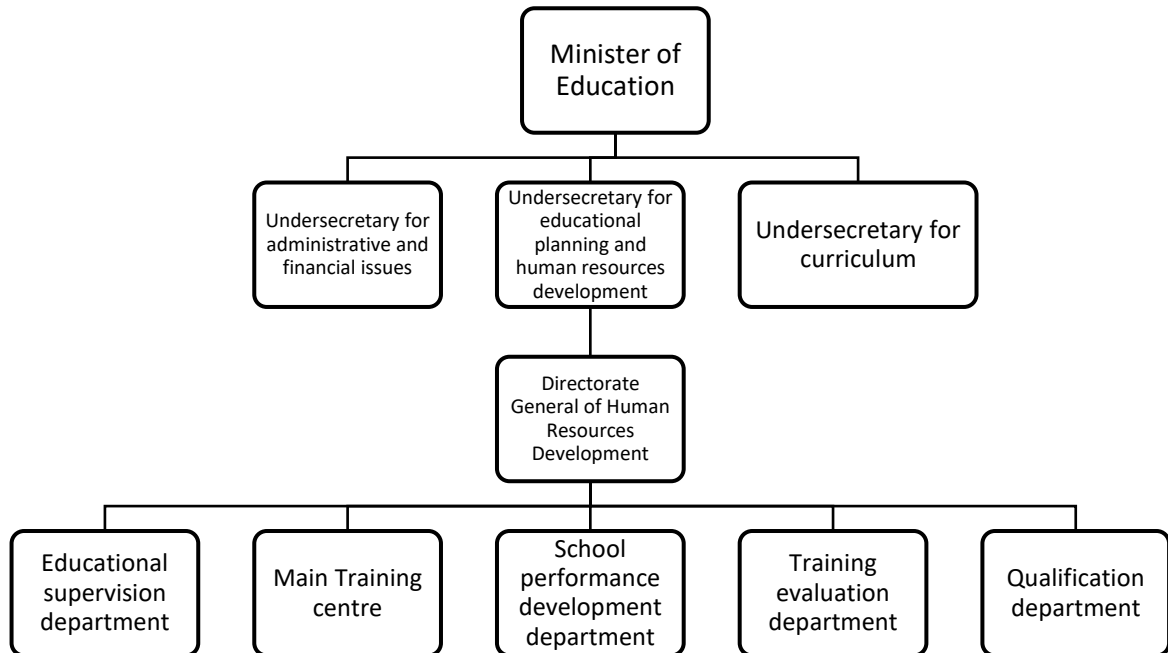


Figure 2.3 The structural position for the in-service training and professional development and support in the Basic Education system. Adapted from Directorate General of Human Resources Development Guide, 2013: pg. 5.

Therefore, until recently, the Main Training Centre - one of the departments of the Directorate General of Human Resource Development within the Ministry of Education - was the primary centre for implementing training programmes and supervising all training undertaken in every governorate. English-Subject Training, which is currently offered and covered in all of the Sultanate's governorates, primarily provides for English subject professionals - including teachers, senior English teachers and Regional English Supervisors. This training is conducted by Omani regional trainers in the governorates, and was supported and managed by the English Training Unit based in the MTC. However, currently the English training team from the MTC was transferred and seconded to the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers, as in 2014 the latter began to offer training for English teachers, as will be discussed later in this work (see section 2.7).

2.5.1.1 English Teacher-Trainers

In the governorates, English training is undertaken by approximately 24 Omani Regional Teacher Trainers. English-language teacher trainers are key contributors to ELT and teacher-education in Oman, and they are one of the targeted groups of participants for this research. Trainers are responsible for designing, delivering, and evaluating in-service INSET courses for English or TESOL teachers in the 11 Omani governorates. Previously, these courses were run by expatriate native English-speaking teacher-trainers (Al-Balushi, 2009; 2012). However, since 2006, the Ministry of Education began qualifying Omanis to do this job and replace the expatriate trainers; originally in-service English teachers, senior teachers, or English supervisors.

When this post was first created, Omani trainers began in the profession by shadowing an expatriate native speaking Regional Teacher Trainer/Advisor for a whole year. During this time, they worked to develop an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the trainer through observation and discussion (Etherton and Al-Jardani, 2009). Then, they gradually became involved in planning and delivering courses themselves, through co-delivering these courses with the native English-speaking trainer/s. Gradually, Omani trainers became responsible for delivering in-service courses (INSET) in their regions (Al Balushi, 2017).

However, currently the newly appointed trainers go through a different process. They are provided with a 25-hour (one week) trainer training course in which they explore the theoretical and practical issues of training and being a trainer (Etherton and Al-Jardani, 2009). They also have to undertake a number of peer observation sessions with more experienced trainers, either from their own region or other nearby governorates. Furthermore, they usually begin the profession with co-training courses with more experienced colleagues, then gradually take on responsibility for delivering their own courses. Importantly, Omani regional trainers are usually encouraged to attend and/or be present at both local and international ELT conferences; their participation in these conferences is usually funded by the Ministry of Education (Al Balushi, 2017).

2.5.1.2 INSET Teacher Training provided by the Main Training Centre

There were two main types of training courses that were delivered for English teachers under the umbrella of the main training centre: these were central and regional training programmes. Firstly, the central programmes were always planned and designed centrally (in the main training centre), and were primarily delivered throughout the regions by the Omani trainers. In previous years, there were around 11 courses/workshops of this type provided in each region. However, in the last two years; (since 2016), the number of training programmes was reduced to only five or six, due to financial issues. The process of planning for these types of training programmes is shared between the related departments: the Main Training Centre, the Supervision Department, General Directorate of Educational Evaluation, and the Directorate General of Curriculum Development. The process of building the central and regional training plan was supervised and managed by the Department of Qualification and Training. This latter department is responsible for approving and providing budgets for the central and regional training programmes. Table 2.4 below shows a list of the primary basic programmes offered to English Language Teachers and senior teachers by the main training centre and conducted by the regional trainers from 2009 to 2015.

Type of Training Course	No	Name of the course
Methodology courses/workshops	1	Senior English Teachers' Course
	2	Cycle One Course
	3	Cycle two course
	4	Post Basic Course
	5	'From Grammar to Words and Back Again' (based on Scott Thornbury's workshop)
	6	Literacy Development Workshop
	7	Creativity Workshop (based on Peter Grundy's workshop)
	8	Observing Teaching Workshop (Jeremy Harmer)
Language Proficiency courses	9	English Language Course for Teachers
	10	Effective communication skills for the language classroom
Professional Development courses	11	Research for Professional Development Course

Table 2.4 Training Programmes provided for English Teachers in Oman in the academic year 2014/2015- adapted from English Training Plan. MoE, 2016a: pg. 6.

As presented in Table 2.4, central English training programmes were originally composed of three different types of training courses. Firstly, methodology, which aimed to update, introduce

and practice new or updated methodologies for the reformed curriculum (EFM), while focusing on all teachers teaching grades (1-12) in the country. These courses were designed to help equipping teachers with strategies and skills for stronger understanding and implementation of the curriculum, while enabling them to deal with the specific age group they teach. The second type of programmes were language proficiency courses; these aimed to upgrade the language proficiency of teachers. Finally, the professional development programmes; which were designed to help providing opportunities for professional growth and development of teachers.

However, as mentioned earlier, the number of courses was decreased since 2015/2016 due to financial reasons. For the academic year of 2016/2017, for example, there were only three primary methodology training programmes, and two workshops provided for English teachers, as presented in Table 2.5 below.

No	Title of the programme	Target group	Main aim	Length
1	Cycle One Course	Cycle one teachers	Supporting teachers to teach cycle one curriculum	50 hours
2	Cycle Two Course	Cycle two teachers	Supporting teachers to teach cycle one curriculum	50 hours
3	Post Basic Course	Post basic teachers	Supporting teachers to teach cycle one curriculum	30 hours
4	Using Technology in teaching English	Cycle 2 & post basic teachers	Supporting teachers to use a number of teaching technologies	3-day workshop
5	Developing reading and writing in cycle 2	Cycle 2 teachers	Supporting teachers to developing reading and writing skills	3-days workshop

Table 2.5: A summary of the training courses provided in the academic year of 2016/2017 by the Main Training Centre for English Teachers (adapted from English Training Plan, MoE, 2016a: 7).

As shown in Table 2.5 above, the programmes were reduced by more than half, compared with the 2015 list of programmes (Table 2.4). The second type of training courses delivered for English teachers under the umbrella of the main training centre are the regional programmes. The regional training programmes plan is built within the governorates themselves. Each governorate is given a specific limit of training programmes according to the number of teachers and staff in each region. Regional English training programmes were usually short courses or workshops, often planned, designed, and delivered by supervisors within the regions themselves.

These courses targeting English teachers and senior teachers, focusing on a range of topics that differ from one region to another.

However, although all of these different kinds of in-service training courses were provided to English teachers (besides their pre-service education), Al-Maskri, et al. (2012) found, through a small-scale interview study on improving the education system in Oman, that teachers do not often apply the teaching methods they were taught and trained to apply in initial preparation. Suggesting that teachers should use methods that better fit students' individual levels of performance and ability. The World Bank (2012)'s evaluation also indicated that many teachers lack pedagogical ability due to a reduced focus on teaching, learning and assessment. Moreover, in the same report, the World Bank (2012) revealed that a survey conducted in 2009 of 150 teachers from five governorates, showed that in-service training was sporadic and poorly planned (Al Jabri et al., 2018). This report demonstrated a number of teachers' major criticisms of in-service training. These criticisms were: firstly, teachers claimed that training is over-theoretical with an absence of practical applications. Secondly, it did not address issues regarded important by trainees; thirdly, trainers were not sufficiently knowledgeable on the content they deliver; and finally, courses were too short to have a lasting impact on their teaching (World Bank 2012; Al-Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018; Al Jabri et al., 2018). According to this report, there was also a need for skilled teachers to be committed to their profession and committed to supporting their pupils to achieve their full learning potential. According to Al-Shabibi and Silvennoinen (2018), teaching continues to be one of the most favoured career choices for women in Oman; partly this is socio-cultural, with teaching viewed as an appropriate profession for women - but also due to the attractive work conditions including the salary and long holidays. Shabibi and Silvennoinen (2018) also claimed that commitment levels were not satisfactory as many teachers view it as a source of income that can be carried out with a minimum amount of effort.

Finally, as recent as the academic year of 2014/2015, the Ministry of Education implemented a large-scale national project, establishing the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers, which aimed to develop the skills and confidence and motivation levels of educators by providing sustained, intensive and accredited professional development. One of the reasons behind implementing this centre was the evaluation study of the World Bank (2012) conducted in 2009 mentioned above. Regarding English Training, this Centre began offering training for

English teachers in the academic year of 2016/17, via two programmes: the English Language Teaching ELT Experts (which targets Cycle-Two and Post-Basic- high school teachers), and the New Teachers Programme for newly qualified English teachers. The design of both courses is the same: a part of the course runs through centralised face-to-face delivery at the Centre itself, and the other part utilises existing English training capacities within governorates. Both courses generally target all schools within the Sultanate. They provide English teachers with updated techniques in teaching, learning, and reflecting on their work (MoE, 2016b). They are accredited programmes which last for one year (new-teachers programme) and two years (English-language teaching experts programme). The New Teachers Programme is a requirement and is therefore compulsory for all new English teachers with one to three years of experience. More details about this centre is discussed later in section 2.6.

2.5.1.3 Additional Professional Development Opportunities (CPD) for Teachers, Senior English Teachers, Supervisors and Trainers.

The Ministry of Education provides a number of activities that contribute to the Professional Development (PD) of the ELT professionals and teacher-educators (Teachers, Senior English teachers, Supervisors and Trainers), in parallel with the longer formal INSET courses. The table below shows examples of some of these activities provided from 2012 to 2017:

No	CPD	Description
1	Online Training Programmes	<p>A- Special Education Needs course for English Teachers (SEN) This online course sought to help English teachers and schools develop an inclusive approach to addressing children with special educational needs in their care. It was offered to two groups of 150 participants during the academic years of 2014/2015 and 2016/2017. The targeted participants were comprised of English teachers, supervisors and trainers, SEN teachers, and specialists. This programme represents a collaborative venture between the British Council and the Ministry of Education and was funded by HSBC Bank Oman.</p> <p>B- The TKT programme The Ministry of Education provided funding in the academic years of 2012/13 and 2013/14 for approximately 400 English teachers to enrol on the British Council's TKT Essentials online programme, to undertake the internationally recognised Cambridge Teacher Knowledge Test (TKT).</p>

No	CPD	Description
2	Attending and presenting at national and international conferences.	In 2013 the Ministry of Education facilitated the opportunity for 320 Ministry employed teachers, supervisors, and trainers to attend the Sultan Qaboos University ELT conference in April 2013. Other opportunities were provided to English teachers, supervisors, and trainers to attend and present at TESOL Arabia conference and IATEFL conference in the UK.
3	Journal subscriptions	All English teachers are provided with electronic access to a well-known international professional journal called the 'English Teaching Professional', which provides articles and ideas for teaching and training. Furthermore, the Ministry provided funding for the electronic subscription to 'The Teacher Trainer' journal, available for all trainers as one source of professional development from 2012-2017.
4	Regional Forums	In 2016 the MTC arranged a mini conference in Nizwa (Oman), regarded as a valuable networking opportunity for English subject professionals (Teacher-Trainers, Senior English Teachers and Regional Supervisors).
5	Professional Development of English Trainers	The Ministry provided high quality certified courses to enhance the professional development of trainers from 2015-2016. Completing these certified courses led to obtaining a 'Diploma in Language Teacher Training Assessment and Evaluation' from the World Learning organisation, which forms part of the SITs Graduate Institute, a highly regarded TESOL degree awarding body. The programme adopted a blended learning approach (both face-to-face and online) in order to develop trainers' abilities to design and evaluate the impact of training programmes and materials.

Table 2.6 Additional professional development opportunities for Teachers, Senior English Teachers, Supervisors and Trainers. (Adapted from the English Training document 2016/2017, MoE 2016a, p. 8).

2.5.2 English Supervision

Generally, educational supervision is defined as a service provided to teachers for the purpose of improving instruction (Oliva, 1989: p.23). This service is identified as a set of duties and comprehensive processes that aims to support teachers in their individual professional development (Allan, 1990). Since 1970, educational supervision in Oman has witnessed tremendous and continual development. This has been accompanied by changes in its forms, procedures, and priorities. These changes can be expressed through three phases of development: the inspection phase (1971-1985), the advisory phase (1986-1995), and the supervision phase (1996-present) (Al-Masroori, 2014).

The present system of supervision aims to improve levels of teaching and learning quality in schools, helping learners, teachers, senior-teachers, head-teachers, supervisors and regional administrators to become active, cooperative, and problem-solving members of their schools and wider society (The Ministry Guidelines, 2001). Generally, its primary missions have been allocated for the improvement of the educational process (MoE, 2008). To clarify the differences

in names and responsibilities, the regional supervisor is the educational supervisor who supervises senior teachers and teachers. The Senior Supervisor is a senior member of staff with the required skills and competencies, who supervises the supervisors' team. The primary role of the senior supervisor is to lead, evaluate, support and enhance the professional functions of the regional supervisors, as well as to monitor the quality of the work and provide substantial feedback (Al-Masroori, 2014). Below for example, are supervision statistics for the academic year 2016/17:

Governorate	Teachers (T)	Senior Teachers (ST)	Regional Supervisors (RS)	Senior Supervisors (SS)	Chief Supervisor (CS)
Hub (The main supervision section in MoE)	-	-	-	2	1
Dhahira	497	42	7	1	
Batinah North	1303	118	33	1 on study leave	
Batina South	857	82	13	1	
Buraimi	209	17	5	1	
Dakhilya	1019	87	15	1 on study leave	
Dhofar	793	36	17	1	
Musandam	114	5	3	1	
Muscat	1085	77	16	1	
Sharkyaha North	532	31	10	0	
Sharkya South	620	50	9	1	
Wusta	155	0	5	1	
Total	7184 teachers (Ts)	544 (STs)	133(RSs)	10 =+ 2 (hub) (SSs)	

Table 2.7 MoE, English Language Supervision department: statistics, 2016-17. MoE, 2016a: 2.

As shown in Table 2.7, Musandam has the least number of regional supervisors as it is a small governorate; only 3 regional supervisors are supervising 114 English teachers and 5 senior teachers besides other administrative duties. While Batinah North governorate has the biggest number of regional supervisors who are supervising 1303 English teachers and 118 senior teachers, and again besides other administrative responsibilities. More detail about the regional English supervisors (in 2.5.2.1) and senior English-teachers (in 2.5.2.2); other two targeted groups of this research participants is discussed next.

2.5.2.1 Regional Supervisors

Alongside regional trainers, regional English supervisors are also key contributors to the ELT and teacher-education in Oman, and compose the second group of participants for the current research. They play a broad role, with both administrative and instructional duties, such as

collecting the personal details of all teachers of English, planning and conducting seminars for all new Omani teachers, and planning and conducting in-service seminar programmes for the academic year. They also visit all recently recruited Omani teachers in their first month of teaching, observe teachers in classrooms, and conduct post-observation discussions (MoE Guidelines, 2001 and 1997; A'Shizawi, 2005).

However, under the new system, some of these supervisory duties have been assigned to Senior English Teachers (SETs); this was a significant change in the supervision system within Oman. The idea behind this is that having the SETs acting as a resident teacher advisor would improve teaching standards, and which would in turn reflect positively on the attainment of students (A'Shizawi, 2005).

There are specific objectives listed in the Professional Code of Ethics for English Language Supervisors (Educational Supervision Directorate, 2011). They include:

- To identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools.
- To promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools.
- To promote self-evaluation and continuous development by Senior English Teachers (SETs) and English language teachers.
- To provide an assurance of quality in the educational system, based on the collection of objectives, dependable and high-quality data.

The Professional Code of Ethics for English Language Supervisors further outlined a number of underlying principles. Firstly, a number of principles relate to school, where supervisors must foster mutual respect and trust in the development of a positive professional relationship with the school community, foster partnerships and collaborations, engage in dialogue with school staff, and ensure confidentiality. Secondly, with regards to professional relationships with senior English teachers (SETs) and teachers, supervisors must be courteous, respectful and fair, while making every effort to preserve positive relationships between Senior English teachers, teachers and students, and display sensitivity towards individual teachers and the wider school. Finally, with regard to evaluative functions, supervisors must observe teaching and learning, examine students' schoolwork, homework, portfolios, and journals where appropriate, and situate students

at the centre of learning and teaching. In addition, they must take cognisance of school self-review and other school-based quality assurance procedures where appropriate, invite a teacher to be present when students are interviewed, display sensitivity when communicating with teachers in the presence of students, and use different sources of information/evidence to corroborate any findings (Educational Supervision Directorate, MoE, 2011; Al-Masroori, 2014).

2.5.2.2 Senior English Teachers (SETs)

Senior English teachers are additional key contributors to ELT and teacher-education and are the third targeted group of participants in this research. The employment of SETs began in Oman in 1998; when they started spreading across the country in General and Basic schools (Al-Kharbushi, 2005:7). SETs should have certain qualities to be accepted for this job; for example, they should possess at least four years of teaching experience. Previously, SETs were selected through recommendations from their headteachers and supervisors if they showed a high level of performance, a strong understanding of teaching methods, and were cooperative with the school administration and their colleagues. However, in recent years, nominations and recommendations were no longer accepted, and a teacher who wants to be a SET must fill in a form sent by the Ministry of Education to all schools. Then all teachers who applied must sit a written test and be interviewed by administrators and supervisors; the selection is based on these results. The accepted SETs then join a training course facilitated by teacher trainers, and on occasion regional supervisors support in the implementation and the delivery of this course.

According to the Ministry Guidelines (2001), SETs are responsible for monitoring and developing the performance of the teachers inside and outside of the classroom. Al-Lamki (2002) stated that senior teachers were given the responsibility of guidance, as it was assumed that they know their teachers better than any other person. He added that they can directly deal with any problems teachers face and act without waiting for a visitor from the main central office. In fact, the role of SETs was divided into three main duties, as outlined in the Ministry Guidelines (2001). Firstly, regarding the professional development of teachers, they become responsible for their own learning and professional development by developing a culture of reflection, while undertaking the collaborative preparation of lessons, exchange of ideas, teaching, and discussion of lessons together. Additionally, they conduct peer observation, informal and formal classroom

observations, and post-observation discussions, and conduct professional meetings regarding any problems, solutions, and ideas. Secondly, with regard to checking teachers' work and supporting teachers who are having difficulties, SETs check profile charts/record sheets to examine ongoing assessments within the classroom, discussing in meetings/workshops how the assessment of learners can affect lessons, schemes of work and individual pupil work plans. Finally, regarding the administrative work, SETs organise the subject section timetables, receive and check teaching and learning materials, participate in the administration of the school day, and pass on information received from the regional supervisors to teachers (Ministry Guidelines, 2001).

2.6 The Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers

The Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT) has been aligned based on the late Sultan Qaboos's vision, that focuses on the importance of sustainable development and providing future generations with the appropriate capacities to meet changing national requirements and world developments (MoE, 2016b). Alongside his instructions that developing human resources should be a major priority in all plans and programs, in 2001 he stated that:

“... the development of human resources is the foundation stone of our policy... human beings are the power, the instrument and the ultimate arm of national development. Thus, we exert every effort to provide these essential qualities so that we can all, together, build our nation” (The Ministry of Information, 2001, p. 188).

As mentioned earlier, the World Bank Report (2012) of a survey conducted in 2009, of 150 teachers from five governorates in Oman, showed that in-service training has been sporadic and poorly planned. This report indicated that in-service training is over-theoretical (with an absence of practical application) and trainers are not sufficiently knowledgeable of the content they deliver (World Bank, 2012; Al-Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018; Al Jabri et al., 2018). According to this report, there was a need for skilled Omani teachers to commit to their profession and support their pupils to achieve their full learning potential. Hence, there was a need to reorganise the concept of Teacher Professional Development (TPD), as there is a concern that teachers do not always take professional development courses seriously, since there are no incentives for salaries or promotions. In addition, teachers are usually selected for training courses by

supervisors, resulting in some complaining that they are sent on irrelevant courses and/or courses on repetitious topics (World Bank, 2012).

Therefore, due to the aforementioned reasons, the Ministry of Education established the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teacher in 2014. The main purpose of this Specialised Centre is to improve the quality of students' learning and improve levels of the learning outcomes through professional development of the education workforce. The establishment of the centre is an integral part of the policy, which also includes the establishment of the National Centre for Careers Guidance, the Centre for Educational Evaluation, and the National Assessment Centre. These national centres aim to attract the best talent and expertise through granting them a degree of independence regarding recruitment, administrative and financial affairs (SCPTT homepage, 2020; Al Jabri et al., 2018).

Thus, the SCPTT is nationally responsible for the training of teachers and other education professionals, by improving their professional development, developing their skills, and evaluating their performance (SCPTT homepage, 2020). It aims at building a critical mass of teachers, school principals and supervisors who believe in, and practice, the methods and approaches required to raise student attainment (The Education Council, 2012: 41). The SCPTT aims to develop highly skilled, confident, and motivated educators by providing sustained, intensive, and accredited professional development. Thus, to maximise the impact, the centre aims to cover all schools in the country and reach a high proportion of teachers and regional officials.

Training at the Specialised Centre started with five strategic programmes identified and selected to address and cater for the most critical needs of Oman's educational system, among which are the need to raise students' attainment levels in science, math, and language literacy. As such, they started with a certain number of participants, as presented in Table 2.8 below:

No	Programmes	Number of trainees
1	Senior Teachers	520 teachers - one from every school - different school levels (Cycle One – Cycle Two- Post Basic)
2	Arabic language	200 teachers – one teacher from every Cycle One school 1-4)
3	Mathematics	374 teachers – (Cycle Two 5-10 teachers)
4	Science	423 teachers – (Cycle Two 5-10 teachers)
5	Education Supervision Experts Programme	411 out of 1500 subject supervisors

Table 2.8 The first five strategic programmes of the SCPTT (Source: Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018: 275).

In the following years of 2015-17, other additional strategic programmes were launched and started, as demonstrated in Table 2.9:

No	Programmes	Number of trainees	Year began
1	New Teachers	786 of the 860 teachers employed in 2014/2015 900 of the 960 teachers employed in 2015/2016	Academic year 2015/2016
2	School Leaders	200 principals and vice principals – targeting 20% of schools	Academic year 2015/2016
3	English language	800 teachers – targeting 80% of schools	Academic year 2016/2017
4	Field 2	400 Mathematics and Science teachers – targeting 80% of grade 1-4 schools.	Academic year 2016/2017

Table 2.9 Additional strategic programmes undertaken by SCPTT (Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen, 2018: 275).

According to Al Shabibi and Silvennoinen's study (2018) that reviewed the challenges in the Omani education system affecting teacher professional development, the Specialised Centre has also prepared and developed a comprehensive induction programme for all of its new teachers, which focuses on teaching and learning classroom practices. This then makes new teachers aware of what is expected from them in terms of professional standards, and raises awareness of the demands of the curriculum and assessment.

The SCPTT's strategic programmes (stated above) are designed to achieve sustainable change in the daily work of the participants, as they focus on the implementation and practice of the most up-to-date and effective methods of improving student outcomes. SCPTT followed a number of principles, which informed these strategic programmes' design in order to secure a direct impact on student standards. The first principle is sustaining two-year programmes to embed knowledge, skills, qualities, and values. The second principle is integrating face-to-face, online and workplace training. Moreover, the third principle includes using the international best practice and research along with all of the Ministry of Education priorities and initiatives (SCPTT homepage, 2020).

With regard to the implementation of these programmes, the MoE through the SCPTT, signed two-year contracts via open tenders with a number of international leading universities. Such as the

Centre for British teachers CfBT, the University of Turku in Finland, the University of Alberta in Canada, and Auckland University from New Zealand to manage the implementation process and the delivery of the centre programmes. Once these institutes were chosen, and based on identified needs, the MoE officials sat with these institutes representatives and discussed the content, the aims and the outcomes they needed. The institutions had to provide resident experts in the centre (known as lead trainers), working side by side with a team of the Omani trainers in the SCPTT throughout the two years contact. In the first year, the training materials mainly provided by these international institutes, however, they were customized to suit the Omani context. This was done by the lead trainer of each programme and his/her team (Omani trainers). In the first year, the lead trainer had to train the centre's teacher-trainers-teams in how to deliver the training materials. While in the second year, the lead trainer trained the Omani trainers to write the training materials themselves and deliver them.

Finally, the possession of quality assurance and endorsement by an outside organisation for validation and accreditation of the project, which is the Institute of Education at the University College of London (UCL). Therefore, the Specialised Centre has promoted the use of online platforms for teachers to communicate with other teachers beyond their own schools, and share ideas about their classroom ideas and practices (SCPTT homepage, 2020).

2.6.1 Education Supervision Experts Programme

I decided to focus on this particular programme as it is connected with the main topic of my study, professional communities; particularly PLCs. Besides, a good number of research participants were involved (as trainees) in this training programme. This programme started running in the academic year 2014/15 for approximately two academic years, and consists of four training periods. It targets the Omani subject supervisors who supervise public schools. It aims in its first year to widen and enrich supervisors' knowledge of the best international practices in teaching and learning. For the second year, it aims to develop the skills necessary to offer support to schools to enable them to improve their educational practices and to raise learning outcomes. It also aims to form independent and professional learning communities that are able to develop educational practices and maintain sustainability in the future (MoE, SCPTT homepage, 2020; SCPTT Participant Handbook, MoE, 2016c).

In the first module (World Class Teaching Practices) trainees study the results of international tests (TIMSS and PIRLS) as an aid to evaluate the stages of the development of the education system in the Sultanate of Oman. They are trained in how to work on strategies used in effective observation and feedback. In Module Two (Effective Learning Environment) trainees are introduced to the various types of effective classroom environments (context) and their components (physical and psychological). They are trained in how to manage student learning progress in the classroom. Module Three (Planning to Support Subjects in Schools) is the implementation stage of the first-year learning in this programme. Trainees get a detailed insight into the process of developing subjects within one semester, which includes data collection to be utilised for developing and analysing support plans, and monitoring and assessing plans in cooperation with school principals and subject teachers. Module Four (Leading Change) is a continuation of the third training period. Trainees prepare a support plan within a prioritised area of development in their governorates schools, and are expected to lead a team to make the desired change in the schools by “forming professional learning communities” (PLCs) between teachers and supervisors (MoE, SCPTT homepage, 2020). Forming PLCs is, in particular, what made me focus on this programme and choose participants rooted in these communities. The differences between the communities of practice and the professional learning communities will be discussed in detail in the following chapter (Literature Review, section 3.4)

Finally, regarding the assessment of the programme, every training period is evaluated through a portfolio that contains tasks, a report on the three training periods, support plans, learning resources, developmental activities, and videos that contain feedback from students and peers. In the 5,000-word report, trainees should demonstrate higher cognitive skills that include analysing, evaluating and critical thinking, and the ability to relate their findings to the local context and research evidence.

2.7 Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter has provided relevant contextual background information regarding the Omani educational system, through a historical account of the development of formal education within Oman from the 1970s to the present day. It was noted that when Sultan Qaboos took to the throne in 1970, there were only three schools in the whole of the Sultanate of Oman. The

priorities, therefore, were to expand educational provision to all parts of Oman, and ensure that all sections of society had equal access to education. By the mid-1990s, this quantitative expansion of education had largely been achieved, and the attention of the Ministry of Education shifted to attempts to bring about a qualitative improvement of the country's education system.

The chapter also included an account of the most ambitious of the Sultanate's educational reform programmes, the Basic Education initiative, first introduced in 17 schools in the 1998-99 academic year. This new programme involves the replacement of the existing General Education system with a unified child-centred education system, covering the first ten years of schooling. Furthermore, the chapter outlined and explored how the educational history of the Sultanate of Oman has undergone rapid development, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The chapter then discussed how the Ministry of Education initiated a number of additional programmes, including projects to evaluate the effectiveness of its educational system such as the Basic Education reform, in order to enhance students' achievements and help those with learning difficulties. This resulted in introducing new models for school evaluation and reforms of the curriculum and assessment system in higher grades (11 and 12). The overall aim of these efforts is to ensure that all young Omani students have access to a high-quality education system appropriate to the needs of the 21st century's globalised world.

Then the chapter focused on English language teaching (ELT) within Oman, exploring its current conditions; this included an account of the INSET courses and other activities offered to English teachers in order to contribute to their professional learning and growth. It also explored the roles and the primary responsibilities of teacher educators, and the key contributors to ELT and teacher-education in Oman: the trainers, supervisors, and SETs, who are the primary target participants of the current study. However, the effectiveness of these roles and responsibilities in supporting teachers and providing professional development must be taken into consideration in order to establish how far they were able to improve schools, increase teaching quality and improve the quality of students' learning, outlined as one of their key intentions.

The following chapter reviews the literature on the targeted professional communities' models; Professional Learning Communities PLCs and Communities of Practice CoPs and provides a comparison between them.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3

The concept of professional communities has gained considerable momentum in the theoretical and empirical studies in education in the past three decades. The concept itself has faced conceptual and methodological difficulties in articulating a universal definition as its operationalisation differs in the various empirical studies conducted on the subject (Lomos et al., 2011). However, I believe that the core purpose of its different models or names is actually the same: namely, learning and development in an environment that is free of stress or at least less stressful. For example, professional communities are defined as groups of professionals who regularly and systematically review how well their practices align with current professional standards and meet their needs (Ingvarson, 2020). They are also known as learning communities where members can learn with lower levels of stress and higher staff retention (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership AITSL, 2020).

This research specifically focuses on investigating two models of professional communities amongst those educators responsible for English teacher development in Oman. Thus, in this chapter I attempt to position this study within the scholarly terrain of these two main models: Communities of Practice (CoPs), which is a field of particular interest to me, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs,) which has recently been implemented in the Omani educational field, as mentioned earlier in Chapter Two (Contextual Background).

This chapter, therefore, reviews and critically discusses the available body of literature relevant to these two models of professional communities. The chapter is divided into four main parts, after this introduction. The first part (3.2) focuses on the CoPs model: it first reviews its history then, defines the concept and reviews its different activities, forms, and processes. It then investigates CoPs in-depth, in order to understand its three main features: domain, community and practice. This part later discusses CoPs' levels of participation, characteristics and development stages before highlighting the main benefits and challenges faced by Communities of Practice.

The next part of the chapter (3.3) moves to focus on the ‘Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs) model; its definitions, PLCs’ characteristics, stages of development and the different kinds of professionals or educators involved. Finally, this section highlights the main benefits and challenges of PLCs based on previous international research and studies. Then part 3.4 of the chapter provides a theoretical comparison between the Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) models. Finally, part 3.5 reviews a number of local research studies on both the CoPs and PLCs models. The chapter concludes with a summary reviewing the main issues discussed across its parts.

3.2 Communities of Practice (CoPs) Model

This part of the chapter focuses on the CoPs model, starting by reviewing its history, then moving to discuss a number of definitions by different authors, and shedding light on its three components: domain, community and practice. To conclude, this part will also discuss the CoPs’ levels of participation and characteristics and will finally review the main benefits and challenges of this model.

3.2.1 CoPs’ history and definitions

Wenger et al. (2002) claim that the CoPs’ phenomenon has a substantial history, they state:

“Communities of practice are not a new idea. They were our first knowledge-based social structures, back when we lived in caves and gathered around the fire to discuss strategies for cornering prey, the shape of arrowheads, or which roots were edible” (Wenger et al., 2002:5).

Lave and Wenger (1991:5) also emphasise that communities of practice have existed as long as human beings have shared and learnt from their experiences (initially through storytelling); we all belong to a number of such communities either at school, home, hobbies or work and that might be noticeable to us or remain invisible. The idea is that most of us are familiar with the experience of belonging to a ‘community of practice’; therefore, CoPs have existed and still exist everywhere in every aspect of human and work life.

“Communities of practice have continued to proliferate to this day in every aspect of human life. Every organization and industry has its own history of practice-based communities, whether formally recognized or not.” (Wenger et al., 2002:5).

As noted earlier (in section 1.2), the term ‘communities of practice’ was introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their work on situated learning. At the time, they were running a research project on social learning at the institute for research on learning in the United States of America. Lave and Wenger were studying on an apprenticeship as a means to share knowledge. During this study, they observed learning not just as a one-to-one relationship with a leader or expert, but as a relationship with a whole community, including different levels of learners. Furthermore, they observed a group of machine technicians gathering around machines’ sellers, spontaneously sharing their ‘tricks’ and telling one another stories about their repairing experiences. thereby sharing ideas, discussions and skills, otherwise understood by Lave and Wenger as active learning. They observed that these technicians used to contact their colleagues in order to find information and suggestions for their jobs, even before checking official learning materials or handbooks. One of the main assumptions drawn by Lave and Wenger is that learning is a social fact, motivated by involvement and participation in a practice.

In their study, Lave and Wenger (1991) explored these experiences, focusing on the relationship between the process of learning and the social situation in which it occurs, as demonstrated with the co-participation practices of the group of technicians previously outlined. Lave and Wenger labelled this process “legitimate peripheral participation” (1991); this term was developed through analysis of studies of apprenticeships within differing social and cultural contexts (midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers and recovering alcoholics). However, the authors claim that through these communities the learning process can be generalised and applied to other social groups, such as schools, as social institutions and places of direct learning for students and teachers.

As the years passed, the concept of CoPs was further developed by Wenger (1998); it was later described by Hughes et al. (2007:1) as “one of the most influential concepts to have emerged within the social sciences during recent years.” The notion of CoPs has thus found its way into our professional and everyday language (Wenger, 2010; Igor et al., 2016).

The concept itself was first defined by Lave and Wenger (1991: 98) as:

“an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their community. Thus, they are united in both action and in the meaning that action has, both for themselves and for the larger collective.”

Brown and Duguid (1991) built on the practice-based theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). They argue that CoPs emerge among people who have a mutual engagement in a joint practice around which they share a common repertoire of knowledge. CoPs are where problem identification, learning and knowledge creation can take place. This definition focuses on the practical element of CoPs, defining the dynamics of ‘communities of practice’ as learning, knowledge creation and problem identification.

According to Wenger (1998), the CoP is bound by three dimensions as a unit: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement is the social interaction and rules that are built by CoP members that lead to the creation of shared meanings and principles on issues or a problem. It binds members of the CoP together as one solid unit and strengthens the relationships between them. 'Joint enterprise' represents the process in which people are engaged and working together toward a common goal. Finally, 'shared repertoire' refers to the common resources that members use to negotiate meaning and facilitate shared understanding and learning within the group community, such as their practices, feelings, objects, artifacts, stories and vocabulary. These three dimensions attempt to outline the process of individuals' interactions within CoP groups; however, it is unclear what distinguishes them from other non-CoP group structures. For example, members of a multidisciplinary care team work together to improve the health of their patients (joint enterprise), communicate with each other about patient care (mutual engagement), and develop ways and resources to adapt practice guidelines within their work (shared repertoires). In this case, it would not be unreasonable to argue that a multidisciplinary team that operates on these three dimensions is a CoPs. However, it is less clear if the team is still a CoP if its internal communications are less frequent; if team members rarely socialise with one another; and if half of the members do not use the available resources to improve their own individual and collective practices. A further feature that may not

make them a CoP is the fact that they are part of the group only because they are obligated to as a paid member of staff. They are not volunteering to join a community in the same way that members of CoPs are.

Wenger (1998) developed the concept further as he formed the basis of the social theory of learning which views learning as social participation (will be discussed in 3.1.1). Therefore, to comprehend the notion of CoPs more deeply, we need to first understand the social learning theory (SLT), which was attributed to Professor Albert Bandura in the late 1970s. Bandura (1977) stressed the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. He believed that “most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (1977: 22). Bandura’s work built on ideas originating from Vygotsky’s (1978) theory that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. In the case of situated learning, learning usually depends on the activities, context and culture in which it occurs; it is the authenticity of the context in which the learning occurs that helps knowledge creation and allows each individual to apply it in new ways and situations. Lave and Wenger (1991) also define the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation with the concept of situated learning. They claim that apprenticeship is a metaphor that demonstrates how an individual, through experience, interaction and eventual participation in the activities set in the community’s agenda, starting from a peripheral position, but legitimised by the other members, develops knowledge and at the same time modifies the community he is in (see also Corsoa and Giacobbea, 2013).

Furthermore, Wenger et al. (2002: 4) define the ‘communities of practice’ as:

“groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their understanding, knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”.

Finally, according to Lindkvist (2005: 1191), CoPs can be understood as “tightly knit groups that have been practicing long enough to develop into a cohesive community with relationships of mutuality and shared understandings”. One lacuna of this definition is the emphasis on practice

as the source of ‘cohesiveness’ and ‘mutuality’, without any clarity as to what is meant by this, - except for an abstract feeling. Here, it is important to question: how does a group of individuals feel this kind of cohesiveness in the first place?

From these collated definitions, it is possible to argue that a CoP should include members who join communities for several specific reasons: for example, professional development, education and learning, hobbies and interests. Within these communities, people share their own experiences, skills and knowledge, in turn improving their own abilities, personally developing and improving their learning, hence supporting their own organisations.

3.2.2 CoPs’ components

As discussed earlier, initially Wenger (1998) noted the three dimensions of CoPs: mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise. He, therefore, defines CoPs as a group of people who communicate with each other (mutual engagement) and develop ways and resources (shared repertoire) for reaching a common goal (joint enterprise). However, Wenger et al. (2002) later reviewed and developed these three elements, naming them: ‘domain’, ‘community’, and ‘practice’, as illustrated below in Figure 3. 1 below. This section discusses these three components of CoPs as modified in Wenger et al.’s (2002: 3) later publication, and the relationship between them.



Figure 3.1: The three components of CoPs adapted from Wenger et al. (2002:3)

- *Domain*

The domain is the area of knowledge that brings the community together and outlines the set of issues that members need to address. It guides the questions, motivates members to present, express and introduce their ideas, and contribute to discussions; it also facilitates the learning process among community members (Wenger et al., 2002). Furthermore, Li et al. (2009:6) claim that the domain creates what they call, “the common ground”; this is the minimal competence that differentiates members from non-members. The domain also plans for limitations, which help members to decide what “is worth sharing and how to present their ideas” (Li et al., 2009:6).

Finally, Wenger (2004) further claims that the domain also defines a sense of common identity; as identity would be defined within a team, rather than defined by a task. The domain also defined the area of knowledge that needs to be explored and developed within the CoPs.

- *Community*

The community refers to the social structures that encourage learning through interaction and relationships among members; it is where members help one another and expand their knowledge of a specific practice or interest (Agrifoglio, 2015). Wenger et al. (2002) states that the community is a crucial element for an effective knowledge structure, the sharing and practising of knowledge; it encompasses a group of people who interact and build interpersonal relationships on issues that are important to their domain. They believe that regular social relationships facilitate discussion and debate between community members, they help to foster their ideas and develop a sense of belonging and commitment. Consolidating this, Wenger (2000) claims that communities are basic building blocks of any social learning system, describing them as “social containers” of the competencies that make up CoPs. He contends that the CoP grows out of a converging interaction of competence and experience involving mutual engagement. Therefore, when building a CoP, knowing and learning how to participate and communicate within these communities is extremely important.

- *Practice*

Practice is the final vital element for creating, building, and developing a CoP, and can be understood simply as ‘what people do’ (Whittington, 1996). Wenger et al. (2002) define practice as a set of shared repertoires of resources that include experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing consistent problems. It is the specific knowledge and skills that are owned, developed and shared by members, as practitioners within a CoP (see also Agrifoglio, 2015).

Furthermore, Brown and Duguid (1991) demonstrate the link between practice and learning within a ‘situated’ organisational context. They label it as “practice-based standpoint”, claiming that practice refers to “learning-in-working,” which “best represents the fluid evolution of learning through practice” (Brown and Duguid, 1991: 41).

3.2.3 CoPs - Levels of Participation

As mentioned earlier, with regard to the involvement and then participation of new members in CoPs or within a social learning system, Wenger (1998) put forward the idea of ‘peripherality’ for participation and non-participation within a community, which refers to either marginal or not total participation. Theoretically, the new member is a clear case of ‘peripherality’ (as a novice) moving towards full participation (as an expert) within their CoP in which they will become professionals in their field of expertise. Lave and Wenger (1991) later expanded the notion of ‘apprenticeship’ from the concept of ‘situated learning’ (1988); however, the meaning of apprenticeship was still unclear. For this reason, they ultimately shifted the concept of ‘situated learning’ to ‘legitimate peripheral participation’.

For further clarification of these concepts, Lave and Wenger (1991) claim that ‘situated learning’ involves placing thoughts and actions in a specific place, so as to create meaning through the involvement of other learners, the environment and activities. All these aspects will help to identify the thinking and doing processes of experts in tackling knowledge and skills tasks. They explain that ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (LPP) is concerned with the participation of new learners/ members into a community of practitioners, where they evolve from novices to masters in specific knowledge and skills via sociocultural practices within their community (or CoP). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), in LPP, the new member initially participates in practices within the community (the CoP) and accomplishes certain tasks which are ‘peripheral’; in this stage, the new member is still regarded as an ‘apprentice’ and at the next stage the apprentice will gradually work his or her way up into becoming an expert. The newcomers gradually gain recognition and ‘legitimacy’ for their participations, and they are encouraged to work collaboratively with others in order to gain a better learning experience. Lave and Wenger (1991) further explain that:

“The effectiveness of the circulation of information among peers suggests to the contrary, that engaging in practice, rather than being its object, may well be a condition for the effectiveness of learning” (p.93).

Concluding the previous discussion, I would say that the learning process in a CoP requires sharing our ideas with our colleagues (or the other members of the CoP) and therefore, we need focus on our most effective and needed practice in our professional field.

Later, Wenger (2000) further developed and elaborated that there are usually multiple levels of participation within the ‘communities of practice’ and that involvement can produce learning in multiple ways, as the domain has different levels of relevance to different people. Indeed, the boundaries of CoPs are more flexible than those of organisational units or teams. He developed a framework of typical categories of membership and participation as adapted in the following Figure (3.2).

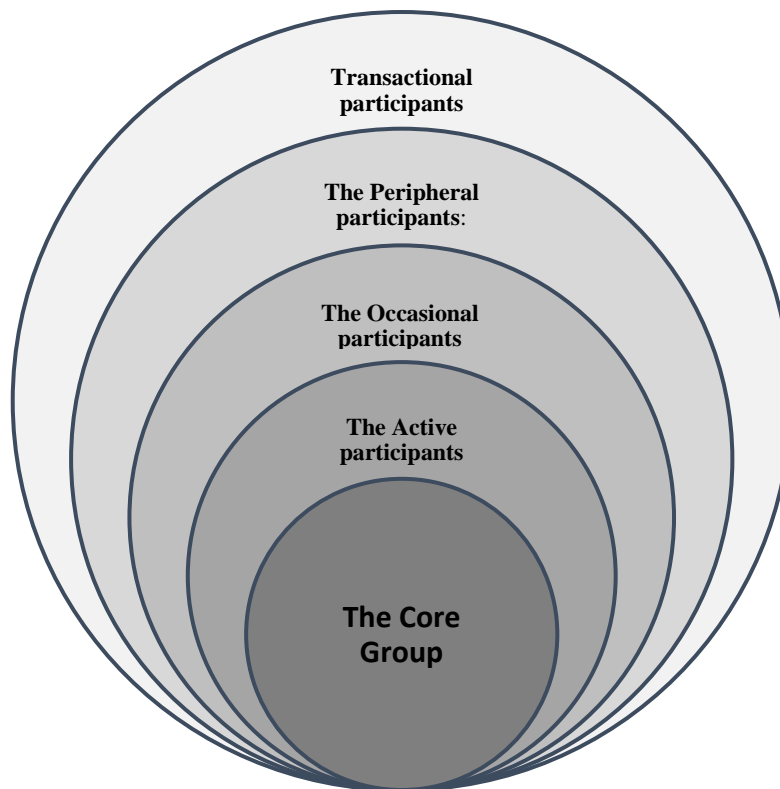


Figure 3.2: Levels of participations in CoPs as adapted from Wenger (2000: 1)

According to Wenger (2000: 1), participation in CoPs include five different groups of participants. Firstly, the **Core group**, which is a quite small group of people, who are often the founders of the CoP. They establish ideas, enhance practice standards within the CoP and are highly respected by the others as their passion and engagement energise the rest of the

community. Next are the **active participants**, who are recognised as 'practitioners' and define the identity of the community. Then, the **occasional participants**, members who only participate when the topic is of special interest, when they have something to contribute or when they are involved in a project related to the domain of the community. The **Peripheral participants** have sustained connections to the community. However, they exhibit less engagement and authority either because they are still newcomers, or do not have as much personal commitment to the practice or group. Finally, the **transactional participants** are outsiders who interact infrequently with the community. They are not members of the CoP; however, they interact to receive or provide support or a service, or to gain access to the artifacts produced by the CoP, such as its tools, publications or its website.

Moreover, regarding participation in CoPs, Corsoa and Giacobbea (2013) suggested that the effectiveness of CoPs, especially in terms of integrating and sharing knowledge, depends on the level of participation and involvement of the members in the community besides the commitment given by the organisation to the community. Gonçalves (2019) also recommends that the leaders need to provide CoPs members with the resources needed to collaborate effectively, as well as ensuring that; the members demonstrate a high level of participation and involvement in the community activities by two means. Firstly, the leader should promote individual involvement, as this will encourage the members and make them feel committed to the community. They will realise that they are a part of this CoP, and they can contribute to their personal or career development. Secondly, the leaders should enhance social relations; as **CoPs** are based on the idea that 'learning takes place in a social context'; it is very important to promote relationships between its members by providing them with opportunities to socialise and build friendships.

3.2.4 Characteristics of CoPs

According to Wenger et al. (2002), communities of practice are spontaneous, organic, and informal in nature and not part of a formal organisational structure. They arise, emerge and flourish in mostly invisible forms, without any broad awareness of their existence among members of the organisation apart from the members themselves (Wenger et al. 2002). It is

claimed that as communities of practice are considered to be natural formations, they cannot be 'formed' or 'established' by management, but only supported, nurtured and leveraged for strategic advantage (Wenger et al. 2002; Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this sense, Wenger and Snyder (2000) highlight that communities of practice differ from other forms of organization, such as teams, which are created by administrators or managers to complete specific projects. In such teams, these managers choose the team members depending on their ability to benefit the team and achieve its aims and they disband it when the project finishes. On the other hand, communities of practice are informal: membership is self-selected as the members arrange themselves, setting their own schedules and plans and creating their own leadership.

Furthermore, Wenger et al. (2002: 42) compare CoPs with other organisational and functional teams and groups in terms of purpose, belonging, boundaries and duration. They claim that it is the passion, commitment and identity within the group that binds CoP members together, because they have independently decided to join the group, rather than being forced or obliged to as with other common groups within society. Here, Sharratt and Usoro (2003) also emphasise that CoPs are not like the other teams and organisational groups or units; they are self-organized and often non-hierarchical, as it is their members who determine the methods of interaction, rules, issues and duration. All of these are determined by members based on intrinsic values or principles inherent to membership (Metallo, 2007).

In addition, communities of practice are not controlled by time or space; therefore, members do not have to meet every day (Wenger et al., 2002). However, at the same time, this does not mean that members only meet or interact occasionally. Wenger et al. (2002) emphasise that, in order to build a strong, cohesive and collaborative CoP, interactions between members must be regular and consistent. They contend that, if members only meet occasionally to discuss a particular topic, this will not contribute to building a strong community of practice. Accordingly, in order to build a community, interactions between members must be regular, to enable them to develop a shared understanding of their domain and build an approach to their practice (Wenger et al., 2002).

3.2.5 Development Stages of CoPs

Communities of practice often emerge from a need: Webber (2016) explains that when people feel the need for support, they often try to find other people who have the same concerns (or challenges) and who they can connect with to get the support they need. Therefore, when that need is met or the challenges have been overcome, usually CoPs become weaker or even end. Like living things, communities of practice usually pass through a number of natural stages of development during their lifetime, in which they have different needs and energy levels, and each stage requires members to interact or contribute to the community (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, et al, 2002; Wenger, 2006; Webber, 2016; Maxwell, 2019). They go through a natural cycle of birth, growth and death; they start as a mere potential, then develop gradually into their mature state, and then continue to grow until they become irrelevant. Many CoPs go through such fundamental transformations; some end because the community members feel the group has achieved its objectives or is no longer providing value. Some continue and they have reasons to stay together.

These stages of CoPs are potential, coalescing, active, dispersed and memorable as illustrated below in Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.3 Stages of a CoP's life adapted from Etienne Wenger, June 2006, <http://wengertrayner.com/theory/>

To expand on these terms, the **potential stage** is when a new community is formed and the members are still under the process of understanding the community. Then the community enters the **coalescing stage** when the members understand its value and its significance to them and recognise the potential of collaboration. The **active stage** starts when members participate actively in the various discussions within the community. Then after being active for a long time, if not observed, evaluated and monitored appropriately, at this point and time, the community moves from the active stage into the **dispersed stage**, when lively and energetic discussions no

longer happen, but the community members still contribute to the community and try to gain knowledge from it. Finally, after the dispersed stage, usually it does not take long for the community to enter the **memorable stage** where members stop participating and only the memories of the community remain (see Wenger, 2006).

Finally, as this current study is concerned with teacher-educators, the following Figure (3.5) illustrates the suggested CoP's lifespan for educators, as adapted from Nussbaum-Beach and Hall (2012:1).

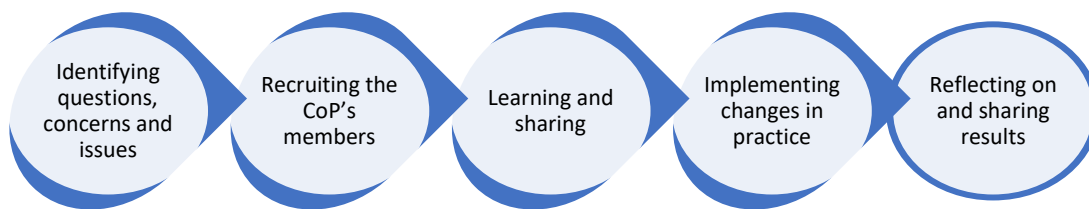


Figure 3.4 A community of practice for educators adapted from Nussbaum-Beach and Hall (2012) in *The Connected Educator, Learning and Teaching in A Digital Age* (2012: 1)

The community of practice for educators typically has a finite life span and moves through a series of predictable and overlapping phases; within each phase, different activities help participants build knowledge, achieve goals and move into the next phase. A variety of activities can be used by communities to develop their practice: problem-solving, requests for information, field visits, seeking knowledge and experiences and encouraging discussions.

To conclude, when developing and maintaining a community, it is important to identify in which stage the community is currently in. The next section discusses both the benefits and the challenges of communities of practice as discussed in the literature.

3.2.6 The Benefits and Challenges of the CoPs Model

- *The Benefits of the CoPs*

By their nature and purpose, CoPs have many potential attractive features, both for the individuals involved and for the organisations in which they exist. Organisational literature has

attributed considerable importance to the notion of CoPs, since it proposes an alternative view to organizational learning (Wenger, 1998).

According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice provide five critical functions. Firstly, they educate members and individuals by collecting and sharing information related to issues of practice. Secondly, they support members by providing interactions and collaboration amongst them. Thirdly, they cultivate knowledge acquisition by assisting groups and sustaining their learning. Fourthly, they encourage members by promoting their work through discussions and sharing. Finally, they integrate the community by encouraging members to use their new knowledge to make real change in their own work.

I have synthesized the benefits of CoPs presented by a number of authors, (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al, 2002; Cambridge and Suter, 2005; Webber, 2016; ERLC, 2016), and shall discuss them now in more depth.

Firstly, CoPs are considered a valuable approach for knowledge-sharing and building better practice, and as a vital professional learning strategy which can accelerate professional development across an organisation. As Webber (2016) highlights, we learn better when we learn together because we benefit from collaboration and building on top of each other's ideas. CoPs introduce collaborative processes to groups and organisations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information (Cambridge and Suter, 2005). Additionally, they provide a common context for members/individuals to communicate and share existing knowledge, information, personal experiences and stories in a way that builds on their understanding and insight and generates new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changing needs and technologies. In support to this point, in their qualitative study in a large urban high school in the USA, Blankenship and Ruona (2007) sought to gain a better understanding of how CoPs facilitate learning and share members' interpretations with each other with the purpose of improving practice. They found that CoPs have the potential to foster an organisational culture that supports knowledge sharing, influenced by factors such as social relationships, informal channels, community culture, and levels of trust between members.

Communities of practice enable dialogue between members to explore new possibilities, solve their challenging problems and to stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection. People in these groups are also able to learn from the successes and challenges of other members. Hence, they help members to improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices. This often leads to valuable outputs with tangible benefits to community members and organisations. It may be necessary for organisations to promote CoPs with personal training budgets or with solo learning objectives.

Secondly, CoPs create a support network for members. They have the potential to connect people and provide them with the opportunity to interact that they might not find elsewhere. People naturally want to connect with other people to find support. Webber (2016) claims that people who do not feel supported at work can quickly lose motivation and may leave their job, but even if they stay, they are likely not to give their best to the organisation. Another potential benefit of CoPs is that they break down organisational silos (Webber, 2016, As Webber (2016) states, it is common for most organisations to have silos, which are formed when a group of people feel a deeper loyalty to each other than to other groups of people. They occur when several departments or groups within an organisation do not want to share information or knowledge with other individuals in the same organisation. These silos might arise as a result of an organisation's structure, or they might develop naturally, and they can happen within organisations, between functions, departments, programmes, teams and other groups or even between different organisations. According to Webber (2016), silos can make communication very difficult, causing duplication of work and frustration for those inside them and they can be damaging to an organisation. CoPs, through their different effective potentials, can help break down such silos and as they aim at team collaboration, sharing of knowledge and experiences and work to support each other, all of which can improve communication across divisions and geographical areas.

The Benefits of CoPs		
	For Members	For Organisations
Short-term Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping to overcome their challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solving problems Saving time

The Benefits of CoPs		
	For Members	For Organisations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building their self- confidence ● Giving them access to expertise. ● Providing them with meaningful work ● Having fun with their colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sharing knowledge ● Collaboration across departments and sections ● Re-use and recycling of resources
Long-term Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal development ● Enhanced reputation ● Professional identity ● Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Innovation ● Strategic capabilities ● Keeping up-to-date ● New strategies ● Retention of talent

Table: 3.1 The benefits of CoPs adapted from Wenger (2002: 3&4)

- *The Challenges of the CoPs*

This section focuses on identifying the key challenges of the communities of practice model that have been observed and noted by different authors. Being aware of these challenges helps anyone interested in building such communities in a better position to support them and to overcome or minimise their limitations. On the other hand, it also helps to maximise and make use of their value as one of the most helpful tools for developing stronger performances of members, and for knowledge and experience-sharing and learning (Gonçalves, 2019).

A number of challenges were also noted and observed from the implementation of communities of practice in a range of different contexts. One of these challenges, as mentioned by Wenger et al. (2002), is that in some cases a coordinator can weaken the success of a CoP. Wenger et al. (2002) further explain that this coordinator's failure can be due to a number of different reasons, such as technical knowledge, time, space (public versus private) and networking skills.

Secondly, as one aspect of CoPs is informality, Luis (2018) claims that it may perhaps be difficult for the leaders to manage such communities through a top-down approach. This is because controlling the processes of these communities can hinder the flow of their knowledge-

sharing, rather than helping them succeed. Wenger et al. (2002) also mention a related concern for communities of practice, which is that they risk becoming ‘cliques’, or in other words, groups of friends who are intimate on a personal level. Wenger et al. (2002) emphasise that these ‘clique’ communities can become dominant and powerful units that may be restricted by the closeness of their relationships, which can in turn cause resistance to collective and individual critique and evaluation of each other, and can sometimes lead to members feeling prevented from seeking knowledge and deepening their understanding. Luis (2018) suggests that the role of leaders needs to be supporting and nurturing the community by providing the resources they require, rather than by micro-managing it.

Another related challenge is the size of the community. Wegner et al. (2002) claim that in some cases the developing community can have hundreds, or even thousands, of individuals coming together. In such cases, it is harder for close relationships between individual members to form, or for every member to become well-acquainted with one another and the size of membership can become a negative factor affecting the CoP. For example, in one CoP it was observed that some participants may have been influenced by peers or employers requesting them to attend, which in turn could have caused problems with the delivery. This means that if these tutors or mentors are forced into participating in the communities, their commitment may be questionable, and they may not share the vision of the programme (Whalley et al., 2008). Besides, if these members are forced to participate, they may not share their experiences or they may have no experiences at all to share, therefore lowering the quality of delivery. Furthermore, mentors or participants forced to attend by an employer can promote negative feelings regarding this experience (Whalley et al., 2008).

Thus, engaging members of CoPs is another challenge. This means, as mentioned earlier, that ‘active participation’ and ‘interaction’ are crucial features for the success of CoPs. Luis (2018) suggests a number of points to overcome this challenge: for example, making sure that the community addresses the members’ needs and interests, and that the influence of ‘social media’ supports their collaboration. He stresses that social media can provide the community’s members with flexible opportunities to pose and ask questions, share ideas, and express their opinions without feeling pressured to create a formal letter or email to the rest of the community. He

claims that social media provides a competent, safe and engaging online platform for communication, socialisation, and knowledge-sharing. Furthermore, there is the possibility of appointing a community leader: one who will help to keep the community engaged by finding answers, solutions and resources for their questions, concerns, and anything else needed, and who can take the lead on the activities and initiatives of the community (see Luis, 2018). Additionally, as cited in Whalley et al. (2008), Williams (2006) found that if the mentors of the CoPs are not successful in bringing learning to the forefront in group work, for example, or in relating it to theoretical practices of people's experiences, then the quality of its existence may be in doubt.

Finally, Gonçalves (2019) highlights the challenge of fostering communities of practice within an organisation or group and ensuring that CoPs do not get distracted by the organisational hierarchy and that the relationships between the members of CoPs needs to be horizontal not vertical, as is the case in some organisational charts. He further explains that some organisations mainly follow a top-down approach, leading to issues such as exercising control and authority when communicating with members, as well as the relationship between individuals within CoPs could have a similar or equivalent functionality. In this case, Gonçalves (2019) suggests that it is important to protect the natural and organic structure of CoPs; otherwise, members receive fewer opportunities to engage in valuable knowledge-sharing activities.

Kennedy (2005), however, notes that learning within such a community could be either a positive and proactive or a passive experience, depending on the role played by the individual as a member of the wider team, because the collective wisdom of dominant group members can shape others' understanding of the community and its roles. He argued that while CoPs can potentially serve to perpetuate dominant discourses in an uncritical manner, they can also act as powerful sites of transformation, where the sum total of individual experience and knowledge is enhanced significantly through collective endeavor.

Finally, it should be noted that the concept of CoPs was originally developed as a learning theory to promote self-empowerment and professional development; however, later, as the theory evolved, it became somewhat more of a management tool to improve an organisation's

competitiveness. The tension between satisfying individual needs for personal growth, versus the organisation's bottom line, is perhaps one of the most contentious issues that makes the CoP theory challenging to apply.

To conclude, I do not believe that we can avoid all of the challenges that may arise in a group of professionals coming together to learn and work. As Gonçalves (2019) recommends, the focus should not be on how we can avoid any challenges, but how we identify and learn about them, and then develop positive and useful ways of dealing with these challenges.

Having discussed the benefits, the challenges of and a number of issues related to the Communities of Practice (CoPs) model in Part One of this Chapter, Part Two below will shed some light on the second model of the professional communities, which is Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

3.3 Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Model

The second model of professional communities being investigated in this research is Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As I mentioned previously in Chapters 1 and 2, in the academic year of 2014/2015, the Professional Learning Communities concept was introduced theoretically in the Omani Educational Context through a training Course by the Specialized Center for Professional Training of Teachers. The concept was put into practice and implemented within Omani schools in 2016. I shall start by retrieving the history of PLCs based on a number of authors before reviewing a number of definitions of PLCs and identifying their characteristics; finally, there will be sections that also discuss their benefits and challenges.

3.3.1 The PLCs' model history and definitions

Historically, the term Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) first emerged among researchers as early as the 1960s when the concept was offered as an alternative to the isolation endemic to the teaching profession in the United States. The concept itself seems to have

emerged from a variety of sources. Bolam et al (2005) claim that the actual term of ‘professional learning communities’ appears to be one that has emerged from those working within the profession and those supporting schools. Therefore, it is connected to notions of enquiry, reflection and self-evaluating schools. The term was applied to schools (or teaching faculties) that use small-group collaboration as a form of professional development.

In this sense, then, the idea of PLCs appears not to be new, as a number of educationalists had previously written about such key features of learning. For example, according to John Dewey, educational practices provide the data and subject matter which form issues of inquiry (Dewey, 1929). Also, Stenhouse (1975) claimed that teachers should be classroom researchers and play an active part in the curriculum development process. Later, Schön (1983) came up with the notion of the ‘reflective practitioner’, which explains how professionals meet the challenges of their work, become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience that is improved through practice.

However, the research on PLCs began to become more explicit only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is when schools’ systems throughout the United States were undergoing a rash of educational reforms as a result of public demands to hold schools accountable for student learning. Schools were searching for the reforms or innovation that would help them improve student achievement. At that time, ‘Professional Learning Communities’ were being discussed as one of the newest educational reforms all over the USA. In developing their framework for the professional community, Louis et al (1995, 4) explained that they used the term to emphasise their belief that:

“unless teachers are provided with more supporting and engaging work environments, they cannot be expected to concentrate on increasing their abilities to reach and teach today’s students more effectively”.

Since then, professional learning communities have slowly gained attention and power as a school reform framework for helping schools meet the needs of their students. And although Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been used in many professional sectors, they have mostly been used in education and schools’ development.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) define a 'Professional Learning Community' as "educators creating an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xii). DuFour (2004: 6), who is considered one of the foremost experts in PLCs field, also defines them as "every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education - a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, and so on."

According to Selena et al. (2007), Professional Learning Communities are designed as a way for schools to reduce isolation and learn together in order to create sustainable change, and their creation has become a popular topic in the past decade as a vehicle for establishing shared relationships and for building capacity for change within a school (Dufour and Eaker, 1998; Fullen, 2004; Hord, 2004; Senge, 2000). It has also been defined as a group of educators who meet regularly, share expertise and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. Finally, Hord (1997) simply and efficiently describes the PLC concept as 'professionals coming together in a group of a community to learn.' In my opinion, most of the above-mentioned definitions could also present the idea of CoPs, which suggests that both models are similar in their core purpose.

As mentioned earlier, the term 'Professional Learning Communities' has been used in many professional sectors and taken a wide variety of forms; indeed, the PLCs themselves have been organised for many different purposes. The term has been used not only in meetings, but also in groups that other educators would not consider to be genuine 'Professional Learning Communities', and therefore DuFour (2004) argues that the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning. Therefore, PLCs do not have one single definition, and it seems that for Dufour and other experts and researchers, the term 'Professional Learning Community' should only be applied to schools in which all teachers and school leaders use specific, recommended strategies. Although PLCs may have varying interpretations in different contexts, there appears to be broad international agreement that they are a group of people sharing and critically questioning their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented and growth-promoting way (Toole and Lewis, 2002), thus operating as a

collective enterprise (King and Newmann, 2001). Therefore, as is the case for CoPs, PLCs tend to develop and improve the skills and knowledge of educators, or any kind of professionals, through collaborative analysis or study, expertise exchange and professional dialogue. However, when PLCs are specifically related to education and schools' development, they aim at improving the educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment of students through stronger leadership and teaching. Therefore, more emphasis and focus is placed on enhancing students' aspirations and achievement.

Despite all of the previous definitions given here, based on their comprehensive literature review of PLCs, Stoll et al. (2006) acknowledge and conclude that “there is no universal definition of a professional learning community” (2006, p. 222), but at the same they suggest five key characteristics that define them: shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, and the promotion of group as well as individual learning. These will be discussed in the next section below.

3.3.2 The PLCs' characteristics

There is broad agreement in the literature that professional learning communities, appear to share five key characteristics (or features) as illustrated below in Figure 3.6. These will be discussed one by one as listed in bold headings underneath:

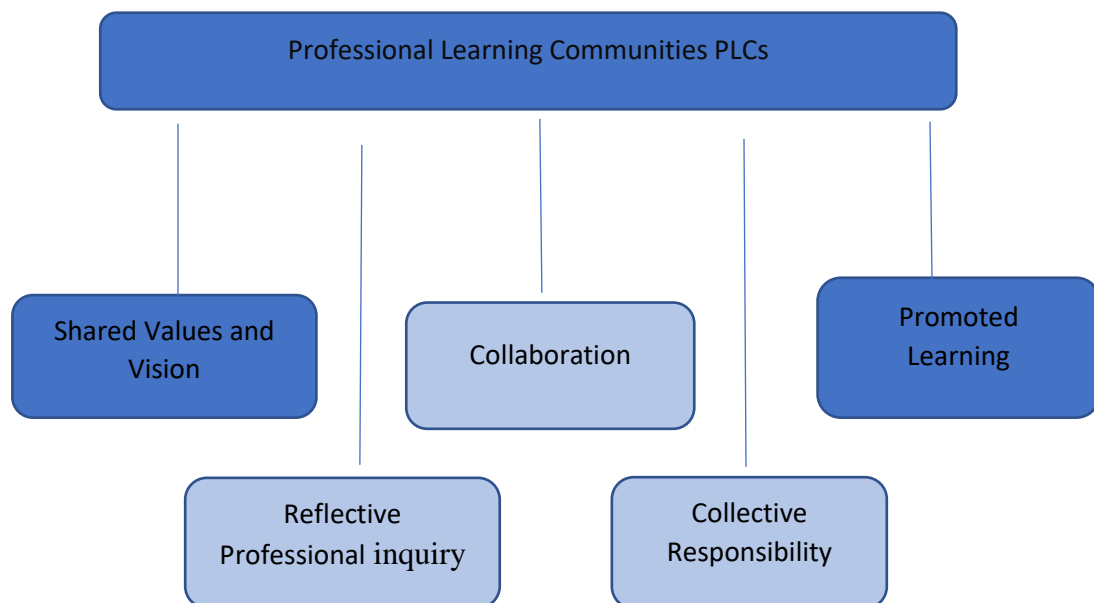


Figure 3.5 The characteristics of PLCs

- **Shared values and vision.** This feature is found to be centrally important to PLCs (Andrews and Lewis, 2004). Hord (2004) claims that there is an undeviating focus on all students' learning and that 'individual autonomy' is seen as potentially reducing teacher efficacy when teachers cannot count on colleagues to reinforce objectives. Therefore, Louis et al (1995) recommend that shared values and vision provide a framework for "shared, collective, ethical decision-making".
- **Collective responsibility.** This feature means that members of a professional learning community consistently take collective responsibility for their students' learning (King and Newmann, 2001; Leithwood and Louis, 1998; Kruse et al., 1995). It is expected that such collective responsibility helps to sustain commitment, puts peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share, and also eases isolation (Newmann and Welhage, 1995).
- **Reflective professional inquiry.** Hord (2004) claims that this feature means a frequent examining of teachers' practice through joint planning, mutual observation, post-discussion meetings, case analysis and applying new ideas and information to problem-solving and solutions that address pupils' needs (Hord, 1997). Louis et al. (1995) also state that this feature includes 'reflective dialogue', which is conversations about serious educational issues or problems involving the application of new knowledge in a sustained manner. Miller (2020) discusses the idea of (or what he calls 'productive conflict'; he stresses that these need to be embraced in PLCs and a space created for it in order to innovate, as these kinds of conflicts lead to better ideas and stronger teams.
- However, he further stressed that we need to allow these 'productive conflicts' to happen with clear norms and standards as well as protocols, to ensure that all voices are heard in the PLCs and that it is safe to engage in such conflicts. It is extremely important to make sure that the projected outcomes of the meetings are clear, and the members are generating ideas or making a decision, as this clarity can make space for open conversations. Therefore, I personally agree with Miller (2020) and believe that conflicts, or as Miller calls them 'productive conflicts', can be healthy during discussions, which means exploring different options, solutions and ideas and does not necessarily mean that

we will not agree on what is good for our community. This is where the role of the communities' leaders is vital during either the CoP or PLC meetings or any kind of a community meetings. The leaders need to focus on facilitating conversations between the members in a way that allows them to engage in productive conversations that generate innovations, solve problems, while promoting learning and risk-taking. Miller (2020) describes the leaders' role during meetings as facilitators; he argues that these leaders (or facilitators) need to find a balance between advocating ideas and the team's consensus/integration (or managing the complex process of moving the team forward), which can be achieved by allowing all voices to be heard and ensuring that team members feel safe to speak up or take risks.

- **Collaboration.** According to Louis et al. (1995), this feature goes beyond superficial exchanges of support or assistance and includes the involvement of staff in developmental activities, such as joint review and feedback. Stoll et al. (2006) claim that feelings of interdependence are central to such collaboration and that a goal of better teaching practices would be considered unachievable without collaboration, linking collaborative activity and achievement of shared purpose. Stoll et al. (2006) further claim that this collaboration, however, does not deny the existence of micropolitics, but that conflicts are managed more effectively in some professional learning communities. Hargreaves (2003, p.163) notes that professional learning communities demand that teachers develop grown-up norms in a grown-up profession – where difference, debate and disagreement are viewed as the foundation stones of improvement. Regarding collaboration, and discussing it from our religious perception and considering the fact that all the participants of this research are Muslims working in an Islamic environment, it is important to recognise that the principle of collaboration or cooperation is vital and fundamental in Islam and should not be an alien principle to any of these groups of people. In the holy Qur'an, Allah the Almighty says (interpretation of the meaning): People cannot live unless they cooperate with one another, help one another in virtue, righteousness and piety (Al-Maidah 5:2). This clarifies that collaboration, cooperation and mutual support among Muslims is something essential that Allah has instructed and made the basis for religious and worldly well-being (Al-Bulshi, 2017). Additionally,

many verses in the holy Quran and the hadith of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) state that Islamic Unity or solidarity among Muslims—, whether individuals, societies, governments and peoples, should help one another, as well as support and advise each other. For example, there is hadith by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which confirms that: the relationship between believers (or Muslims) should be like one body or a structure, parts of which support other parts (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). This saying clearly confirms and indicates that mutual support, compassion and care among Muslims, and cooperation in doing good are obligatory (Al-Bulshi, 2017).

- **Group as well as individual learning is promoted.** This means as Louis et al. (1995) claim that all teachers are learners with their colleagues (i.e. learning from each other) and the term collective learning happens when the community interacts, engages in serious dialogue and reflects about information and data, interpreting it communally and distributing it among them. As Rosenholtz (1989) explains, that type of learning enriched schools.

With regard to who is included as ‘professional’ within the professional learning community, Stoll et al. (2005) distinguish between four groups as presented in Figure 3.7 below:

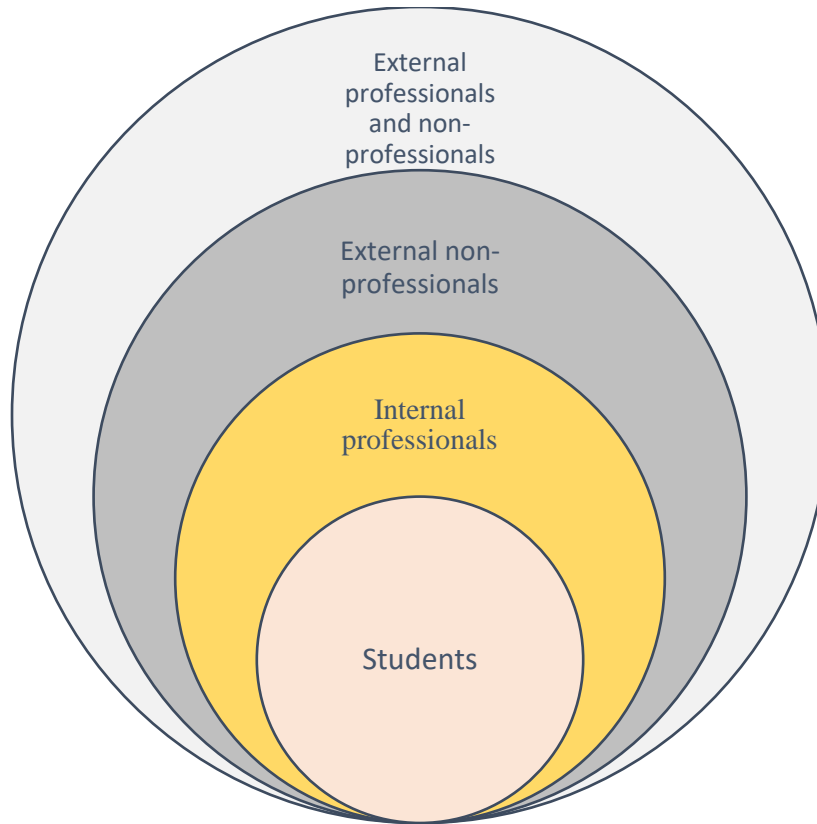


Figure 3.6 Groups of people involved in PLCs (adapted from Stoll et al., 2005: 17)

These groups are as internal professionals (teachers and other staff in the school including school leaders and those in administration), internal non-professionals (parents and governors (non-employee members of the school organization), external professionals (consultants), and external non-professionals (wider community representatives, in business and industry etc.) Stoll et al. (2005) claim that students (or pupils) might be considered as part of the internal non-professional group, but can also be seen as a unique group “in the centre”. The starting point, of course, are the internal professionals (shaded in Figure 3.7) who form the main group of creating and sustaining the professional learning communities.

Having reviewed a number of definitions, the characteristics and membership of the PLC model, the next two sections will shed light on its stages of development.

3.3.3 The PLCs' stages of development

As with CoPs, PLCs change over time in various ways and in particular aspects that may or may not be planned (Bolam et al., (2005). Eaker et al. (2002) view the development of a professional learning community as having four stages of a continuum: *pre-initiation, initiation, developing and sustaining*. Hipp (2005) built on this and created the Professional Learning Community Development Rubric (PLCDR), which describes different dimensions of a professional community according to the four phases. Three of these phases are adopted from Fullan's theory about change and innovation (Fullan, 2001). These phases are *initiation, implementation and institutionalization* and the first phase of pre-initiation was added. This rubric works as a framework whereby the administration or the PLCs staff informally assess their school as a professional learning community and to determine which phase they are in.

However, Bolam et al., (2005), hypothesised that a school might be in one of three stages as a professional learning community: starter, developer and mature (as presented in Figure 3.8 below). They claim there are exceptions to the one-dimensional model, which means that the features of a school as a professional learning community can all be located in one of the developmental stages mentioned.



Figure 3.7 Three stages of a professional learning community (adapted from Bolam et al., 2005: iv)

For their study, Bolam et al. (2005) initially categorised professional learning communities in terms of their 'stage of development': early starter, developer and mature. Implicit in this categorisation are four assumptions that each stage reflects in terms of increasing PLC effectiveness. Thus, a PLC might vary over time in the extent to which the characteristics of effectiveness were expressed. Therefore, as a PLC made the transition between developmental stages, its effectiveness varied accordingly and the transition between stages might proceed in either direction, including the possibility of a decline from mature to developer as a result, for example, of high staff turnover. Bolam et al. (2005) found a loose positive association between

the stage of development and the expression of the eight characteristics of effective professional learning communities they set. These are shared values and vision; collective responsibility for pupils' learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual and collective professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; mutual trust, respect and support. Bolam et al. (2005) concluded that all types of English school, whether nursery, primary, secondary or special, are likely to exhibit these eight characteristics at varying degrees and that their 'profile' on the eight characteristics changes over time as circumstances change in each school.

Finally, Hipp et al., (2008) argue that the development of a professional learning community seems so complex that to be able to describe discrete stages is unlikely. Some dimensions of a professional learning community are far more difficult to locate in a particular stage than others. Moreover, schools do not always develop; indeed, they can slide back into previous stages. Consequently, an important question is how to understand the development of a professional learning community.

3.3.4 The PLCs' model benefits

The literature based on this model claims that correct implementation of the Professional Learning Communities PLCs could offer many resulting benefits. Firstly, PLCs can promote substantial reform in schools (DuFour et al., 2008; Watson, 2014) by 'going from a culture of isolationism to a culture where teachers are working in teams to discover the most effective ways to enhance student learning' (Jerry Paul, 2017: 31). Besides, PLCs provide an environment for collegial trust and also establish open and honest communications between members about their pedagogy and students' learning (Gray et al., 2015). They provide teachers and educators with opportunities to directly improve their teaching practice and students' learning whilst developing their reflection skills and the use of critical reflection (Linder et al., 2012). Thus, PLCs also enhance educators/teachers' reflection on instructional practices and student outcomes; they allow them to reflect on their teaching and adjust their practice. Through PLCs, teachers/educators can share best practices, brainstorm innovative teaching methods and drive student achievement (Peppers, 2014; Serviss, 2020). This was supported by a number of research

studies. For example, a study that was conducted by Hoban et al. (1997) through a 3-year innovative professional development programme called 'Enhanced Action Learning' that used PLCs. The researchers found that participation in weekly PLCs among high-school science teachers enhanced both the teachers' and students' learning. During PLC meetings and collaborative sessions, teachers collectively focused on the science content and how to address science skills at each grade level. As the establishment of PLCs strengthened collaboration among these teams of high-school science teachers, major changes occurred in their classroom practices that ultimately positively impacted students' learning. Another study was conducted by Deborah and Williams (2013) which aimed to determine if the reading achievement of students in urban schools increased as a result of weekly teacher collaboration in the form of PLCs. This study concluded that student achievement increased over a period of time and that collaboration through PLCs is an important in continuous improvement of teaching and learning practices. Finally, in her study, Peppers (2014) explored eight secondary teachers' perceptions prior to and after the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) in a large suburban high school. She aimed to provide information that focused on students' achievement, retention of teachers and their views of leadership. The results of this narrative ethnographic study revealed that teachers' perceptions and implementation of PLCs do indeed influence the schools' learning environment. Hence, Peppers (2014) concluded that PLC usage in a school allows for continuous learning, exploration of the learning and pedagogy, collaboration, empowerment of the faculty and teacher leaders, in addition to the fostering of effective leadership.

However, a variety of good flexible communication tools or channels is a key requirement, allowing educators to share their opinions and feel that their educational practices matter.; The more minds that come together from different backgrounds, the more likely these educators are, through their PLCs, to add value to the field of education. Therefore, PLCs build stronger relationships between educators or their team-members in general (Peppers, 2014). Because PLCs focus on and are committed to student learning, for example, regular educator's meetings create bonds and build teams of leaders within schools, within regions, and eventually locally and globally. One of the vital requirements here for building a strong team is clear definition of roles, responsibilities, and the relationships of team members, as this enhances the strengths of others, builds trust and makes relationships c more fruitful (Serviss, 2020).

Secondly, PLCs help to develop and build leaders not only within the curriculum team, but also in the school as a whole (Jerry Paul, 2017; Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). Hence, with the use of such distributed leaderships, PLC schools will run more efficiently where collaboration and consultation occur, rather than delivering autocratic decisions to staff (DuFour and Fullan, 2013). They will also allow for the growth of teacher-leaders and build a heightened atmosphere of ownership in the learning process within a school (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Finally, PLCs help teachers/educators to stay up to date with the literature, the latest research, and emerging technology tools for the classroom (Serviss, 2020). A global PLC, for example, can allow educators/teachers to share and learn from each other even on a daily basis. Social media applications such as Twitter and other sites can help educators to collaborate worldwide and create a community of practice that far exceeds their classroom walls. Collaboration within each region and beyond is essential in order for educators to have ongoing and regular opportunities to learn from each other.

3.3.5 The PLCs' model challenges

Although PLCs are seen as having a valuable and positive purpose, some doubts have been raised by some critics that question the validity of some aspects of these groups of communities. In this section, I will go through some of these challenges based on some of the references, such as The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014; Jerry Paul, 2017; Zhang et al., 2017; Qiao et al., 2018; Weber, 2011; Chuan Chua, et al., 2020; Study.com, 2020; Professional Learning Community Definition, 2022).

Firstly, it is difficult to measure or evaluate student learning or performance through research into one single influence (in this case, the benefits of PLCs) as there are many possible factors at play which can influence student learning and performance, including, for example, family support or any other support outside of school. Therefore, the benefits of Professional Learning Communities may be difficult to measure objectively and reliably.

Moreover, teachers and administrators of PLCs may face different possible challenges in their implementation, such as a lack of support from their leaders, insufficient training for their group facilitators, a lack of clear and explicit goals for group work, vague understanding of PLC, poor

implementation of PLC by the school community, or a negative school culture or unsupportive conditions in schools which can contribute to tensions, conflicts, and division in the group (Zhang et al., 2017; Qiao et al., 2018; Chuan Chua, et al., 2020; Study.com, 2020). All these challenges can erode support, motivation, and enthusiasm for the process and can lead to an inadequate investment of time, attention and resources, resulting in unfocused conversations, misspent time and general confusion about the purpose of the groups. These challenges can also produce ineffective facilitation, disorganized meetings, and an erosion of confidence in the process and ultimately undermine the potential benefits of Professional Learning Communities. Examples of studies who highlighted some of these challenges is for example, Jerry Paul' (2017) who investigated the perspectives of ten teachers-participants in a case study carried out at a suburban high school on the impact of their PLC on the school's culture. Her findings suggested that the school's ineffective use of PLCs negatively affected its culture due to a lack of established norms, collaboration, communication and accountability between the PLCs members. The study supports positive social change by providing school leaders and PLC participants at the study site with information to sustain PLCs in a manner that promotes a positive school climate, which could lead to a more efficient, consistent learning environment that benefits students. Another qualitative study was conducted by Wei Chuan Chua et al. (2020) from the Asian Chinese nations. This study attempted to provide an understanding of the PLC practices and the challenges in implementing PLC in a Malaysian Chinese culture-dominated secondary school (Malaysian National-Type Chinese Secondary Schools - NTCSSs). The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with six middle leaders and ordinary teachers from this school-type. This school was chosen as it is actively involved in PLC activities and continually builds a network with others beyond the school area by organising international student camps and international conferences, allowing students from different cultures and nations as well as professionals into the school for knowledge and culture exchange. The findings showed that the practice of PLC encounters various challenges, including excessive workload, teachers' passive attitudes, unsupportive conditions in the school, poor execution of the PLC by the school community, and a vague understanding of PLC. Besides, the study identified two uncovered challenges hindering the development of PLC: misconceptions about PLCs and a lack of supervision from the local authority. Thus, the study provided a number of practical implications for administrators and teachers to adopt an active approach in practising PLCs and for policy-

makers and stakeholders not to issue one single guideline for a new policy to be adopted by all schools, regardless of the schools' cultural backgrounds.

One of the potential benefits of PLCs was that they assist and empower teachers/educators to be knowledgeable in a way that enables them to be more skillful and efficient in their practice, meaning that overly close guidance or 'central prescription' can be avoided. Nevertheless, this claim has been criticized as this could merely be theoretical, because in practice, PLCs are a process through which teachers are instructed to implement teaching practices over which they have no control. The impression that there will be collegial cooperation and involvement confuses the reality, as in fact the most important decisions about educational practice are taken elsewhere and PLCs merely enable teachers to find the most efficient way of implementing these practices (Bottery, 2003; Philpot, 2017).

One of the challenges or criticisms of the PLC model is related to one of Stoll et al.'s (2006) defining features of PLCs: 'shared values and vision'. Some researchers have argued that this feature can also be one of the obstacles to some forms of learning. Shared values and vision can lead to 'group think' through the lack of alternative voices and viewpoints and lead to the acceptance, rather than the questioning, of already dominant ways of conceptualizing practice and problems. This can contribute to the short-term pragmatic problem-solving aspect of PLCs rather than to them fostering deeper learning (see also Philpot, 2017).

Finally, Allen-Bradley (2013) also claims that teachers involved in PLCs are often more interested in collaborating as a positive point or as an end in itself, rather than being interested in identifying specific outcomes for the community beyond collaboration. Thus, the focus of the enquiry needs to be clear, focused and manageable as well as being based on existing evidence of what is important, not just plucked from the air.

Having discussed the benefits and challenges of PLCs, the following section will compare several aspects of the CoPs and the PLCs models.

3.4 Theoretical Comparison between the CoPs and the PLCs models

In this section, I will compare the two professional communities' models, - PLCs and CoPs, based on a number of references, such as Blankenship and Ruona (2007); Konig (2013); and Development Without Limits site DWL (2019). I started my comparison by adapting the work of Blankenship and Ruona (2007) and Konig (2013), please see Appendix (15) for my adaptation of these two references. Then I built upon that and created a comparison based on this adaptation besides the original references of Wenger, 1998; Dufour and Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997 and 2004. As illustrated below in Table 3.2, the comparison will be based on the similarities and the main differences between the two models.

PLCs model		CoPs model
Similarities		
Educators engage in collective enquiry of best practices in teaching and learning through collaborative and supportive school-communities. Members work together to enhance classroom practice, developing teaching/learning skills and benefit the student body as a whole.	Process	A group of professionals come together to develop their practice through activities such as problem-solving, sharing information, discussing developments, documenting projects, and conducting site visits.
-Empowering groups of interested people in facets of learning/teaching. - Implementing improved practices. - Increasing of learning and knowledge. -Sharing mission, vision and values driving the work. -Collaboration is achieved through shared practice. and is key innovation, experimentation.	Culture/ features	- Empowering groups of interested people in similar learning aspects. -They build relationships that allow them to learn from each other to improve their practice. -Developing trust. -Building collaboration. Values innovation and knowledge sharing. Increasing learning.
Start, evolve and end organically.	lifecycle	Start, evolve, and end organically – Continue if topic is of relevance and value, and the desire to learn communally remains.
Differences		
Members are selected by principals/ leaders/ faculty-members.	Membership	An informal voluntary group. Members do not necessarily work together on a daily basis.
Provided by principals or educational leaders.	Leadership	Informal structure: the community is democratic in nature. Leadership

PLCs in general seem to emphasise the role of leaders who are external of the community.		is provided by its communities' members and managers. CoPs downplay that role of the external leader in favor of a more "grassroots" leadership from within the communities.
More focus on the result of teaching and school and students' improvements.	Focus	More focused on improvements of educators' learning and their practice.

Table 3.2: A theoretical comparison between Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Starting with the similarities, I based my comparison on three aspects: process, culture/features and lifelong of the models. Both CoPs and PLCs seek to empower groups of people (educators in our field case) who are interested in learning and/or in teaching. Hence both models support learning and are designed to inform and connect educators or professionals of other careers, especially in the CoP model. In both models, those who are seeking to learn can share their knowledge, experience and divergent viewpoints with their peers and learn new things from each other. Any increase of learning and knowledge needs to be through collaboration, which is the goal of both models. Thus, the main idea is to bring the individual into a group to learn, share experience, build upon their knowledge and innovate in their field of practice. In the following Figure 3.6, I tried to integrate the learning cycle of both models in four shared key words by both: collaborate, share, practice what has been shared and learn. Then the cycle starts again by collaborating, sharing what has been practiced and learning with colleagues.

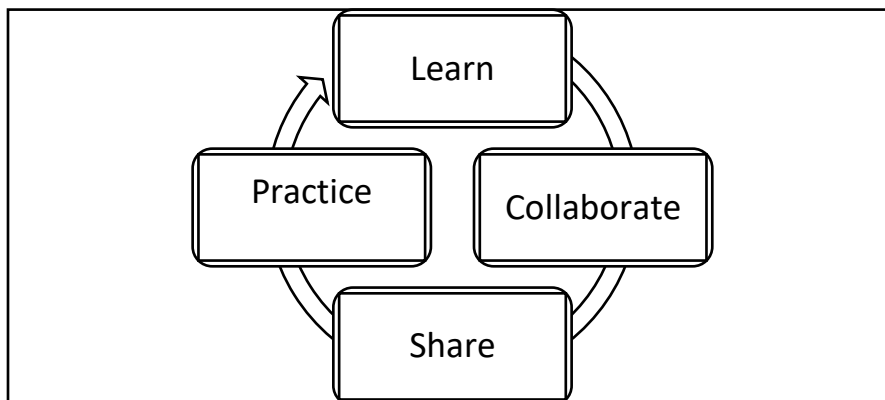


Figure 3.8 The learning cycle elements for both CoPs and PLCs models

In most models of PLCs and CoPs, knowledge-sharing is seen as occurring through formal structures such as team meetings, reflective group dialogues, use of protocols or even virtual workspaces. PLCs are arranged to encourage people to collaborate and exchange ideas by meeting at a designated time, and then over time mold the purpose of the group to better assist the teachers included in the process. These meetings take place as events and occurrences for assisting classroom teachers and developing strategies to improve individual student performance.

CoPs could have a much broader outreach. The community can leverage social media and develop over time through contributions and steady input from like-minded individuals (or professionals of similar profession). Also, for both models' knowledge-sharing and creation seem to occur at the individual and maybe the group level; however, it is unclear whether knowledge development actually extends to the organisational level despite the fact that in most models this is clearly the implied or stated hope (Blankenship and Ruona, 2007).

Finally, with regard to their stages of lifetime, that is their start, evolution and ending, both models might exist as long as the topic is relevant, and the desire to learn communally lasts. PLCs and CoPs change over time in different ways and in particular aspects that may or may not be planned as circumstances change. For PLCs, the stages of development are starter, developer and mature (Bolam, et al., 2005) and for the CoPs they are potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship and legacy (Wenger, 1998). Understanding these stages of development provides some useful insights into their changes as it helps us understand that these kinds of communities are also like living things; they go through a natural cycle of birth, growth and death. They start as a mere potential, then they develop progressively into their mature stage, and then continue to evolve until they are no longer relevant (Wenger, 1998). This understanding helps to provide ways of responding to them in each stage and identify what needs modifying to be of real help if they are to be of further use to practitioners. This is because these communities depend on the passion of their members; the death of a community always remains a possibility at any point of its development. However, as Wenger (1998) advises, we need to work on making its will to live an expression of the human spirit and to value whatever legacy it leaves.

The differences between the two models occur mainly in three elements: membership, leadership and focus. Table 3.2 shows that membership in CoPs is mainly voluntary, while in PLCs membership is by virtue of employment status (or explicitly mandated). Motivation for membership, whether based on a strategic need of the organisation, type of work, or a common interest in a work-related issue, can influence the types of conversations that take place within the community (Blankenship and Ruona, 2007:4). Leadership appears to be stronger externally in PLCs than in CoPs. Both Hord (2004) and Dufour and Eaker (1998) place strong emphasis on the role of the principal in establishing supportive conditions for team-learning to take place, as well as their role in developing and implementing a shared vision and values. Hord (2004) and Dufour and Eaker (1998) place more emphasis on the critical roles that leadership and school culture play in the formation of Professional Learning Communities.

The CoPs model, on the other hand, does not place such emphasis on the external leadership of collaborative teams or the communities, yet also needs support (or funding) from external leadership in order for the team or the community to grow and mature (Wenger et. al., 2002). The communities of practice literature also emphasises the importance of the social aspect of learning in the formation of new knowledge and does not place as much emphasis on the role of leaders external to the community or on the culture outside of the community.

Finally, PLCs have a similar approach to CoPs, but are more focused on students' learning and achievements; in this model educators work collaboratively in repetitive cycles of cooperative inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (DuFour, 2006). Thus, more focus is placed on teaching outcomes. In contrast, CoPs focus more on educators' learning and development of their practice.

3.5 Review of research studies on CoPs and PLCs in Oman

In this section, I review a number of local research studies on both CoPs and PLCs models, focusing on those that investigated and explored the following aspects: barriers in implementing PLCs and CoPs, the benefits of both models for their members (professional development) and students' achievements, the roles of leadership in supporting the communities' development,

collaboration and shared practices. These studies are listed in this section chronologically according to the year of conduct as follows.

Starting with CoPs model, there are very limited number of published and unpublished studies on CoPs in Oman: a few briefly noted CoPs, but it was not their primary focus (AL-Hakamani, 2011; Gawande and Al-Senaidi, 2015; AL Balushi, 2017). Firstly, in her study, Al-Hakamani (2011) states that ESOL teachers in Oman are expected to form a ‘community of practice’ in which collaboration is encouraged by regional supervisors and school administrations. As part of such collaborations, teachers are required to accomplish certain tasks to promote their professional growth and development, such as reading and discussing educational articles, analysing students’ work and results, and undertaking team-planning and the teaching of lessons. However, Al-Hakamani notices that teachers often perform these practices mechanically in order to complete the paperwork required as part of such activities, without any clear focus or consciously-sought outcome. In this sense, teachers become passive rather than active actors. As a result, Al-Hakamani indicates that this effort offers a limited contribution to Omani ESOL teachers’ professional learning and development. My study will build upon this study as it will target the educators of these teachers and with their support work together towards producing quality work and enhancing teacher effectiveness.

Another study by Gawande and Al-Senaidi (2015) suggests the various possible approaches to employing the benefits of ‘Situating Learning’ within the higher education sector in Oman, particularly within the contemporary era of advancing technology. The researchers claim that in a developing country such as Oman, the ‘Situating Learning’ paradigm can play a significant role in producing graduates equipped with the necessary relevant skills. Innovations in technologies have now made it possible to bring the ‘Situating Learning’ paradigm to the classroom. Gawande and Al-Senaidi suggest four possible approaches to the implementation of ‘Situating Learning’ within this era of advancing technologies in Oman, such as Project-based Learning (PBL) in which students are engaged with solving real-life problems related to the subject domain.

In her PhD study, Khadija Al Balushi (2017) examines the CPD system within the in-service TESOL context of Oman. The findings reveal that participants take part in a range of activities, mostly offered to them through the Ministry of Education in structured ways – such as INSET courses. However, it was also found that these activities failed to respond to teachers' individual needs. The study finds that the role of teachers in the provision of CPD is significant, in that the way teachers are currently marginalized and understood as grateful recipients of CPD does not provide the conditions for an intelligent and responsive teaching profession. Interestingly, this study adopted the participatory model of CPD from Kennedy (2005), demonstrating that this model has had a positive impact on participant teachers' CPD. As one of the models used is a community of practice, Khadija Al Balushi claims that a CoP has been formed among the research participants as a place in which they can be mutually engaged with one another. The data revealed that the participatory model of CPD has been of great benefit to the participants since they joined a community of practice (the researcher, teachers and SETs from different schools) through which they could discuss issues, share concerns and learn from each other's ideas and contributions. The findings of her study revealed that participating in communities of practice is as important as teaching in contributing to teachers' professional development and learning, as well as to students' learning and improving schools. Finally, besides these MA and PhD studies, I have also come across one recently published research study, which mainly focused on the Communities of Practice model and was conducted in 2018. This research by Abatayo (2018) aimed at exploring how language teachers in Higher Education in Oman develop communities of practice through their involvement in Language Teachers Associations (LTAs). The study targeted 11 postgraduates-expatriate tutors of English from a number of universities and colleges in Oman. The study explored these participants' perceptions of joining language associations as CoPs and their own reflective practices about this experience. As the study focuses on the importance of LTAs, it provided a number of recommendations as to how such associations could provide effective and beneficial professional development to teachers.

Turning to the PLCs model local review, as mentioned earlier, as this model has now been adopted by the Specialised Center in their training courses for teachers and educators since it started in the academic year 2014/2015, so it can be expected that research into this model will consequently increase. One study good to mention is that conducted by Al-Mahdy and Sywelem

(2016), which aimed to identify teachers' perceptions about the extent to which Saudi, Omani, and Egyptian public schools function as PLCs. A quantitative approach was implemented using a questionnaire. In Oman, the survey was answered by 726 teachers (194 males and 532 females randomly chosen by principals from nine different grade levels). The results of the survey indicated that not all characteristics of the PLC existed in the Egyptian schools (only supportive and shared leadership), while all the characteristics of the PLC (shared leadership, shared vision, collective creativity and learning, peer review or shared personal practice, and supportive conditions/capacities) existed to some degree in Omani and Saudi schools. The research concluded that both Saudi and Omani teachers showed positive perceptions regarding the degree to which their schools function as PLCs. The study recommended that educational policymakers in Egypt, Oman and Saudi Arabia "should mentor and guide schools to focus on improving student achievement and enhance teacher professionalism through increasing the professional status of teaching and providing teachers with greater opportunities for professional growth" (Al-Mahdy and Sywelem, 2016: 10).

Recently, Al-Shuaili and Ibraheem, (2020) studied the role of school principals in building Professional Learning Communities in basic education schools in Oman. The study employed a mixed method approach by the means of a questionnaire and interviews to collect data. The study reveals that the role of school principals in promoting PLCs from the teachers' point of view was high-level degree. The study found that the headmasters paved the way for teachers to share their values and vision, conduct collective learning and application of that learning, share personal practice and provide a supportive environment.

Finally, a very recent study by Al-Yahmadi and Al-Shammakhi (2021) examined the implementation of PLCs in Basic and Post-basic schools in Muscat, the capital of Oman. Their findings revealed that PLCs are to some extent available in Muscat schools but their implementation is still weak, although highly supported by the schools' principals and believed to have a great impact on teachers' performance. The researchers found that teachers are facing a number of obstacles that hindered them from applying the PLCs activities in their schools, such as an overloaded teaching timetable and administrative paperwork. This study recommended removing these obstacles to help teachers implement PLCs effectively inside their schools.

3.6 Summary of Chapter 3

The current chapter has reviewed a range of relevant literature in regard to two models of professional communities: CoPs and PLCs. Consequently, the chapter was divided into four main parts, the first of which targeted the 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) model through a range of scholars' works (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002). The chapter started by exploring early history, conceptualisations and different definitions of CoPs as well as discussing the concept in its many variants. Communities of practice are not just a collection of best practices: they are groups of people who interact, learn together, build relationships and develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment. Sharing the overall view of each other's domain and bringing their individual perspectives to any given problem creates a social learning system that goes beyond the sum of its parts (Wenger et al., 2002: 34). It has also been noted that the concept of CoPs was originally developed as a learning theory promoting self-empowerment and professional development. However, as the theory evolved, it became a management tool for improving an organisation's competitiveness (Linda et al., 2009). The tension between satisfying individuals' needs for personal growth versus the organization's bottom line is perhaps the most contentious of the issues that make the CoPs' theory challenging to apply. Furthermore, as the definition broadens, it becomes more difficult to characterise what is and what is not defined as a community of practice. The chapter then identified the components of CoPs, the domain, community and practice, exploring its different activities, characteristics and types. Additionally, on the basis of the CoP literature, this part of the chapter also considered the significance or the benefits of CoPs for organisational knowledge-management strategies before reflecting on the spatiality of knowledge production through communities.

The second main part of the chapter reviewed some literature on the PLCs model. As defined in the literature, PLCs include five key dimensions: shared leadership, shared vision, collective creativity and learning, peer review or shared personal practice, and supportive conditions/capacities (Cowley, 1999; Hord and Sommers, 2008). This part of the literature reviews also shed light on the history of PLCs and reviewed a number of definitions by different authors and then focused on the benefits and the challenges of PLCs. This chapter then also

provided a theoretical comparison between Communities of Practice and Professional Learning Communities on the basis of a review of the literature (in part 3.4) and finally reviewed a number of local research studies on both models (in part 3.5).

Finally, as outlined in the chapter, in the process of undertaking this literature review, I managed to identify a wealth of conceptual studies on communities of practice and professional learning communities, but not many practical or experiential research studies on the actual practice and limited systematic studies that measure their effectiveness especially for the CoPs model. Furthermore, while these two models are gaining international popularity in different fields, and apart from the PLC model recently implemented in the Omani educational field, the CoPs model is still relatively unknown in the Omani educational field, and so there is relatively limited research available from within Oman. I would argue that we are still at the very early stages of adopting these models and exploring their effectiveness, making the current study crucial to the development of professional communities' practices in Oman.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

In this Chapter, I present the underlying philosophy, methodology and research design used to explore the status of the professional communities (both CoPs and PLCs models) amongst teacher trainers, supervisors and senior teachers in Oman. After this introduction, I first discuss the philosophical underpinnings of the study and in 4.3 I present the qualitative research model in order to place the study within its research approach. In 4.4. I provide justification for the data collection methods adopted. The study adopts four data-gathering tools: semi-structured interviews, document-gathering and analysis, non-participant observations and research diary to achieve the objectives and explore the practices and the relationships between these groups (supervisors, trainers and senior teachers) and examine the extent to which these practices and relationships possess the characteristics of PLCs or CoPs models as defined in the literature.

I then explain in 4.5 my access to the 36 teacher-educators who volunteered to become participants in my research. This section also offers a timeline of data collection. In 4.6 I discuss ethical considerations, including the research approval process and validating all the research participants' rights of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity before reflecting on my role as an 'insider' researcher in 4.8. In 4.9, I discuss the piloting stage process including the recruitment of the research participants and piloting the data-gathering tools. Later in 4.10, I discuss the data analysis process; starting with describing the procedure for transcription and translation of the recorded interviews and my experience with the NVivo application and ending by explaining how, through analysis, the themes (and sub-themes) emerged from the data. Finally, in 4.11, I summarise this chapter.

4.2. Philosophical underpinnings of the study: adopting an interpretive paradigm

The basic assumption of any empirical study lies in the philosophical position that supports the type of knowledge required for addressing the research questions, and then the selection of the appropriate methodology and data-collection tools. Guba and Lincoln (2005) state that every researcher owns a paradigm that directs the study; this section, therefore, examines the

theoretical position that guided and laid the foundations for this study, but I will start by explaining two important terms (or phenomena), which are ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’ to understand the nature of research.

‘Ontology’ and ‘epistemology’ are understood as the starting point for research that is concerned with what human beings believe makes up ‘reality’ (Fussy, 2017). Vanson (2014: 1) notes, “epistemology is concerned with the questions “What do you know?” and “How do you know it?”, whilst ontology is concerned with “What is there?” Grix (2002) contends that, although the two concepts are closely related, it is rational to separate them; this is because research tends to begin from one’s own subjective perception of reality, which is also shaped by the experiences that both participants and researchers possess in the research process.

As noted earlier, ontology is concerned with ‘what is’: the nature of existence and the structure of reality (Crotty, 1998), or what it is possible to know about the world (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Epistemology, as Crotty (1998) claims, is a way of perceiving and understanding the world; it involves knowledge and embodies a particular understanding of what that knowledge entails. It is related to a distinct approach to the cognitive process of comprehending, and subsequently explaining how one knows exactly what they know (Grix, 2002); it is related to how knowledge can be formed, gained and communicated (Scotland, 2012). This qualitative research study is concerned with knowledge, perceptions and beliefs of teacher-educators’ knowledge (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers). For example, what they know, understand or perceive the professional communities to be, and what they think about other related issues, such as their workplace relationships and collaborations. It aims to build knowledge from what they know, as they are the primary source of knowledge in the study, and then their beliefs and knowledge require further exploration and also interpretation.

There exists a range of epistemological and ontological positions, presenting distinct understandings of knowledge and the world they operate within. Here, I briefly discuss some of these positions as identified in the methodological literature, in order to outline the one adopted in this study. The first of these the positivism/objectivism position, claims that the world is external and objective, and the observer is independent (Vanson, 2014). Truth is static, and always

objective in regard to the people being studied; it is conceived that this objective truth can be 'discovered' if approached correctly, using methods such as 'careful direct observation' and refusing to make deductions from abstract propositions (Ormston et al., 2014). Secondly, the interpretivism and constructivism position (Bryman, 2008; Crotty, 1998) asserts that the world is socially constructed and engaged with subjectively, and that the researcher, as observer, is inherently part of what is observed (Vanson, 2014). This position contends that the approaches to knowledge of the world around us arise from our own perceptions and interpretations; where people use their perceptions to interpret what their senses alert them to. It means that knowledge of the world is conceived to be based on one's 'understanding', which in turn arises from our reflections on events, rather than solely on lived experiences (Ormston et al., 2014).

The current study adopts this interpretivist paradigm; this is primarily because it stresses a close relationship between the researcher and the social world, both influencing one another. Before starting this study, I was a training specialist then a trainer working at the Main Training Centre within the Ministry of Education. In this respect, sometimes I felt I was investigating a topic in which I was not only the researcher, but could also be one of the participants (see below section 4.8, which explains my role as insider researcher). This means that the researcher cannot separate themselves from the research process; however, they continually construct meanings and interpretations based on their individual, and the participants', experiences and reflections (Al-Saadi, 2014). In this case, knowledge of the world and social phenomena is based on our own understanding, that in turn arises from our own reflections and interpretations of the events, rather than on our senses and careful observations, as in the positivist view. This approach is also relevant to the current study, as it aimed at analysing the Ministry of Education's policies, gathering perspectives from a range of senior-staff members (within the Ministry) regarding current practices. Finding possible ways forward in developing better communities within the educational system in Oman, which also require a close interaction between researcher and these participants during the research process and consequently helping the researcher to better comprehend participants' actions (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006; Thomas, 2009).

This study, therefore, looked at the transformative experiences of the participants based on the belief that knowledge is socially constructed through personal experiences, engagement,

dialogue and interaction (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). This is supported by learning theories that view learning as a product of interaction and meaning-making: something that emerged from the interaction with the social world, rather than something that lies in the head. These include Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) community of practice models. I, therefore, conducted this research through the active participation of the participants and myself as an insider in the whole process (see section 4.8). To conclude, I planned to commit myself to explore (rather than 'discover') the reality, or partial reality of the status of the professional communities in the context of teacher-education in Oman. This was explored through the Ministry of Education's policies, and the perceptions and experiences of participants in their particular social contexts and geographical regions. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and place importance on their varying subjective perceptions, views and experiences.

Having discussed the philosophical underpinnings the study, the next section discusses my research approach.

4.3 Adopting a qualitative research approach

This section presents and discusses the 'qualitative research' approach (which I adopted for this thesis work) in order to place my study within its research approach.

However, before discussing the qualitative research approach, it should be noted that the original plan for the current research, was, in fact, to conduct an action research study. This was due to my own passion to adopt a community of practice, and enthusiasm to experiment through a cycle of an action research. It was planned to invite and involve a number of English supervisors, trainers and senior teachers, to work together in this community. Hence, the enquiry would involve observing and reflecting on the process of an action research that would follow systematic and practical processes, or key steps, that are called 'cycle of action' or 'cycle of inquiry' (McNiff, 2013: 90).

For example, in my own research, the process would begin by these educators reviewing their current practice: where they identify some of their work issues (or a key problem to be addressed). Then they work together to identify some of the possible solutions, develop a plan to address the problem, then try these out. Following this, they meet to evaluate the results of the actions taken, and modify their plan in light of what they have found. Furthermore, they continue with the modified action: implementing the developed plan, evaluating it, and repeating the process for a new query. However, it was very difficult to conduct such action research and follow this process while based in Glasgow. Conducting such research requires the researcher to be present in the fixed place that the research focuses on: to observe, evaluate and follow up with findings as they appear. Therefore, instead I decided to investigate the topic using this qualitative- interpretive research approach, using different methods of obtaining data, such as interviews, document analysis, non-participant observation, and my own research diary notes.

Regarding the quantitative research approach, and although it was dominant in the middle of the 20th century in natural and social sciences, more recently, a high volume of qualitative research has taken place and been widely used in social sciences (Dörnyei, 2007: 24-36). Holloway (1997: 2) defines qualitative research as “a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live”. The author further claims that this kind of inquiry is found in the interpretive approach to understanding the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures; therefore, researchers use it to explore the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the people they study. Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 136) further describe qualitative research as a tool “to analyse and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities and realities and to understand little and big changes that affect our lives.” These definitions of qualitative research reflect the design of this current study. I decided to adopt a qualitative approach as it suits this social inquiry, which investigates the status of the professional communities as a distinctive social phenomenon in the Omani educational context. Engaging trainers, supervisors and senior teachers, the study seeks to explore the perspectives and experiences of these educators, alongside the Ministry of Education (MoE) authorities. It is therefore primarily interested in uncovering the ‘how,’ ‘why’ and ‘what’ of the social phenomenon of ‘communities of practice’ (CoPs), and how social factors interact to produce specific outcomes (Creswell, 2012). Researchers who are interested in ‘how’ questions

and not in 'how many' questions tend to use qualitative research methods because these questions would require deeper understanding of research issues (Silverman, 2000).

Qualitative research involves data-collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended non-numerical data, which is then analysed primarily by non-statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2007). According to Bodgan and Biklen (2007:4-7), qualitative research includes descriptive data, as the data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. They further claim that this approach is concerned with process rather than outcomes or products and that meaning is an essential concern, as the researchers are interested in how different people make sense of their lives. They also claim that this approach is inductive; this means the researcher does not seek out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they have before doing the study. but that any abstractions are built as the facts gathered are grounded together (and thus theory is grounded in the data).

However, Balikie (2007) argues that qualitative research is more than being deductive or inductive, and further states that, even with the inductive approach in which knowledge is developed from evidence, there still exists some element of influence originating from previous research, or the literature embedded within the research process, such as during the formation of the research questions and focus, which is also supported by Ritchie et al. (2013). I believe that my research encompasses a level of deduction, as well as induction. This is because the themes that aimed to be explored during interviews derive from the related literature. Of course, no research begins with a single blank sheet of paper; a range of influences re always present, whether from previous research or during the research process. These influences ensure that researchers possess and can access, contextual and relevant knowledge regarding the investigated area, either from experience, specific contexts or their previous/current education. Thus, the focus and aim of the study is indeed deductive, primarily decided on before the data-collection began. The focus of the research was developed based on my own understanding of the Omani educational context, and the literature review I undertook. This research is also inductive, because the focus will be reshaped by the research process and findings. Snape and Spencer (2003) note:

“Although qualitative research is often seen as an inductive approach, it is not a singularly defining characteristic of qualitative research. Inductive reasoning is used in other forms of enquiry and the processes of sampling and generalisation from qualitative research involve both induction and deduction”. (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 14).

Qualitative research can also be described as a ‘naturalistic inquiry’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). According to Salkind (2010), naturalistic inquiry is an approach which aims to understand the social world wherein the researcher observes, describes and interprets the experiences and actions of specific people and groups in a societal and cultural context. Working in the places where people live and work, naturalistic researchers draw on observations, interviews and other sources of descriptive data, in addition to their own subjective experiences, to create rich, evocative descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena. Other scholars such as Eisner, (2017) termed qualitative research as interpretive inquiry; according to Given (2008), interpretive inquiry focuses on understanding (interpreting) the meanings, purposes and intentions (interpretations) people give to their own actions and interactions with others. These definitions also reflect the design of my research, and we can combine both by claiming that the researcher cannot exclude his own view while trying to understand and comprehend the situation from the participants’ perceptions, and this can be the interpretive nature of the naturalistic research (Frey et al., 1999).

Finally, early qualitative research was criticised as being ‘non-systematic and non-rigorous’ and consisting of ‘lengthy and detailed descriptions’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 as cited in Dörnyei, 2007: 36). However, this may not be the case anymore as researchers in social sciences have used qualitative research in a systematic way, which is the aim of this research. There are a definite set of procedures and steps that I aimed to follow in order to get the most accurate results through the organised research process as we will see throughout this chapter.

Having discussed the qualitative approach, the next section discusses my research data-collection tools. As well-selected methods lead to more accessibility of the truth, the decision on which data- collection methods to implement for this research was crucial.

4.4. Selecting data-gathering tools to address the research questions

I decided to conduct interviews as a primary data collection method, as they are the most used instrument in qualitative research (Alvesson, 2002), and I thought it suits my research best in order to gather in-depth opinions from my participants. Bodgan and Biklen (2007:103) outline that, interviews may be the dominant strategy for data- collection in qualitative research or they may be employed in connection with document analysis, observation or other techniques. Accordingly, in addition to interviews, I decided to incorporate document analysis (as a second method) and non-participants' observation of group meetings and my research diary within this study to help me answer my research questions. Table 4.1. below outlines these two data-collection methods and which research question each method helps to answer.

Main Research Aim	What is the status of the professional communities among English-subject teacher educators (teacher trainers, supervisors and senior teachers) in Oman?	
No	Research Questions (RQs)	Data Collection Methods
1	What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani trainers, supervisors and senior teachers are required to work?	Documentary Analysis. Analysis of the Ministry of Education's formal policies, published and unpublished: guidelines, decrees, memos, reports etc. Semi-structured interviews with senior staff members from the Ministry of Education
2	How do these three groups of teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers) work within and across groups?	Documentary Analysis. Analysis of the Ministry of Education's formal policies: guidelines, decrees, memos, reports etc. Semi-structured interviews with trainers, supervisors, senior teachers and senior-staff members.
3	How do trainers, supervisors and senior teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional communities (such as CoPs and PLCs models) within and across their groups?	Non-participant' observations of groups meetings - Research diary.

Table 4.1 Main research aims, research questions and data-collection methods

Having briefly outlined the data gathering tools for this research, namely semi-structured interviews, documentary-data analysis, non-participant' observations of group meetings and my research diary, I will discuss each of these methods separately in the following sections.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Generally, interviews are used within qualitative research studies when the researcher is interested in collecting facts, gaining insight, understanding opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviours or predictions (Rowley, 2012). Silverman (2000) also indicates that interviews provide both ‘external reality’, which is linked to the facts or events being explored and ‘internal experiences,’ that refer to the participants’ feelings, understanding and meanings. As noted earlier, the primary aim of this study is to explore the status of the professional communities within the Omani educational context, in particular, between Omani teacher educators (teacher trainers, supervisors and senior teachers), and in relation to the role of MoE authorities/stakeholders. I therefore chose to interview my participants, in order to explore their opinions, attitudes, experiences, understanding, and meanings regarding the topic.

I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with my participants. In this kind of interview, the researcher asks the participants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions, which gives the researcher control over the topics discussed in the interview and means that there is no fixed range of responses to each question (Given, 2008). At the same time, while there are a number of prepared questions, the interviewer can ask additional questions which emerge in response to the answers given during the interview; in other words, it promotes and facilitates increased dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. Therefore, this kind of interview is flexible, with the potential to provide detailed data and further explanations if implemented correctly by the researcher. Hence and because of all these features, I trusted that semi-structured interviews match the design of my research, and as such, I decided to choose it as the primary and main data-collection method to help me answer my research questions as outlined earlier in Table 4.1. I thought that, because of their flexibility, they would provide me with the opportunity to generate rich data from the participants, as the language used by participants was considered essential in gaining insight into their perceptions and values (Newton, 2010). Lastly, interviews can be conducted either with one person on an individual basis, or with a group of people as part of a focus group. Within this research, the focus was on individual interviews, in which I aimed to interview one participant at a time.

As I planned, I divided my interviews with participants into two main parts. In the first part, I explored participants' perceptions and views regarding their relationships within each group and governorate and broadly across the other groups of teachers-educators' colleagues within and across other governorates. Table 4.2 below outlines a number of identified proposed themes and areas for exploration that I prepared in advance to explore with trainers, senior teachers and supervisors during this part of the interviews. I drafted these themes and areas based on some of the characteristics of CoPs and PLCs.

Proposed themes and exploration areas for the first part of the semi-structured interviews. To collect data for research question 2: How do these three groups of educators (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers) work within and across groups?		
No	Proposed themes	Proposed areas for exploration
1	Identifying gaps and problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever had an experience of planning knowledge or identifying gaps or needs together (trainers, supervisors and senior-teachers) as English-subject teacher educators? Can you give me an example? • How do you cooperate as teachers-educators to solve such problems (or teachers' needs or problems)?
2	Coordination, collaboration and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of information do you (as trainers, supervisors or senior teachers) request from each other? Why? • Have you faced problems requesting such information? How? • What kind of coordination, collaboration or interaction occurs between you and the other groups? In what way? • What kind of resources do you request from your supervisor, SETs or trainers? Have you ever shared resources?
3	Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you do regarding your own continued professional development (CPD)? With whom you discuss this? • What about the teachers' CPD? Who discusses it and with whom? • Can you give me an example of a project that was shared between supervisors and trainers or SETs? • Can you give an example of a workshop or a presentation or a training course was (or meetings) shared between trainers, supervisors and SETs? • In what ways do trainers, SETs and supervisors plan projects and write documents about their own profession or to support teachers together?
4	Meetings and visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do trainers, supervisors and SETs meet? For what purposes? What kind of formal or informal meetings do you have? Who organises them? What do you think of the process?

Table 4.2 Proposed interview exploration areas and initial proposed themes for the first part of the interviews.

As illustrated in Table 4.2 above, these proposed themes and areas of explorations helped me to explore the kind of work that occurs between the three different groups of English-subject educators, their relationship, and how they communicate, interact and collaborate. For example, identifying gaps and solving problems areas helped to explore how these trainers, supervisors and SETs deal with solving their work/profession-related problems or teachers' problems, and whether any consultation or coordination takes place between these groups in solving such problems. Interaction areas and collaboration explored the gathering of experiences, information and also knowledge that relate to their own work or to teachers' development. In addition to that, they helped to examine the process and the activities that trainers, SETs or supervisors conduct to seek and share experiences, learning skills and knowledge from one another, such as peer observation, discussion, meetings, conferences, forums, as well as how novice members of each profession seek experience from their more experienced colleagues. These proposed areas also drew out any sharing of pedagogical resources and materials between these groups or within each profession and any interactions between them, as well as how the three groups might work together towards a shared goal or particular aim. Also, professional developments areas covered discussing any continuous professional development opportunities or projects, either for themselves (as groups of trainers, SETs or supervisors) or for the teachers they look after: for example, conducting training programmes, presentations or workshops, attending conferences, or publishing joint articles. Included in this would also be undertaking projects together, even those requested by the ministry, or writing documents collaboratively: for example, writing meeting minutes, ministry guidelines for teachers, creating curriculums, or contributing to journals for teachers or related professions. Visits included sharing peer and professional visits as groups or within the same profession, either within the same governorate or going to other governorates.

For the second part of the interviews, and specifically for those participants who were involved in the Omani PLCs through the Specialised Center for the Professional Training of Teachers, either as PLCs leaders or members, I prepared the following proposed themes and areas for exploration in Table 4.3 underneath, again based on my knowledge of PLCs model.

Proposed themes and exploration areas for the second part of the interview- To collect data for research question 3: How do trainers, supervisors and senior teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional communities (PLCs model) within and across their groups?		
	Proposed themes	Areas for explorations
1	The purpose – membership and process	Would you please tell us about your experience of the PLCs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How was the community formed? By whom? When? - Who are the members? - How do the members interact? - How often do the members meet? - What is the common purpose of the community? - What is their mission? - What kind of work you do in common, which you count as the main purpose of the work?
2	PLC characteristics	What are some of the features you can say that your PLC include? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there collaboration between the members? - How is the involvement and the relationship between the members within the community? - What kind of tools, techniques and even language, stories and behaviour patterns are used within the community? What is the cultural context for the work?
3	Benefits gained	What are some of the benefits that you believe you as a teacher-educator or the teachers and their students obtained from these PLCs?
4	Obstacles and issues faced	What are the some of the obstacles or challenges you faced throughout the process of the PLC?
5	Stages and lifetime	Is the PLC you were involved in still existing?
6	Suggestions and recommendations	Is there anything you would like to add that I may have forgotten in my questions? Is there any idea or strategy beyond the PLC model you would like to see implemented to enhance your practice or your colleagues' practice?

Table 4.3 Proposed interview themes and exploration areas (Part 2) – To help answer Research Question 3 (SRQ 3) designed to explore the implementation of the PLCs model in the Omani Educational Context.

As just mentioned, I drafted the above proposed themes based on my readings and PLCs model literature discussed earlier in Chapter 3. The proposed areas of the first theme, for example, explored the vision, the process of forming the PLCs, and who was involved in these Omani PLCs. The areas for the second proposed theme investigated the characteristics of these PLCs and then the areas of themes 3,4, and 5 covered the benefits and challenges faced by the participants throughout the lifetime of these PLCs. Finally, I planned to leave a space and time for participants to add any information or suggestions they would like to raise about the implementation of the Omani PLCs.

Last but not least, I also prepared the following themes and areas for exploration as outlined in Table 4.4 beneath, for the participants who were not involved in the Omani PLCs and also the PLCs participants as the time allowed. I proposed to explore the implementation of another option of professional communities; the CoPs model. Therefore, I was prepared to undertake a brief orientation of the CoPs model for any participant who was unfamiliar with this model.

Proposed themes and exploration areas for the second part of the interview- To collect data for research question 3: How do trainers, supervisors and senior teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional communities (CoPs model) within and across their groups?		
No	Proposed themes	Areas for explorations
1	Suitability and cultural appropriateness of the CoPs model (between English-subject trainers, supervisors and SETs) in the Omani educational context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think this notion is appropriate and suitable for the Omani context? How? • In what ways do you think that applying this concept between trainers, supervisors and SETs will be beneficial for teachers and for these professionals themselves?
2	Practicality and applicability of the CoPs model in Oman.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How about forming the CoPs model between SETs, supervisors and trainers in Oman? What do you think? • Do you think applying this idea will succeed or fail between these groups in Oman? Why?
3	Time and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think senior teachers (SETs), supervisors and trainers will have enough time to participate within the CoPs if it was created?
4	Additional comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything you would like to add that I may have forgotten in my questions? • Is there any idea or strategy beyond the CoPs model you would like to see implemented to enhance your practice or your colleagues' practice? • Are there any additional factors that you would like to add that may be inhibiting the enhancement of your work and your colleagues' work? • Are there any facilitating factors that you think help you, or you and your colleagues to enhance your practice?

Table 4.4 Proposed interview themes and exploration areas (Part 2) – To help answer Research Question 3 (SRQ 3) designed to explore the implementation of the CoPs model in the Omani educational context.

These themes and areas for explorations were planned to cover answering the part related to the CoPs model of the third research question: How do trainers, supervisors, SETs and their senior-

members perceive the potential benefits and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional communities (such as PLCs and CoPs models) within and across their groups? As shown in Table 4.4 above, these areas helped me greatly to explore participants' reactions, views and beliefs regarding the implementation of the CoPs model within the Omani educational context. Indicating any benefits for English subject teacher-educators and revealing some of the difficulties might be faced of applying this model with the Omani Educational context, and the keys for avoiding and overcoming any difficulties that might be faced.

Finally, I should note that the questions listed in the above tables were areas for exploration rather than actual questions asked. I drafted the themes and the areas of exploration listed in the tables based on my readings of the main features of PLCs and CoPs models. I drafted these beforehand, as topics and areas to be explored in the interviews, and to help guide the conversation and keep respondents on topic. As with the nature of the semi-structured interviews, which allow flexibility (Newton, 2010), I focused on the themes, which I explored by adapting the questions to the context of each interview, and by developing new questions while interviewing, as appropriate to the direction of the conversation.

I also considered a number of tips in order for the semi-structured interviews to be effective. First of all, as suggested by several scholars, the researcher is required to undertake careful preparation in order to overcome any potential difficulties which may arise during the interview (Punch, 2014; Robson, 2002). It is also necessary to think quickly to distill the essential points from the participants' responses, and formulate the appropriate follow up questions accordingly (Flick, 2011; Myers & Newman, 2007; Legard et al., 2003). The researcher must definitely be fully conversant with the research aims and with the topic guide (Flick, 2011; Legard et al., 2003), all of which I had carefully planned and prepared in advance.

Nevertheless, it is also important to address, and be aware of, the weaknesses of the semi-structured interview method. According to Cohen et al. (2018), the flexibility offered by the semi-structured interview can become a limitation at times, as it may affect the participant's responses to the same question, which can reduce comparability between the data. Flexibility might also enable some participants to differ from the original point being discussed and move

onto irrelevant points (Teijlingen, 2014). However, it is the role of the researcher to avoid such limitations, therefore, I considered paying attention as a researcher to bring the participant back to the focus of the interview.

In addition, Gunasekara (2007) argues that the researcher's identity may influence the data obtained, which might, therefore, affect the validity and reliability of the interview. Scheurich (1997) adds that the researcher, whether intentionally or unintentionally, carries unseen baggage to the interview that may alter the way s/he would interpret and analyse the data. Denscombe (2007) further claims that people might respond differently depending on how they perceive the interviewer and his/her characteristics, such as their sex, age and ethnic origins, all of which can affect the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their level of honesty in what they discuss. Gomm (2004) also discusses demand characteristics, which may occur when the interviewee's responses are influenced by what s/he thinks the situation requires. In this case, at the beginning of the interview, the researcher must make clear the purpose, aims and topics of the research, and seek to put the interviewee at ease. In general, therefore, the researcher should avoid, or at least minimise such possible limitations or problems, by the careful use of probing questions, explanations, or rephrasing questions and in their judgement of the answers provided. Please see Appendix 18 for examples of some interviews' timetables scanned from my diary.

One activity that must be carried out before undertaking any interviews is to prepare an interview schedule that includes the list of issues to be covered (Thomas, 2009). Thomas (2009) claims that preparing this list helps the researcher combine the structure of a list of issues to be covered together with the freedom to follow up points if necessary (pg. 164). To end each interview, I asked each participant if there was anything else they would like to add. I decided to employ the semi-structured interviews as I believed that I would not have enough time to conduct interviews more than once with each participant (Bernard, 1988). To solve this, I asked each participant if they agreed that I would contact them later, in case I had any additional questions or clarifications.

As I planned in advance, I audio-recorded each interview and later transcribed them for the analysis of the study. From my experiences of conducting interviews for my Master's degree on 'Promoting Reflection through Post-Observation Discussions', and for other professional

development research on, for an example, ‘Developing learners’ self-assessment skills’, I have found that audio-recording is less distracting for participants than note-taking using pen and paper to record the interview, and is more time and energy efficient (Al Sinani, 2007). Lichtman (2013) highlights that audio-recording captures more information than note-taking (tone of voice, pauses, etc.). As I planned, I tested my recorder before conducting the interviews to see if it was working and that the recording was good quality and then checked that it had been recorded in full immediately after finishing the interview.

All the actual interviews were conducted in the summer time between June and August 2019. They were all conducted in the Ministry of Education buildings in the three targeted governorates as suggested and agreed by the participants. They were mainly conducted in the regional training centers which belong to the directorates of human resources, some interviews were conducted in the specialised center of professional training of teachers and some in the MoE main building. Location and time for conducting the interviews were arranged with each participant in advance. Most interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes (each), only few exceed the 50 minutes and only few were less than 30 minutes and most were conducted in English. Only three were conducted in L1 (Arabic language) as preferred by these participants and I had to transcribe and translate these interviews.

4.4.2 Document-gathering and analysis

As mentioned earlier, to help me answer my RQ1 (Table 4.1) and for the purpose of triangulating my data-collection-methods, I employed document analysis as a second supplementary data-collection method. Document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for examining and evaluating both printed and electronic documents (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Bowen (2009) also defines document analysis as a form of qualitative research, in which documents are interpreted by the researcher, to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic. Documents can include public records, texts, images, visual and audio-visual documents, which are detailed without any intervention from the researcher (Bowen, 2009; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). According to O’Leary (2014), public records are types of documents which represent the official and ongoing records of an organisation’s activities: examples of these include student transcripts, mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, student handbooks, strategic plans and syllabi.

For this research, I planned to review and analyse a selection of the Ministry's official documents, such as policy guidelines, newsletters, studies, reports, theses, memos, decrees, magazines and journals. I really hoped to obtain copies of both the old and current policies dating back to the 1990s through to the present date, in order to seek any references to professional communities' practices made in these documents. Moreover, in order to find an answer to my first research question about the provenance of the current policies on how Omani trainers, supervisors and senior teachers are required to work, I specifically intended to look for the stated intentions and ideas relating to referenced professional communities, as well as the timeframes and outcomes stated. I planned to explore and investigate themes such as teamwork, group work, professional development, practice, reflection, learning and community. Furthermore, I proposed to look for any theses and peer-reviewed articles focusing on Omani education policy from 1998/99 to 2018.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter two, the Omani Educational System was reformed as the Basic Education System in 1998/99 (MoE, 2016). With the aim of improving the quality of education, teacher training and professional development, in order to create a population of critical thinkers ready for the demands of the 21st century and shifting towards the Omanisation policy (replacing expatriate workers with trained Omani personnel). This study meant investigating whether any of the policy documents encourage Omani trainers, supervisors and senior teachers to cooperate and build strong relationships with one other, in any ways, for the benefit of teachers and the education system more generally. Another important aspect was to examine the role of the relevant authorities (or stakeholders) in supporting how these professionals can potentially work better, in order to offer more support to teachers and those working in the field of education.

To get access to any documents needed for this research, I was informed that I need to go through a formal process with a number of departments, namely: The Main Training Centre, The Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers, the Supervision Department, The Technical office and Documents within the Ministry of Education. This last department is responsible for preparing the procedural tools related to document management, document classification system, and the retrieval manuals (MoE, 2017).

Thus, I emailed the Technical Office within the MoE and obtained an official letter from the ministry of education to facilitate my research study (see attached letters in Appendix 3 and 4). I managed to collect a number of official documents, as listed and outlined below in Table 4.5.

No	Title of the Policy/Document	Source
1	Professional Standards and Jobs Specifications/ descriptions –for Subject Trainers, Subject Supervisors and Subject Senior Teachers.	Ministry of Education (MoE) - not dated
2	Regional Supervisors and Senior Teachers Appraisal forms –	(MoE, 2018)
3	Regional Supervisors and Senior Teachers Standards and Indicators	(MoE, 2017)
4	Trainers Competencies Document	(MoE, 2010)
5	The Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers Guide	(MoE, 2016b)
6	Expert Supervisors Training Programme - Module 4 Assessment - Participant Handbook	(MoE, 2016c)
7	National Report on the Development of Education in the Sultanate of Oman	(MoE, 2001)
8	National Report on Quality Education in Oman	(MoE, 2004a)
9	National Report of the Sultanate of Oman - Inclusive Education: The way to Future	(MoE, 2008)

Table 4.5 Policy documents used for the current study

As listed in Table 4.5, I managed to obtain the above listed 9 documents. In my analysis of data, I divided these documents into two groups. The first group are the first four policies listed above (1-4). Namely: Regional Supervisors, Trainers and SETs' Professional Standards and Job specifications', Regional Supervisors and Senior Teachers Standards and Indicators, 'Supervisors and SETs Annual appraisal forms and 'Trainers Competencies' file. These four documents specifically and directly related to the three groups of teacher-educators, their responsibilities, their work nature and work-related issues such as their relationship with their colleagues. Thus, I used them to help me answer my second research question. I was particularly focusing and was investigating whether these documents encourage Omani trainers, supervisors, and senior

teachers to cooperate and build strong relationships with one other, in any ways, for the benefit of teachers and the education system more generally. For my analysis of this group of policies, I used keywords such as teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, professional development, communication, support and community, practice, reflection, learning and roles and responsibilities. The second group of policies are the other five documents listed above (5-9) in table 4.5. These policies were also useful, in particular they helped me with answering my first research question. Because they are specifically concerned with the MoE updates, innovations, achievements, projects and plans related to its departments, bodies and employees (especially for the jobs related to schools and teaching, e.g., supervision) and the international institutes they work and cooperate with.

Document analysis went through a similar process to other qualitative research methods. This process involved both content and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the stage of organising the data or the information found in the documents into categories that relate to the research questions and focus. This was then followed by a thematic analysis, which forms the process of examining and interpreting the data gathered (Bryman, 2004; Bowen, 2009). This included careful examination and re-reading of the documented data, the use of pre-defined codes and themes and compared with the ones were used from the interviews data codes, see further discussion in section 4.10.3. below in this chapter, particularly because these policy documents served as supplementary tools for triangulating the research methods used (Bowen, 2009). See also an example of the process of identifying similarities between MoE policies in Appendix 19.

4.4.3 Non-participant observations

Non-participant observation is a data collection method in which the researcher enters a social system to observe events, activities and interactions with the aim of gaining a direct understanding of a phenomenon in its natural context (Albert et al., 2010). However, the researcher here does not play any part in what is being observed, but merely observes without actively participating. Therefore, this option is used to understand a phenomenon by entering the community or social system involved, while staying separate from the activities being observed (Liu and Maitlis, 2010). In other words, simply non-participant observation is used to reveal differences between what people say and what they actually do and the researcher in this kind of

observation collects data by observing behaviour without actively interacting with the participants.

For this research, my original plan was to use this method to observe group meetings, in combination with the previous data -collection methods mentioned earlier, as this can offer a more accurate and dynamic appreciation of the meetings the Omani teacher-educators professionals (Supervisors, Senior Teachers SETs, and trainers) conducted together, for example, in an MoE departmental meetings or within each group. However, unfortunately that was not possible because these meetings are usually planned around events, semester-plans or updates which never suited my timing or circumstances.

However, I was able to conduct two non-participant observations of Professional Learning Communities' meetings in two different governorates immediately before the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. I obtained permission from my participants to attend these existing Omani PLCs members' meetings. The group meetings observations were conducted in two different schools' level; one was elementary (Cycle 1 school) and the other was conducted in preparatory (Cycle 2 school). The first meeting included a supervisor with the school's SET and four school teachers, who were not participants in my research. Therefore, I informed them in advance to the meeting that I was not observing them during the meeting and my focus was only on my research participants. The second meeting was also attended by my participants supervisor and SET and other two teachers from that school. Of course, not all the PLCs members attended in those planned meetings due to their personal circumstances besides the news of COVID19 pandemic at that time. I believe that these meetings were also useful as I managed to take some notes and observe how the members interacted tackled group discussions, I also managed to look at some of their PLC' s work. As I mentioned earlier, during these observations, I was directly observing and gathering notes on my research participants only who were involved in my interviews; I did not focus on the other members at the meetings during my observations. They were informed about this and were told that their names will not be recorded or mentioned to anyone. I only observed my participants (who are involved in my research) and only made notes and collected data on my participants (and not on the non-participants). I attended these communities' meetings, and filled an observation proforma for each meeting (see Appendix 13), I recorded the

interviewees' ways of working and reflected on their meetings and afterwards I added an entry to my research diary (see Appendix 14).

4.4.4 Research diary

A research diary is a written record of the researcher's activities, thoughts and feelings throughout the research process from design, through data-collection and analysis to writing and presenting the study (Bloor and Wood, 2006). As part of my Master's degree studies (Al Sinani, 2007), I carried out a critical study about promoting teachers' reflection during post-lesson discussions by SETs. At the beginning my plan was to keep a research diary to write, reflect and report on all the decisions I made, the kind of thinking, the whole methodology process, hunches, and notes (Silverman, 2005). However, and although this is what happened especially because my research was about reflection and reflective practice, I found that writing in my research diary also became an emotional support which positively impacted on the research process and its progress.

According to Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009), the research diary gives more validity and credibility to the data because a reflective journal, along with member checks and triangulation, provided scaffolding tools. For this work, I started to keep a research diary when I started to prepare for the data-collection process, listing things and dates and arranging for the interviews, and that was put in practice in April 2019. I stopped writing notes in my diary since I finished conducting the two non-participants observation by March 2020, as I started the actual analysis process.

Although I did not conduct direct group meetings that involved the three parties (trainers-supervisors and SETs) as I mentioned earlier, I managed to take some useful notes in my research diary during the arrangements and the preparation for and conducting the semi-structured interviews. During all these processes I managed to note useful observations of the kind of relationships between these teacher-educators, for example, governorate-1, and compared it with the other two governorates. I wrote an entry for each governorate with different dates where I recorded my notes, activities within the governorate, thoughts and feelings throughout the fieldwork and data-collection process and I continued recording my notes even during the analysis stage (see examples in Appendix 14).

4.4.5 Qualitative data analysis

More recent perspectives on qualitative research endorse both inductive and deductive approaches to be employed in data analysis. I therefore attempted to follow the model below (Figure 4.1), outlining the sequential steps involved in the analysis process, based on Newby's (2014) description of the qualitative content analysis process.

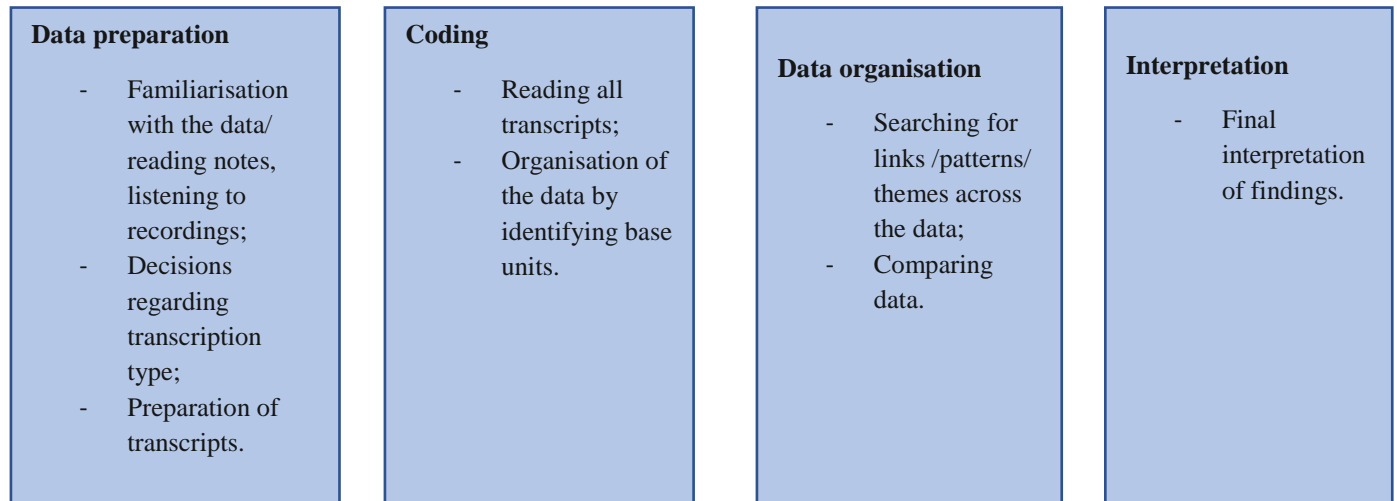


Figure 4.1: Qualitative data analysis process (Based on Newby, 2014: 40)

As presented in Figure 4.1 above, these processes of qualitative research analysis begin with data preparation: this includes becoming familiar with the data obtained, by listening to the recordings, reading notes, and the documents the researcher has obtained. Furthermore, it includes taking decisions; for example, regarding the type of transcription to be used. Then, moving to the coding stage, includes reading the transcripts repeatedly, and identifying base units in the data, in order to organise it in a way that assists the researcher to identify the information from and within it. Following the work of Miles and Huberman (1994), coding arranges the data for comparison and analysis by combining the data for ideas, themes, and categories; these codes can then be assigned titles or names that relate to the topic currently being investigated.

Moreover, Newby (2014) claims that coding can be either deductive or inductive. Deductive coding can be based on pre-defined codes that are available for the researcher to employ in their own work. Additionally, it occurs when the researcher devises the coding system before the

analysis takes place; this is based on existing knowledge and theory. However, codes can be inductive when they emerge from the data. The next stage is data organisation: this stage includes searching for links and themes across the data, through comparison within the data. Finally, an interpretation of the data takes place. In the current research, I found that this approach to qualitative data analysis is useful, in that it is both flexible and manageable, particularly for semi-structured interviews, as well as documents-analysis and non-participant observations. Hence, I decided to follow and implement these processes as a framework for my analysis of all of the data that I had previously collected, using the same order and beginning with the primary data of the study: semi-structured interviews, as shown below in Table 4.6.

Data-collection methods	Data-analysis procedure
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first stage was deciding to transcribe the interviews verbatim, and preparing all of the interview transcripts. This stage worked in parallel with initial data analysis: familiarising myself with the data, by listening to the recordings repeatedly, and reading over my interviews notes. - After transcribing all of the semi-structured interviews, I read the transcripts repeatedly and thoroughly. - I recoded initial thoughts, writing comments and short memos in the margins of the interview transcripts. - I looked at segments, categories, codes, differences and similarities in the data being analysed. I allowed the themes to emerge naturally first. Some themes forced themselves to appear from the first coding; therefore, I decided not to assess the importance of any theme from the beginning. - I continued coding until my list of themes started to grow and included a larger number of themes. At this stage, I began to segment and categorise them into major themes and subthemes, where I had to combine codes and categories into broader subthemes, and then major themes. I re-grouped some of the themes and dropped others, due to identified overlaps and contradictions between sub-themes. The coding labels derived from the participants' exact words, transcribed verbatim. - I then finalised the themes, subthemes and categories identified as primary. - Finally, I began writing up the findings of my analysis based on the themes/subthemes/categories, using quotes from the research as evidence to support my findings.

Data-collection methods	Data-analysis procedure
Documents-analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first stage was to, thoroughly, go through and read all of the above-mentioned policy documents one by one. - I then highlighted with colour pens any important related texts to my topics, bearing in mind my prepared themes for these policies analysis, while looking for new ones as I read. - I took notes while reading each policy document. - I then compared and contrasted each policy-identified coded theme. As I did this, I looked for common similarities and differences in the data being analysed. - I proceeded to write a list of all of the identified themes and codes for this tool. - I then compared and synthesised all of the themes identified through the semi-structured interviews.
Non-participant observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The first stage was to go through and read each observation note thoroughly, one by one. - I then highlighted the important and related notes from each observation, based on the proposed themes, using colour pens. I highlighted or/and wrote my own notes alongside any notes identified as important to the research. - I compared and contrasted each observation theme and identified codes. - I then wrote a list of the identified themes and codes for this tool. - I compared and contrasted the identified themes with the semi-structured interviews and policy documents analysis. - Finally, I looked for similarities, differences and synthesis.
My research diary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For this, I followed the procedure outlined above, employed for non-participant observations.

Table 4.6 Data-analysis procedure/ stages

The final stage of the analysis was to start writing the analysis findings based on the themes/subthemes/categories using quotes and extracts from the interviews, policy documents and my research notes and observations as evidence, please see section 4.10 and Chapter 5.

Having described the qualitative analysis process for the four research data gathering tools, I move on next to discuss participants details, how they were accessed and selected.

4.6 Participants' access and selection

Patton (1990:181-182) emphasises that the sampling strategy must be selected to fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced. Emmel (2013) also stresses that the researcher must make judgments before, during and after sampling about what to sample, and how to use the sample in making claims from their research -with reference to what is known of the phenomena under examination. With all these criteria in mind, this study involved a total of 36 sample participants, which included 8 teacher-trainers, 13 supervisors, 10 senior teachers from 3 different governorates, and 5 authorities working within the Ministry of Education in Oman (from the Training department, the Supervision department and the Specialised Training Centre).

The types of sampling of participants recruited for the current research study were non-probability and purposive sampling. Non-probability sampling suggests that “not every element of the population has an opportunity for being included in the sample” (Burns and Grove 2001:804). For this research, I cannot include all of the SETs, supervisors or trainers, as I am bound by time and distance. One limitation of non-probability sampling is that it can be less vigorous and might produce fewer representative samples that may, in turn, limit the generalisability of the findings (LoBiondo-Wood and Haber, 1998:249). In any case, the goal of this qualitative study research is not to generalise, but rather to provide a rich and contextualised understanding; therefore, I do not believe that generalisation is an issue here.

Regarding the purposeful sampling, Emmel (2013) states that it is instrumental in research to search out information-rich cases to be studied in-depth, and that it provides the best insight into the research questions. Although purposive sampling can provide great depth regarding qualitative research because of its nature, it does not necessarily represent wider populations, and could be regarded as biased, because of its deliberate and somewhat predetermined selection process for participants (Cohen et al., 2011). King and Horrocks (2010) state that diversity is the most common factor for sampling in qualitative research, claiming that it is better to have one or

two fixed aspects. This means that researchers must control one or two aspects of the group criteria, such as their age and gender, while allowing for a variety of other factors to be included outside of their control (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013).

Krueger and Casey (2009) highlight the need to set specifications and criteria for selecting participants carefully. Hence, based on the discussion above, the participant samples for the current study are selected based on the needs of the study and certain criteria: knowledge of the study, access (place of origin, and place of work.), mixed-gender, and years of professional experiences (Silverman, 2000; Cohen, et al., 2011; Grbich, 2013).

No	Governorates	No of participants	Trainers	Supervisors	SETs	Gender	Years of experience
1	Governorate-1	12	4	5	3	Mixed gender	Vary from novice to more experienced (from 1 year to more than 20 years of working experience)
2	Governorate-2	8	2	3	3	Mixed gender	Vary from novice to more experienced (from 1 year to more than 20 years of working experience)
3	Governorate-3	11	2	4	5	Mixed gender	Vary from novice to more experienced (from 1 year to more than 20 years of working experience)

Table 4.7 The first group of participants (regional supervisors, trainers and SETs,)

Regarding my primary target group of participants, the trainers, supervisors and SETs (see Table 4.6 below) are from three different big governorates in Oman. I targeted participants who varied in their years of experience, including novice participants (these included the newly-appointed ones and participants who have 2-3 years of experience) alongside those more experienced ones (who have more than 15 years of working experience in their profession). The reason behind this choice was that I wanted to see whether there was a noticeable difference between the views, perceptions and opinions of the novice participants in contrast to those more experienced. I also included participants of both genders. Of course, they were not as equal as I hoped, as by nature some posts/professions, such as the trainers' post, attract more female trainers in almost all of the governorates. The Table below (4.6) demonstrates the first group of participants (regional trainers, supervisors and senior-teachers).

With regard to accessing these participants, I formed a network of friends and colleagues from these governorates, with whom I have a good relationship, who helped me reaching the target number of participants in each region. In fact, initially I expanded the invitations to participants a little predicting that some of them would not be willing to participate, which was indeed the case. I approached over 45 participants from the three governorates. Unfortunately, most of the people who declined the invitations or even did not respond were mainly from one governorate, and I had to approach other teacher-educators in this governorate with the help of my colleague regional trainers until I reached a satisfied number from there.

As mentioned earlier, the research also involved the participation of 5 senior-members' from three main departments within the MoE, namely, the main training centre, supervision department and the specialised centre for professional training of teachers (as shown in Table 4.7) below. These sectors are responsible for teachers, SETs, supervisors, and trainers (please see chapter 2, section 2.5 for the detailed roles of these departments) and also responsible for their professional development.

No	Department	No of participants	Years of experience
1	Main Training Centre and the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers	3	More than 15 years of experience
2	Supervision Department	2	More than 15 years of experience

Table 4.8. The second group of participants: MoE senior-staff members.

With MoE senior-staff members, they are all experienced participants, who had worked for the MoE for a long time and were always involved in writing guidelines and documents for the ministry, as well as being involved in training, mentoring and supervising the teachers of teachers. As these were my colleagues, some of whom I had worked with for a long period of time, I contacted them myself and they immediately expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

Finally, I would like to explain that I made the decision to not include participants' profiles, or more specific details about each participant, as I was aware that doing so would affect their anonymity. This felt particularly pertinent, as there is a small number of trainers in each governorate, and with just a few details of each participant they would be very easy to identify. However, I provided the role next to the name of each participant, as shown in Table 4.9 below. This is also provided next to any quotation or extract of speech from participants' interviews in Chapter 5.

Participants' roles	Pseudonyms of the participants												
Trainers	8	Nibras		Samar			Masoud	Shahad	Juma	Huda	Zahra	Jalal	
Supervisors	12	Raya	Saeed	Omar	Faris	Jufar	Yamin	Amal	Shamsa	Jamal	Manar	Karima	Laila
Senior Teachers	11	Wafa	Talah		Riham	Hind	Ashwaq	Riham	Elham	Hafsa	Qabas	Heba	Reem
Senior Staff Members	5	Hashim					Dalal	Siham	Juma	Jana			

Table 4.9 Participants' pseudonym and roles

4.7 Ethical considerations

There are some important ethical concerns that should be taken into account while carrying out qualitative research, as the consideration of ethical issues is crucial in protecting the research participants. BERA (2018: 2) highly recommends that educational researchers undertake wide consultation at all stages of their project, in order to identify any relevant ethical issues, including listening to all involved in the research context, such as stakeholders and sponsors. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2011: 84) state that “whatever the specific nature of their work, social researchers must take into account the effects of the research on its participants and act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings: this is their responsibility to participants.” Accordingly, a number of ethical issues were considered in undertaking this research. This section goes through these considerations, including voluntary participation, privacy and anonymity, confidentiality and finally discussing the ethics of participant information and completing consent forms.

4.7.1 Research approval

The current research considered and followed the ethical policy and guidelines as stated by the University of Glasgow. Hence, my role as researcher, and the research aims, purpose and procedures were revealed to all participants beforehand. That was through official documents presented to the College of Social Sciences' Ethical Committee at the University of Glasgow in order to obtain the necessary ethical approval, before research could begin. Please see Appendix 1 for the research ethical approval and Appendices 3 and 4 for official letters within the Ministry of Education.

4.7.2 Voluntary participation

According to Cohen et al. (2018), voluntarism entails ensuring that participants freely choose to take part (or not) in the research and guarantees that exposure to risks are undertaken knowingly and voluntarily. All the current research participants participated voluntarily and with explicit consent; no-one was forced to be involved (please see Appendix 2 for the participant consent form submitted to them beforehand and Appendices 5 and 6 for plain language statement and the request letter of participation). Additionally, BERA (2018) also states that all participants have the right to withdraw from the research for any reason, at any time, and that participants must be informed of this right. It is therefore, required that researchers provide their own contact details to participants. For this study, participants were informed of this right and they were made aware that they could withdraw from this research project at any time (if they wished). Besides, they were informed that they had the right to choose which questions to answer, and they would not be penalised if they decided not to answer any specific questions.

4.7.3 Privacy and anonymity

According to Lichtman (2013), any individual participating in a research study must have reasonable expectations, such as that privacy will be guaranteed, and that no identifying information about an individual will be revealed in written or other forms of communication. One way of addressing privacy and protection from harm is through anonymity. The principal way of ensuring anonymity, then, is to remove any means of identification. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) suggest a number of strategies for achieving anonymity: for example, the use of aliases, pseudonyms and codes for identifying people in order to keep their information

private and inaccessible. Additionally, names can be changed, places shifted, and fictional events added to prevent identification of participants (Plummer, 1983). This issue is, therefore, significant within the area of research ethics, and I validated that all participants in this research study have the right to privacy and anonymity using the above-mentioned strategies.

4.7.4 Confidentiality

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) underline the need for the confidentiality of participants' identities, contending that any violations of this should be made solely in agreement with the relevant participants. This means protecting confidential communications, such as papers or grants submitted for publication, personnel records, trade or military secrets, and patient records (Resnik, 2015). One way of protecting participants' right to privacy is through the protection of confidentiality, by refusing to disclose any information regarding a participant that might identify the individual, or that might enable the individual to be traced. I ensured that all data were kept private, only able to be seen by the researcher; no names of participants are mentioned in the study or to anyone apart from the researcher. Any information, comments, or questions participants decided to comment on are kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

4.7.5 Participant information and consent forms

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), informed consent requires informing research participants of the overall purpose of the investigation and the primary features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project. It further requires obtaining the voluntary participation of participants involved and informing them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (as mentioned earlier). Additionally, it includes informing them of the purpose and procedures of the research project. Including information regarding confidentiality, who will have access to the interview or other material; the researcher's right to publish the whole interview or parts of it (and where it could be published) and the participant's potential access to the transcription and the analysis of the qualitative data.

Prospective participants were provided with as much information as possible about this research, and so were able to make an informed decision and choice about their involvement before the

research begins. It was made clear that their participation is voluntary, and that a decision not to participate will have no bearing on them in the future. As explained earlier, potential participants were aware that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any point during the study, without explanation or penalty. They were also assured that their identity and any other information provided by them would be treated as confidential.

All of this information was disclosed to participants orally and in writing, through the information sheets and consent forms supplied at the outset. They were asked to read, understand and sign the consent form (see Appendix 2), which clearly states the research title and focus and provides the researcher's details including contact number and email address. The consent form also explains that the interview will be audio-recorded and kept safe until a certain time in the future during the dissemination of the research findings.

Finally, as this research deals with human beings, I assured that it meets the ethical principles set for educational research. This research, therefore, does not cause any form of harm to participants or the researcher (Bryman, 2004) and does not infringe the privacy of others nor include any dishonesty or deception, having obtained the formal consent of everyone involved (Bryman, 2004).

4.8 Research quality assurance and trustworthiness

I considered Guba's (1981) four criteria to assess the trustworthiness of my research: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, which I discuss in short subsections here. Although Guba used these criteria for naturalistic inquiries, many social science qualitative researchers commonly use and adopt them for their research.

4.8.1 Credibility

This is also called the 'internal validity' by which the researcher ensures that their study investigates what is actually intended to be investigated (Shenton, 2004). This means that the research should present an accurate picture of the issue being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing

trustworthiness. This can be achieved by adopting well-established research methods in addition to triangulation methods.

For my research, I benefited from more than one research method, which I believe ensured its internal validity. Besides, I discussed and revised several drafts of the semi-structured interview questions with my supervisor until we were satisfied that we could ensure the validity of this method. The validity of my research methods (semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and non-participant observation) was also enhanced by my understanding of the research context and by encouraging the participants to freely express their views and opinions as well as by putting the participants at ease. Finally, I believe that piloting my research methods which resulted into integrating some editing, changes and modifications also enhanced the issue of validity and veracity of my data-collection methods (see section 4.9). In addition, I used the exact speech and statements of the participants in order to ensure the transparency and credibility of the research.

4.8.2 Transferability

This term also refers to external validity, which is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Therefore, it refers to the generalisation of the research, which means that based on the findings reached from the representative sample in the research, some conclusions could be drawn for a bigger population (Bryman, 1988). Trochim (2020) claims that the qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. Guba (1981) also emphasises that researchers should provide sufficient details about the research context for the readers to help them to decide if they can apply the findings to similar contexts or not.

This research provided very detailed contextual background and information about the Omani educational systems, the situation of English language teaching, the Training and Supervision departments and the new Specialised Training Center as described in Chapter two. Besides to a detailed description of the participants in this chapter. I believe that all this information and the details provided about the whole research process added to the depth provided about this research context and increased the chances of transferability of this research, as the process

becomes transparent to the reader. The participant teacher-educators in this study shared similar situations as other English language teacher-educators in other governorates in Oman: for example, professional development opportunities and in-service training courses. Accordingly, the chance for the application of the findings from this research to other governorates in Oman is possible and it may become even possible in other similar contexts.

4.8.3 Confirmability

This refers to objectivity, which means that research findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In other words, the findings should be data-oriented rather than presenting the researcher's perspectives. To ensure objectivity and make sure that the findings reflect the data collected not the researcher's perspective, the researcher needs to provide a "detailed methodological description that enables the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted" (Shenton, 2004: 72). Therefore, decisions made regarding methods, the research design and researcher's role and position (Guba, 1981) in addition to the role of the triangulation must be also emphasized. All of these have been taken into consideration throughout this research.

4.8.4 Dependability

This term, also known as reliability, refers to the extent to which the study could be repeated by other researchers and the findings would be consistent. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress there are close ties between 'credibility' and 'dependability'. This means, in practice, clearly demonstrating credibility, would help to ensure dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Thus, it is very important for the researcher to make sure not to miss anything about the research study and to report everything in detail in their final report. In other words, if a person wanted to replicate your study, they should have enough information from your research report to be able to do so and subsequently obtain similar findings to those in your study.

Creswell (2009) also advised that throughout the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher needs to validate his/her findings. For my study, I used three primary strategies to ensure reliability: triangulation, member checking, and auditing. Triangulation is the process of

corroborating evidence from different individuals (trainers, supervisors, SETs and senior-staff members included in my study), or methods of data collection (e.g. semi-structured interviews, document/policy analysis, non-participant observations and my research diary) in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation of data was used to secure corroborating evidence in the data; hence to increase the accuracy of my research.

Furthermore, in order to ensure accuracy of the recorded data and presentation of participants' views, member checking was conducted (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Through the process of member checking, the researcher can ask one or more of the study participants to check the accuracy of the accounts (Creswell, 2009). Thus, I chose three participants from the three different governorates and sent each one summary transcripts in English to check the quality of my transcription of the interviews, with each requesting them to verify its accuracy. The three of them confirmed the accuracy of the recordings or the transcriptions, and one participant even clarified her views further and the meaning of some comments made during the interview.

Finally, I asked a colleague who acted as critical friend to review a small sample of completely-anonymised coded interviews and policy-documents. This was to ensure consistency in coding and thematic categorisation (Creswell, 2009), and as suggested by Thomas and Harden (2008) when advising that the researcher's identification of themes is validated by others. Before conducting this step I considered the research ethics rules on data access and discussed the process with supervisors. It is stated in Section 8c of the approved Ethics application concerning access to research data that supervisors, examiners, research assistants and transcribers have permission to access data (the 24-page Ethics application is available on request). In this case my critical friend acted as a research assistant for a few hours, to double check that the emerging themes and categories made sense. Therefore, after completely anonymising the interviews transcripts and coding them, fully protecting participants' anonymity, I asked my critical friend to solely look at two extracts of anonymised transcripts, and two coded-extracts from policy documents. Following this, we discussed the codes and themes, finding that there was more than 90% agreement on the major themes and small minor changes in the subthemes and categories. After the meeting, I collected my extracts of data, which I kept securely for the analysis writing.

4.9 Reflecting on my role as an 'insider' researcher

The issue of the 'insider' versus the 'outsider' researcher relates to the role that the researcher plays during their study. It has been argued that researchers in qualitative research are often constructed as research instruments because of the close interaction with the study's participants and their position in relation to the study being investigated (Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 2009), which might affect the reliability of findings. Researchers can be either an insider who shares the common experience, knowledge and characteristics with the research participants or can be an outsider to these common experience and knowledge shared by the participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Unluer (2012) states that it is crucial for social researchers to clarify their role within the research, particularly those who are utilising qualitative methodology in order to make their research credible. As such, it was vital for me as a researcher to disclose my position in this current study and clarify the advantages and disadvantages associated with this position in the research process and how that could influence the interpretation, results and the findings of the study.

As mentioned earlier in section 1.3, I was working as a trainer in the Main Training Center for 6 years and was transferred to the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of teachers one semester before starting my PhD study (within the Ministry of Education). Therefore, for this research, I took the role of the insider-researcher. In this respect, I investigated a topic in which I could not only be a researcher but also one of the participants. This research sits within my own work practice, which is counted as a key feature of work-based research (Costley et al., 2010). However, this was done without any interference in the participants' views and perceptions.

In their work, Costley et al. (2010) discuss the issue of the insider-researcher in relation to the notion of 'social situatedness' (Vygotsky, 1962), and 'situatedness' in terms of learning, as developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The latter claim that the development of individual intelligence requires both social and cultural influences; multiple perspectives are, in fact, needed to build understanding as provided by context. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that situatedness occurs as a result of the interaction between the agent (the researcher), the situation (the particular set of circumstances and the researcher position within), and the context (where, when

and more general background). Organisational, professional and personal contexts might, therefore, affect the development of the research; this means that within the organisational context, the culture and structure of the researcher's work situation and understandings of colleagues are likely to shape the research. The authors (in this sense) further claim that researchers who are insiders draw upon existing shared understandings and trust of their immediate surroundings, and the colleagues with whom normal social interactions of working communities have been previously developed, which I believe that this counted as an advantage.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) also identify three key advantages of being an insider-researcher: firstly, a strong understanding of the culture being studied; secondly, not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and finally, possessing a familiarity with the context which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. Smyth and Holian (2008) further claim that the insider-researcher possesses a great deal of knowledge, which can take an outsider a long time to acquire. This means that the insider-researcher generally knows the politics of the context wherein the research take place: not only the formal hierarchy, but also how it "really works" and how to best approach people (Unluer, 2012).

On the other hand, although there are various advantages of being an insider-researcher, there are also challenges. For example, the researcher might make wrong assumptions about the research process unconsciously based on their prior knowledge; hence, the loss of objectivity (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). In addition, insider-researchers may also be challenged in terms of role duality; they may struggle to balance their insider role (i.e. their job) and their role as researcher (DeLyser, 2001; Gerrish, 1997). Finally, according to Unluer (2012), the challenges of the insider-researcher approach is not simply that they may not receive or see important information, but that they might gain access to sensitive information. Therefore, in part to avoid such challenges, Smyth and Holian (2008) emphasise that to conduct credible insider research, insider-researchers must develop an explicit awareness of the possible effects of perceived bias on data collection and analysis, respecting the ethical issues related to the anonymity of the organisation and individual participants. Furthermore, they must consider and address the issues about the possible influence of the researcher's insider role on coercion, compliance and access to privileged information at each and every stage of the research.

As an insider-researcher in my professional field, I tried to gain all of the advantages mentioned above; at the same time, considering at all times good research practice and clear ethical considerations within my professional area of research in order to avoid or engage with any challenges that may arise. I believe that possessing the same background and common values and experiences with my participants did impact positively in my research especially with the flexibility I had in contacting participants and involving them in my research, besides the flexibility in conducting my interviews. However, I did not interfere at all with what the participants did not want to say or reveal during the interviews, and informed them in advance to deal with me as a researcher and not as an MoE employee. I was aware that I had to be careful about my role as insider-researcher particularly during the interviews with my participants and I did not meddle with their views or perceptions. I attempted to be careful during planning my research questions; for example, I avoided any words or phrases that could guide the participants to expected or led answers. Finally, I was confident that I had the expertise and experience that gave me an advanced level of knowledge of issues within my area of practice, and that I was well-informed and passionate about my topic. I intended to commit myself to the research despite any obstacles that may arise, as they usually do within any research project.

In order to reduce the subjectivity element from the sample, a piloting stage took place before the real data collection commenced, which I discuss in the following section.

4.10 Piloting the data-gathering tools

Piloting the data-collection instruments is an essential step in any research project to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments prior to the implementation of the full study (Lancaster et al., 2004; Kraemer et al., 2006; Stewart, 2016). Kim (2010) also stresses that piloting is relevant to test the fitness of methods, recruitment, transcription process and data analysis procedures. This step also offers indication and evidence of participants' understanding level of the topic, in addition, it ensures that the research instruments are functioning well (Bryman, 2012, Howell, 2013).

Once I received the approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow (College of Social Sciences), I went back to Oman to start the data-collection process and start the piloting stage for the semi-structured interviews immediately. For me, piloting the interviews was crucial to test the questions and to gain some practice in interviewing participants. I was originally planning to carry out four pilot interviews; at least one interview with one trainer, one supervisor, one senior teacher and one of the MoE senior-staff members. However, as there were no senior-staff members available at this stage, I decided to just conduct three interviews with two colleagues' trainers from different governorates that were not involved in the study and a colleague from my village who was a senior English teacher, of course, these people were not involved in the main study. This step was really crucial, it helped me to be more focused in my questions and I had to delete some of the questions, refine, edit, and add some changes and modifications to other questions and thus I finalised the design of this data-gathering tool. Please see Appendix 17 for the previous lists of drafted interviews questions before the piloting stage. I also conducted one analysis of a government policy documents and reflected on that process. It was at this stage I realised that I have two groups of policy documents and that one group of policies would help me answering the second research question beside the interviews. I therefore sorted them accordingly to two groups as discussed earlier (in section 4.4.2). Because my original plan was using the MoE policy documents only for the first research question (see Table 4.1 above).

Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct a non-participant observation pilot, because in fact I could not observe the group meetings I had originally planned for many different reasons as mentioned earlier. One of these reasons was that these group meetings were not actually available during the time I did my field-work. However, I had a great opportunity to observe two PLCs members' meetings in my second field-work visit in Oman. Again, because they were only two observations, it was not possible to pilot these observations. However, I made a conscious effort to take note of any weakness or limitations discovered in the first observation and avoid these in the second one. Fortunately, this observation went smoothly and I did not have to change anything either in the form or the issues focused on in the second observation.

4.11 Qualitative data analysis

In this section, I explain the process I went through in analysing the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the main source of data and the other supported methods; the document-policies analysis, besides the two non-participants observations notes and my diary notes (see Table 4.9). In the literature, there are a number of stages described for qualitative data analysis. These stages involve the management, description and interpretation of the data. According to Spencer et al. (2013), the first stage involves familiarisation, which is when the researcher reads their raw data or transcripts and identifies areas or topics that seem interesting and are linked to the research topic. Spencer et al. (2013) further claim that this familiarisation process could include interesting topics in relation to the participants' views, perceptions and experiences, as well as methodological issues, such as the flow of the interview, its atmosphere and the level of ease or difficulty with the issues raised.

4.11.1 Transcribing the interviews

The first stage in the data analysis process was to make a decision about transcribing the interviews. Hammersley (2010) clarifies that transcription is about the researcher's construction of what has been said, regardless of the format of transcription, whether a word-to-word type, such as in the fields of linguistics and sociology, or as chunks, as in other qualitative type of research. For my research, and after familiarising myself with the data by listening to the recordings more than once, I decided to carry whole or complete transcriptions of my interviews (word-to-word), as I believed that full-interviews-transcripts would contain critical data and would capture what has been said exactly. Hammersley (2010) states that these transcripts are accurate and detailed and they enable researchers to capture human interaction scientifically and are open to revisit for further detailed check analysis.

Although some people claim that transcription is boring, I really enjoyed listening to the interviews many times and transcribing them. In fact, that was even more beneficial for me as I started to highlight important comments and mark some vital quotations at the time of transcribing. The complete transcript of each interview depended on the length of the interview, which all varied, depending on the details provided by each participant. Producing each

transcript required several hours for some shorter interviews as an intensive task and more than a day or two for the longer ones. The qualitative data of these semi-structured interviews' transcripts (using Times New Roman 11 font-size- double-spaced) generated about 307 pages of data.

4.11.2 The experience of NVivo

In order to achieve a deeper analysis of my research data, keep myself up-to-date with analysis methods and my own knowledge about using software and technology, I decided to use NVivo as an organisational tool for my collected and transcribed data. Odena (2012) recommends that software would assist the researcher testing alternative hypotheses and that systematic analyses aided by software would afford increased possibilities to substantiate research claims. However, as I did not have any expertise and knowledge about how to use the Nvivo, I registered for training sessions in the University of Glasgow, which involved a wait of more than a month. As the data was ready for analysis, I decided to start the analysis manually first until the Nvivo training session started. Eventually, I attended the session and I also explored the Internet regarding the usage of NVivo.

I then started with my project, opened the resource files and uploaded all my transcripts in separate files within the internal folders. Although, I did not use NVivo right from the beginning of my data analysis, I found it actually useful as it gave me time to analyse, read carefully and segment my data before forming themes right from the beginning and rushing into conclusions because NVivo required the creation of a set of themes. I realised that the use of NVivo should take place after the manual analysis or the familiarisation of the data stage and after the codes are formed based on the preliminary analysis. Please see Appendix 9 for different examples of screenshots from NVivo interviews-data analysis.

4.11.3 Thematic analysis

In this section I shall present a summary of the basic process of qualitative data-analysis based on the three-stage process by scholars such as Miles and Huberman (1994) and King and Horrocks (2010). These stages are descriptive coding, interpretive coding and defining the overarching codes.

4.11.3.1 The Descriptive coding stage

Starting with the semi-structured interviews; my main source of data, I started this stage by reading my data of the interview transcripts many times in order to familiarise myself with what was being expressed and answered by the participants; without attempting to code it at this early stage. The next step I followed, was highlighting certain texts in the interview transcripts that included the participants' views, feelings or experiences which I felt relevant. I highlighted these texts with different colours in my computer on the transcripts (see Appendix 7). In addition, I wrote comments in the margins using computer-based software, as suggested by Spencer et al. (2013). The final step was to go through my comments on the highlighted texts and try to define descriptive codes I tried to write codes, either a word or a short phrase, that were closely related to the participants' comments and explained what they said (Miles and Huberman 1994) without attempting to find out the theoretical reason behind these texts for this stage (King and Horrocks, 2010). I followed the same procedure with all the interview transcripts one by one and kept going through my comments and the descriptive codes, redefining them wherever needed based on the emergence of new codes. After deciding on the descriptive codes and getting them sorted out, I moved to the next stage, which was interpretation.

4.11.3.2 The stages of interpretive coding and overarching themes

In this stage of coding, I went back to the descriptive codes and tried to interpret them. Charmaz (2006) suggests that researchers should ask themselves some questions when coding their data. These questions include: what is happening? What is being said or done by people? What do the statements or actions take for granted? What is the role of context and structure in supporting, maintaining or changing these statements? (p 94-95). I started to group the similar ones and tried to define and interpret these codes according to what they meant to me by making interpretive codes. Then I applied the same process of this interpretive coding to all the transcripts, which was a lengthy process. After this, I moved to the to the final stage, that of identifying the overarching themes. Here, I drew on the interpretive codes I classified from the data and defined these in themes that were relevant to my study and its nature. I grouped some, combined others that relate to a certain concept or theme, and deleted others until I finally settled on the main and subthemes.

The document/policies analysis also required careful examining and interpretation equally as the semi-structured interviews. Again, the documents were analysed using content and thematic analysis, as the semi-structured. This means that the same focus areas were sought for in these documents. The focus of the document analysis was, for example, on the 'roles and responsibilities' of the three groups, 'collaboration' between departments, 'cooperation' between teacher-educators, 'communication', 'professional communities', and 'CPD' opportunities. I made a table with these areas and filled it in accordingly bearing in mind the same analysis criteria utilised for the semi-structured interviews. Finally, the analysis of the two non-participants observations and my diary notes were less demanding because the amount of data they included is less compared with the interviews and the policy documents. Again, tables of focused areas were filled for these two and a similar procedure stated above was followed.

Regarding the organisation of the data and processing, the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the policies analysis and the two non-participant observations were carried out using a two-phase approach based on Miles and Huberman (1994). The first phase was vertical analysis, where each interview, a document, one observation, for example, was analysed first separately. And the second phase was comparative or horizontal analysis through cross-case analysis where I looked for common similarities and differences in the data being analysed. The two-phase approach has been implemented for the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, policies analysis and the two observations as the comparison within and across data ensured validity and credibility of the research (Silverman, 2000; Robson, 2011) and provided more in-depth insights into the data being analysed. Please see below in Table 4.9 examples of extracts from the different qualitative data sources, showing how these have been coded and then clustered into categories, main themes and sub-themes and see Appendix 19 for an example of policies-data analysis process.

Step 1 →	Step 2 →	Step 3 →	Step 4
Quotations/extracts/data sources	Sub-subthemes	Subthemes	Themes
“Through my experience in supervision, there is little cooperation between the three groups. These three groups never meet together to share their needs, experiences, and challenges..... In fact, I am not happy, not satisfied about such cooperation” (Amal, pg.1). Semi-structured interview data	Cooperation	Healthy work environment	Workplace and professional relationships
“as I told you I believe that cooperation and this topic is of a high important to me, having a healthy work environment between supervisors, trainers and senior teachers is really important topic and we should all together focus on” (Samar, pg. 9). Semi-structured interview data.	Cooperation		
“I am very disappointed with this kind of relationship between us. We tried to create a homogeneous cooperative group; however, we are faced with their challenges and overload of work.” (Masoud, pg. 6). Semi-structured interview data.	Cooperation		
“I guess you noticed that I am not happy about the relationship between these three groups as they are supposed to work in a more professional environment than personal effort... as we three of us must work together, supervision, training and SETs must work together to achieve one thing which is students’ learning and students’ improvements” (Samar, pg. 8). Semi-structured interview data.	Cooperation		
Extract from my research diary “– when I first reached the building, I was welcomed by two ladies one of them was a trainer and the second one was a supervision coordinator who is mainly doing admin work in supervision department – it seems to me it was actually obvious to sight that she shares a very good relationship with the trainers from their speech and friendly relationship-according to the trainer she supported her in everything. She helped in arranging interviews with supervisors, brought materials and she even arranged coffee and stuff”. Research diary notes.	Cooperation	Healthy work environment	
“the meeting was conducted in the school, included the school supervisor, the SETs and the schoolteachers. To me the meeting was closer to be an informal friendly meeting rather than a formal structure meeting. During the meeting, all members had time to speak and say something and dialogue was handled smoothly; I like the atmosphere doesn’t seem to there is any stress around between the meeting members. Issues related to teachers needs and CPD were discussed”. Extract from my non-participants observation.	Cooperation		
End of Year Report on Regional Supervisors 5. Level of initiative/cooperation/professionalism/responsibility. Documentary analysis			

Table 4.10 Example of qualitative data analysis using different sources of data

In conclusion, the process of finalising the major and sub-themes included finding meaningful codes and segments (topics/sections/categories) and assigning names to these segments (sub-sub-themes). I then combined the codes or the categories (sub-subthemes) into broader subthemes, then major or main themes, as illustrated above in Table 4.9. Please see also Appendix 7 for an example of a coded interview and Appendix 8 for more examples of data analysis tables. The full list of themes that were generated by the analysis process is discussed in the next two chapters.

4.12 Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter has outlined all the decisions regarding the research type, paradigm, design, and data-collection methods. It also described the participants who contributed to this research and the recruitment process involved. The four data-collection methods were described carefully and clearly, together with the piloting stage and kinds of modifications made based on it.

This chapter has also covered the quality measures for this research and the ethical principles it considered. This research sought to take into consideration the participants' dignity, interests, anonymity, privacy and confidentiality during all stages of the research process, including prior to the undertaking of the interviews. All participants and their original governorates are referred to through the use of pseudonyms in the transcripts, and their identity will remain anonymous throughout all stages of the research.

Finally, this chapter described the data collection and analysis methods and the structured approaches implemented in this research. The next chapter presents the findings reached from the analysis of fieldwork data.

Chapter Five: Research Findings

5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

In this chapter, I share my findings from the data analysis, interrogating the participants' perceptions from the interviews (with 8 trainers, 12 supervisors, 11 senior teachers and 5 of their senior staff members from the MoE, totaling 36 participants). Interviews data is compared with the findings of the ministerial documents and policy analysis (see 4.4.2). These findings were also corroborated with my notes from the two non-participant observations of Omani PLCs and my research diary where applicable. This chapter aims to show how these different data sources meet to support each other.

Although I came up with a big number of themes and categories, I decided to organise them hierarchically under four major themes and then have ten subthemes. Particularly relevant subthemes also have up to three categories under them (i.e., sub-sub subthemes). The findings therefore are presented in relation to four major themes which shape the divisions of this chapter after this introduction, as presented in Table 5.1 below, namely (5.2) Professional and Workplace Relationships, (5.3) Workplace Communications, (5.4) Omani Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and (5.5) Communities of Practice (CoPs) model in the Omani Context. The numbers in brackets correspond to the chapter section in which themes and subthemes are discussed.

Main Themes	<i>Subthemes</i>
5.2- Professional and Workplace Relationships	5.2.1 <i>Healthy Workplace Environment</i>
	5.2.1.1 Cooperation
	5.2.1.2 Collaborative problem-solving
	5.2.1.3 Developing sharing as a habit
	5.2.2 <i>Calling for supportive and flexible leadership</i>
5.3- Workplace Communications	5.3.1 <i>Meetings</i>
	5.3.2 <i>Professional development opportunities</i>
	5.3.3 <i>Social media networking</i>
	5.3.4 <i>Ministry of Education platforms</i>
5.4- Omani Professional	5.4.1 <i>The benefits of Omani PLCs experience</i>
	5.4.1.1 Students' success and achievements
	5.4.1.2 Teachers' professional development

Learning Communities (PLCs)	5.4.1.3 Teacher-educators' professional development
	5.4.2 <i>The challenges of the Omani PLCs experience</i> 5.4.2.1 Changing trainees' and teachers' negative beliefs and attitudes
5.5- The CoPs-model in the Omani educational Context	5.5.1 <i>CoPs' model potentials</i> 5.5.1.1 Bridging the gap 5.5.1.2 Sustainable development
	5.5.2 <i>CoPs' model obstacles</i> 5.5.2.1 Change management 5.5.2.2 Project management 5.5.2.3 Time management

Table 5.1 Main themes and subthemes developed from the research data.

These major themes are presented in bold and its subthemes are presented in *italics* throughout the chapter. As presented in table 5.2 above, the first main theme '**Professional and Workplace Relationships**' is divided into two subthemes: (5.2.1) *Healthy workplace environment* and (5.2.2) *Calling for supportive and flexible leadership*. A number of categories/ideas are discussed under the *Healthy workplace environment* subtheme: Cooperation, Collaborative problem-solving and Developing sharing as a habit, as shown in bullets in the table. The second main theme '**Workplace Communications**' is divided into four subthemes: (5.3.1) *Meetings*, (5.3.2) *Professional development opportunities*, (5.3.3) *Social media networking* (5.3.4) *Ministry of Education platforms*. The third main theme, '**Omani Professional Learning Communities' (PLCs)**' has two subthemes: (5.4.1) *The benefits of Omani PLCs experience* and (5.4.2) *The challenges of the Omani PLCs experience*. A number of ideas/categories will be discussed under the *benefits* as shown in bullets: Students' success and achievements, Teachers' professional development and Teachers-educators' professional development, while 'Changing trainees' and teachers' negative beliefs and attitudes' will be discussed under the *challenges*. Finally, the last main theme '**The CoPs-model in the Omani educational context**' includes two subthemes: (5.5.1) *CoPs' model potentials* that consists of 'Bridging the gap' and 'Sustainable development' and (5.5.2) *CoPs' model obstacles*, which discusses Change management, Project management, and Time management as listed in table 5.1 above.

Considering the nature of the qualitative analysis process and the difficulty to isolate social interactions into neat boxes, the findings presented in this chapter may overlap and cover parts of two themes simultaneously. For example, workplace relationships cannot be separated from workplace communications; each theme builds upon and/or affects the other, and most of the subthemes listed above refer to CoPs and PLCs, which, would share some of their characteristics, challenges, and benefits.

5.2 Professional and Workplace Relationships

This introduction provides an overview of the participants' perceptions of their professional and workplace relationships, then its two subthemes will be discussed in different subsections.

Overall, several open-ended questions were asked during the semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 4, 4.4) in order to inspire participants to reflect upon their collegial (professional) relationships within and across regions. These questions touched upon various aspects: their relationships with their colleagues, their relationships with other groups of teacher-educators and their relationships with their authorities. There seem to be diverse viewpoints as the participants expressed different perceptions during the semi-structured interviews regarding the kind of relationships shared between the three parties of the English subject teachers-educators (trainers, supervisors, and SETs) within their regions and even across governorates. A good number of participants such as, for example Hind, Samar, Masoud and Shahad reported that they do not really share a satisfactory relationship with their colleagues' teacher-educators in their governorates for different reasons as we will see as we are look at some of the participants' quotes below. These quotes will include the page number of their interview transcription. While other participants, such as for example, Zahra and Jufar, believe that trainers, supervisors and senior English teachers (SETs) share a good relationship in their governorate. This view was supported by some of the authorities, which will be discussed consecutively in the following paragraphs.

To begin with, it appears that not everybody shares good relationships with the other parties, and some are disappointed with these relations, although all of them agreed on the importance and

the necessity of having a strong relationship between them as teacher-educators due to the vital role they play in educating, supporting, mentoring, and providing teachers with the adequate professional development opportunities they need. The following statements by participants explain this point:

“... unfortunately, this is not the case in my region, each group work separately as they are different departments” (Hind (a SET), pg. 3).

“...I guess you noticed that I am not happy about the relationship between these three groups as they are supposed to work in a more professional environment than personal effort...as three of us together, supervision, training and SETs must work together to achieve one thing which is students’ improvements and learning” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 5).

It was explained by some participants that conflicts (or misunderstandings) between these parties and a reluctance to develop good workplace relationships may sometimes be caused by a number of reasons. The first reason, as participants claimed, is the shortage of staff members in any of these groups which causes work overload, and a shortage of time and thus results in a lack of motivation to get in touch with the other groups for updates and cooperation. In support of this argument, Masoud and Shahad stated:

“We...have tried to include the other groups in our planning and future work. However, we felt that the other two groups are disconnected.... I am very disappointed with this kind of relationship between us. We tried to create a homogeneous cooperative group; however, we are faced with their challenges and overload of work.” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 6).

“Yet, due to the loaded schedules of supervisors and therefore their lack of time, most of the challenges haven’t been modelled seriously” (Shahad (a trainer), pg. 4).

Another reason the research findings revealed was the overlap in roles and responsibilities of supervisors and trainers, or sometimes them being unaware of this overlap. To explain this point, Juma an experienced trainer and Sammar, for example, stated:

“Supervisors usually wear the hat of the trainers; designing and conducting training for the teachers which might be conflict of interest and make teachers

frustrated as they do not understand the role of both parties”. (Juma (a trainer), pg. 8).

“they complain of workload and at the same time they fight to deliver a lot of workshops and they conduct a good number training programmes, why are trainers appointed then if supervisors can do this job?” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 5).

In these two quotations, Juma and Samar expressed their feelings regarding the duplication of roles between them as trainers and disapproved the rule that allow supervisors to conduct training courses and programmes. Trainers thought that there is unnecessary duplication of their work, when supervisors, in their side, conduct some in-service training for teachers. Trainers also argued that training is a professional job requiring skillful execution. This means that they are entitled to do the job instead of others as they have received the specialist training required.

Based on my analysis of ‘the criteria of evaluating the performance of supervisors’ throughout the academic year and ‘the job specifications of supervisors and trainers’ documents, it was clear that there is overlap in these roles. Both trainers and supervisors are required to conduct different forms of in-service training. The following excerpt is extracted from the supervisor’s job specification:

“1. Range of professional development skills that will empower self, SETS & teachers, e.g. the ability to conduct effective workshops, seminars, meetings, team teaching, peer observations, unseen observations, small scale classroom-based action research, etc” (End of Year Report on Regional Supervisors Form, pg. 2).

More than that, supervisors share the same role as trainers in designing and organising training materials and events. This is stated as one of the supervisors’ main roles.

“- Participating in defining, preparing and implementing training programs for senior teachers, / teachers of the subject/field and following up its impact” - Participating in defining, preparing and implementing training programs for all the groups he/she supervises” (Subject Supervisor’s job-specifications, pg.1).

Such overlapping in roles and responsibilities between trainers and supervisors may cause conflict among the two groups, although this is not always the case. Some trainers perceive that this overlap between their roles and that of their supervisors has no negative impact on their work or relationships with their counterparts in supervision. One of the trainers clarifies that she has a good relationship with the other supervisors in the region. She cannot remember an incident of a conflict or a problem through her entire work with supervisors. Instead, she is always prepared to provide them with support and consultation when needed in their training. She also encourages her colleagues in supervision to co-train with her. Besides, as far as school visits are concerned as well as conducting training, the same previous trainer claims that her visits to schools run smoothly and successfully. In some cases, she invites teachers' supervisors to join her in these visits.

“Well, I think it's one of the roles of the trainers; I have to see teachers, otherwise my job is useless. If I deliver the courses and then that's all, then what's the benefit? I think we have to be in classes... seeing real practices... I'm not sure whether it is formally one of the roles or not, but I believe it is the most important role: to be in schools, in classes” (Huda (a trainer), pg. 14).

The research findings also revealed that some of the participants have positive views about their professional and workplace relationships shared between these three elements in their regions. Examples of these participants are Zahra and Jufar, who seem satisfied with the relationship shared in their regions by these practitioners as they stated:

“In our region, we have a very strong relationship with supervisors and also senior teachers.” (Zahra (a trainer), pg. 11).

“The relationship between these three groups is very good in my region. For example, when trainers plan a course or workshop, they always keep in touch with supervisors and SETs in order to nominate teachers who are really in need for the training” (Jufar (a supervisor), pg. 4).

In support of this opinion, one of the senior staff members said:

“There is a friendly rapport between supervisors, trainers and senior English teachers in Oman. Supervisors and trainers are playing a major role in equipping

and enabling the senior teachers with adequate strategies and skills regarding teaching and learning aspects” (Hashim (a senior-staff member), pg. 2).

Interestingly, I got two completely opposite views about the relationship shared by these educators from the same region. One possible explanation for this might be that each of these participants is from a different Willayat (town) within the same governorate. Moreover, some of the participants preferred only to describe how important the relationship is between these groups and how it should be, rather than saying the reality of this relationship (or the real situation) in their regions. I did not push these participants to give more detailed information as I understood and felt that they did not want to; I would describe their responses as diplomatic answers.

Additionally, from my research diary, in some regions I noticed that supervisors and SETs have a closer relationship than the one between trainers and SETs. I thought this maybe because most of the supervisors’ work is connected with teachers and schools and part of the supervisors’ job is visiting schools regularly and sitting with SETs (as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3: Contextual Background). However, I thought that the relationship between supervisors and senior teachers (SETs) is more official and therefore would not be so relaxed as supervisors are involved in assessing the SETs and writing their appraisal reports. However, it seems that this is not a reason for not building a friendly and modellable professional relationship between them. On the other hand, I thought that the trainers’ and SETs relationship would be a more relaxed one as the trainers are not involved in appraising SETs’ performance or writing their appraisal reports. However, it seems this might impact negatively on their work together and on their professional relationship, as they would not be in a regular contact with each other. This is what a number of senior teachers (participants in this study) expressed; for example, Ashwaq said “there is a new trainer who she was appointed last year in the region and till now we still didn’t see her” (Ashwaq (a SET), pg. 4). Another colleague of hers, a senior teacher from a different region claimed, “regarding between senior teachers and trainers, there is no such cooperation if there is, I ’haven’t experienced any of it” (Riham (a SET), pg. 3).

Having discussed different examples that show some kinds of workplace relationships shared by trainers, supervisors and senior teachers of English in the Omani educational context, in the

following sub-sections, findings related to *Healthy workplace environment* (with its three categories) and *Supportive leadership* subthemes will be presented and discussed in more detail.

5.2.1 Healthy Workplace Environment

Healthy workplace environment was one of the expressions that was commonly used by at least 15 participants to express their feelings and hopes about the training-supervision professional relationship they need. They believe that healthy workplace environment is one of the elements which build good relationships between employees at workplace and is crucial to improve work productivity, achieve their work objectives and maintain positive outcomes. In support of this point, Samar, and Huda for example, stated:

“...this is of a high important to me, having a healthy work environment between supervisors, trainers and senior teachers is important topic and we should all together focus on” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 9).

“...what we need is a healthy work environment where we all cooperate, work as one team to solve our problems, face challenges together, create innovations think about development and achieving targets. I think maybe the first step is supervision and trainers need to be allocated in one building” (Huda (a trainer), pg. 3).

Considering Huda’s last point regarding the workplace building, she highlighted this issue many times during the interview, as it seems that in some of the governorates’ trainers and supervisors are not based in the same building which may cause difficulties in facilitating meetings, discussions, and so result in not being in a regular contact. The building issue was also raised by other participants and will be discussed in the next chapter.

There are three distinct ideas categorized within the subtheme healthy workplace environment’, namely: cooperation, problem-solving’ and sharing, which will be discussed in the following sections starting with cooperation.

5.2.1.1 Cooperation

Cooperation was one of the common terms which appeared in different parts of the semi-structured interviews data, and the famous expression ‘united we stand, divided we fall’ was a proverb used by several participants to consolidate the positive meaning of collaboration.

Different aspects of collaboration between English-subject teacher educators were discussed with the participants, such as discussing work challenges on team communication channels, arranging meetings and working on tasks, projects and CPD activities and collaborating on shared documents.

Again, two different views the interviews findings showed here. Some participants are satisfied and quite happy with the supervision-training cooperation in their regions and they referred to it as an effective feature of their professional lives. The following quotes by a supervisor and a trainer present this view:

“We cooperate all the time, trainers always give us a hand. We talk to them, they listen, and they are welcoming our needs and taking our points comments very seriously” (Yamin (a supervisor), pg. 3).

“The supervision department, training department and senior teachers cooperate and discuss together the training plan of teachers’ professional development” (Elham (a SET), pg. 2)

On the other hand, some participants had a different image of the kind of cooperation between these three parties in their regions; this point of view was not only mentioned by one group, but, in fact, it was highlighted by different parties in different governorates. The following examples, by a SET, supervisor, and a trainer from different governorates relate to this point:

“Through my experience in supervision, there is little cooperation between the three groups. These three groups never meet together to share their needs, experiences, and challenges..... In fact, I am not happy, not satisfied about such cooperation” (Amal (a supervisor), pg.2).

“...I don’t think that there is a lot of cooperation between these three groups in my region, unfortunately. Each group is working independently..... Cooperation among these three groups yet happens when there are training programmes where supervisors are encouraged by trainers to nominate teachers based on their needs... I wouldn’t call such corresponding as cooperation” (Masoud (a trainer), pgs. 5+6).

Masoud, therefore, is ambitious for more kinds of cooperation with supervisors than only nominating teachers for a training course as he believes that cooperation influences productivity in the workplace and should aim for the success of the organisations. It is worth mentioning that

one of the issues that participants shed light on is the difference between teamwork and group work in relation to cooperation. To clarify this, I utilised Samar's reflection below:

".. they work in groups not in one team, ...for example, those who are from X area working together; they are excellent..., but they are not working with their colleagues who are supervising Y area. ...you know our governorate is a very big region so it's not easy getting all of them to achieve one thing and all these issues, that's why you will see X area's supervisors doing things that are not even communicated to supervisors who are in Y area for example or in Z area" (Samar (a trainer), pg. 5).

Hence, although these supervisors are from one governorate, they work separately in smaller groups within the same region. Samar, as well as other participants, further explains that this happens due to different reasons, such as friendships, gender reasons (males work together and females work together), where they live (nearby areas) and sometimes due to personal ambitions and project innovations. Samar further states below:

".... we don't have that culture of working in (or with) a team, not a group... they're totally two different concepts. They cannot be linked together, working with a team is a culture that must be spread among these three groups. We work together, we don't work for ourselves to shine. No. that's not what we are really here for. We shine together or we don't shine..." (Samar (a trainer), pg. 6).

Although group work is something which we normally encourage, it is seen as a negative thing in this case. As seen by these participants, forming these groups within the same region is not healthy and does not lead to a healthy working environment; instead, it creates negative competition, selfish ambition, conflicts, and a lack of collaboration between colleagues.

Based on the appraisal report of the regional supervisors, cooperation seems to be part of the fifth assessment level:

"5. Level of initiative/cooperation/professionalism/responsibility" (End of Year Report on Regional Supervisors, pg. 2).

This then suggests that cooperation is considered important by supervision authorities as it is stated in the appraisal report, and when I clarified this with one of the supervision senior-staff

member, she indicated that they work to spread the culture of cooperativeness and create such atmosphere amongst staff, supervisors, senior-teachers and teachers in schools. Because such atmosphere link to greater learning, provide experiences that develop both good social and learning skills as staff and teachers give encouragement and support of one another and this will raise the students' achievement in the end, as she reported.

5.2.1.2 Collaborative problem-solving

It appeared that problem-solving was somewhat missing, or in other words was not very common as a skill between the three groups of English-subject teacher-educators at least in two governorates. Masoud, for example, complained that these three groups of English teacher-educators need to sit together to solve their own work-problems and discuss teachers' issues as he stated:

“... unfortunately, they don't bring their issues to an open table to be discussed, explore issues and suggest possibilities.... We hope they include us at least in their discussions of teachers' issues as these kinds of issues enrich our knowledge of teachers' needs” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 7).

Just as Masoud recommended, collaboration in solving problems was also suggested by many participants as a way to build stronger relationship between trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers: as Shahad specified below:

“I think they need to overcome their problems and conflicts first and having a better dialogue helps to be able to maintain their relationship” (Shahad (a trainer), pg. 5).

The majority of participants therefore emphasised that collaborative problems solving is *essential and should be shared between them as English teachers-educators. Because as they noted that they can support and stimulate each other in discussing the issues offered to be discussed and a variety of perspectives and experiences can be applied to try and find solutions.* However, some participants stressed that if this collaboration in solving issues managed poorly it can also quickly lead to communication issues, and hence discussions need to be managed wisely because people who solve problems are less likely to create them.

Although generally there were poor examples of shared problem-solving activity mentioned by participants, Jalal from a different governorate reported.

“For example, some of the supervisors were facing some problems with some teachers, either maybe technical problems or sometimes even administrative problems. As we are now closer to them since we are sharing the same building, they started to consult us, seeking advice and help to solve some problems and we participate” (Jalal (a trainer), pg.7).

Jalal believed that sharing the same building with supervisors’ teacher-educators’ colleagues is an important factor that helped encouraging these colleagues to discuss issues and seek advice, consultation and solutions of different issues amongst themselves.

5.2.1.3 Developing sharing as a habit

To avoid any overlap with the next main theme, workplace communications, this category focused on presenting findings related to participants’ perceptions of ‘sharing’ as an important feature of maintaining good relationships between colleagues. Some participants used the well-known expression, ‘sharing is caring’, to express that sharing plays an important role in building a healthy atmosphere in the workplace. Samar, for example, stated that:

“... regarding training ...we don’t have such culture where somebody wants to work for themselves without sharing or spreading knowledge, the opposite is true.... English training is really very healthy....I hope that one-day training and supervision will be working together like what we are doing now in the training team. We share among each other without thinking that this person has done this” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 9).

Samar appreciates the sharing of knowledge trainers adopt as a genuine practice between them and at the same time she hopes that more sharing of knowledge will take place between trainers and supervisors in her region through having a better relationship. Therefore, Hafsa suggests building sharing as a habit in the following comment:

“...we need to build the habit of ‘sharing’ between us as colleagues, its important I think sharing increases trust between people and hence it strengthens their work and relations at the same time” (Hafsa (a SET), pg.4).

Building the habit of sharing may need the interference and support of the leadership and mentors. Maybe also they need to make it a priority, as it is not enough to dream of sharing for it

to happen by accident between colleagues without guiding or encouragement, especially if people are already overloaded with work. From my experience, I would say if sharing grew as a habit between staff members and colleagues, they will look after and support any new member joining the team without being told to do that.

Moreover, sharing in the workplace does not necessarily mean only sharing knowledge and materials; it can also mean sharing the same workplace building. As addressed by Jalal above, (in 5.2.1.2) supervisors and trainers have recently been sharing the same building in his region, which seems to have helped them to develop better communication. It was notable from my observation notes during the field work in one of the regions that supervisors and trainers do not only share the same building, but interestingly they share the same offices. As Zahra, the trainer claimed, one of the reasons why such a strong relationship between trainers and supervisors has developed in her region is because she insisted on sharing the same office with the supervisors when she was appointed as a trainer and she advised her new trainer colleagues to do the same.

Having discussed the three categories of *Healthy work environment*, which is one of the sub-themes of the main theme ‘Professional and Workplace Relationships’, the next section will discuss its second subtheme.

5.2.2 Calling for supportive and flexible leadership

All participants’ perceptions related to their relationship with their authorities, officials or leadership belong under this subtheme. These include findings related to their leadership’s role in supporting others, organising meetings or facilitating any kind of collaboration (or dialogue) between trainers, supervisors and SETs. Besides the role they play in arranging professional development opportunities, and hence the role they could play in building professional communities within their teacher-education context.

Participants’ perceptions also diverged here, with some participants being a little disappointed about their authority’s roles. Masoud, for example, explained their role with regard to facilitating and encouraging collaboration by saying:

“Their role is negative and there is no supportive leadership structure that might encourages the collaboration among the groups. There are some workshops that advise and highlight the importance of cooperation between training and supervision. Yet, there seems to me no real cooperation apart from nominating teachers for the training programmes and identifying teachers’ needs” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 7).

Masoud, therefore, viewed their role as negative and claimed that some these authorities do not seem to initiate ideas of collaboration between them; as he says, he hoped for more than nominating teachers’ names for training courses. Masoud and Samar also highlighted their opinions with regard to the authorities’ role in facilitating formal and informal meetings between supervisors, trainers and SETs by saying:

“They allow such meetings to happen and of course they are willing to support if they are asked. However, they don’t take initiatives to encourage cooperation and learning from each other. The role is absent” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 4).

“Regarding how are the authorities facilitate these meetings, I have never seen initiative going around however they are well informed about how training is isolated from supervision and all of these issues, management know very well that this is happening but they haven’t done anything yet as far as I know but they do always say we know that this is not right you have to work together but I have never seen or heard them talking to supervision in a way that training must be involved” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 6).

Samar argued that training and supervision were working in isolation from each other and she criticised their leadership for not initiating any meetings to bridge this gap between them, though they were aware of this gap between the two groups in her governorate. While Masoud also talked about their absence of role in initiating collaboration between the two groups. In support of Masoud’s views, Nibras also stated his view of the leaders’ role as follows:

“Their role is not clear, they are in between. The legislations are controlling them. There is a lot of bureaucracy which hinders the flow of the processes. They should find a platform where it is clear the role of each in developing or following up a task. There is random work and no fixed plans to follow through. But there are instantaneous plans appearing out of nowhere” (Nibras (a trainer), pg. 3).

Masoud and Nibras here besides more than half of the participants from the 3 different governorates expressed their hope for a more supportive and flexible leadership which has a clear structure and transparency in encouraging collaboration between the three groups and facilitating the process of their CPDs. They believe that their leadership could play a better role in facilitating talks, meetings, enhance better relationship and more collaboration between the three English groups of teacher-educators. They hoped for a leadership which would help them develop their individual capabilities, but aware of the whole system at the same time, which “do the right things and do things right at the same time.....see the big picture and connect the dots” as the SET Ashwaq (pg. 4) voiced.

On the other hand, few participants appreciated the roles their leadership played in some of the above-mentioned issues. Elham for example claimed:

“they support different kinds of meetings and fund them; they support the training plan of teachers’ and SET’s professional development by organising annual meetings for a committee from both departments including senior teachers to decide what to include in this plan and fund those programmes and supervise them” (Elham (a SET), pg.3).

As illustrated by Elham above, less than 10 participants valued the work of their leadership. They acknowledged the efforts taken by them in organising meetings for them and supporting the training plan. Some of these participants noted that their officials were doing their best to facilitate things and support them, however, their failing or unsuccess in achieving that is due to the system not to their personal efforts.

In summary, the findings under the main theme ‘**professional and workplace relationships**’ outline the mixed attitudes and different perceptions concerning these relationships. The data analysis above revealed a number of factors that affect the professional and workplace relationships of Omani teachers-educators (both negatively or positively). These factors are summarised and illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.



Figure 5.1 Factors affecting Omani English-subject teacher educators' professional relationships, emerging across the three groups of participants.

As presented in Figure 5.2 above, some of these factors are related to cultural issues, such as gender, friendship and living places. Motivation also seems to be another factor; this includes the ambition and competitions of some teacher-educators to get different kinds of promotions from their leadership by initiating work ideas, innovations and projects and neglecting their colleagues. The workplace building itself can be another factor that affects such relationships as it appears that the distance between the workplaces of trainers and supervisors may negatively affect their relationships in terms of connections, meetings and updates. The overlap in roles and responsibilities appeared as another factor besides the authorities' roles, support and encouragement.

Having examined the findings relating to the workplace relationships of the English subject supervisors, trainers, and SETs, the next section presents the findings relating to their workplace communication.

5.3 Workplace communications

Participating trainers, supervisors and SETs reported they interacted within each other through various ways of communications. These included: face-to-face meetings (5.3.1), professional development opportunities (5.3.2), social media applications (5.3.3) and the Ministry of Education official platforms (5.3.4), which are all discussed one by one as subthemes in this section. This main theme covered the different kinds of communication methods used by interviewees in relation to three points: 1- the degree to which they were (or each) used, 2- between which teacher-educators' groups they were used, and 3-how effective they were as means of communications.

The following (positive) quote by one of the participants, Elham, described all these different methods of communication as she described the situation in her governorate:

“Oh yeah, I think trainers, supervisors and senior teachers are a good powerful team in my region. We meet together we communicate easily and collaboratively and smoothly using many different ways of communications for example ... social media we present and share achievements in social media like Facebook twitter and Instagram ... we have WhatsApp groups for any urgent discussions or updates. Even sometimes we also share documents through even the MoE platforms we are using them sometimes to communicate and share documents” (Elham (a SET), pg. 7).

Although Elham, listed all these types of communications in her interview, just as other participants did, there seems to be disagreement between these colleagues of teacher-educators as regard the three points mentioned above; who is involved, the quantity and the effectiveness of these tools in communicating, as we will see as we go through them one by one in the following sections.

5.3.1 Meetings

Trainers and supervisors from the three governorates explained that they generally conduct regular regional meetings for their groups within their governorates, in which they discuss daily basis work-related issues, plans and updates. Additionally, in one of the regions, participants also highlighted that Senior English Teachers (SETs) from Basic Education schools (BE) and

supervisors meet with trainers infrequently during the school year to discuss different issues, for example, teachers' CPD needs, action plans and how to support teachers and learners.

With regard to wider meetings, it also seems that some of these teachers-educators groups conduct formal meetings annually (or per semester) to discuss different issues related to their CPD, teachers' CPD, any updates from their authorities, or to discuss circulars and important decrees. For training department, for example, they claimed that all English subject trainers from all the governorates conduct a meeting each semester in which they provide work updates and share experiences. Zahra and Masoud describe these meetings below:

“... we discuss these in the meetings we share ideas, we share challenges, solutions. We support each other.... Yes, two meetings yearly are enough because our meetings are usually not 1 day. Usually, it goes for 3 days...” (Zahra (a trainer). pg. 5).

“I feel our meetings are always effective and fruitful. The work is divided among us, and there are opportunities to mingle and co-train with each other.” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 2)

Regarding training-supervision' meetings, which in theory should be as important as each group's meetings. It appeared that these meetings differ from governorate to another in quantity and quality. Zahra, as a trainer, described below the situation regarding training-supervision meetings in her region:

“Yes, I attend all supervision formal meetings.... in every meeting...there are about 15 minutes for the trainers (and this is a rule in the region) to present whatever new we have as trainers, or to say something about our training, our job - to advertise ourselves, to advertise our programmes.” (Zahra (a trainer), pg.15).

Therefore, this was a positive example of training-supervision meetings, where trainers are involved and welcomed in supervisions-meetings, and they are given the opportunity to speak and express their views. On the other hand, Samar, another trainer but from a different governorate, had a negative opinion regarding such meetings:

“Regarding meetings and discussions among training and supervision, in my region we always push to have meetings with them otherwise if we don’t, we are never informed about anything that goes on in the supervision department at all..... just as I told you we know only by accident, however when it comes to training whatever is new we push all the time we send to the supervisors to be informed, regarding training programmes, new programs to be delivered soon and we discuss with them what happened what programmes what evaluation we have got we do have also the training needs before the start of every year we do send the senior supervisors to pass to all the supervisors and SETs” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 10).

Samar, therefore, complained here that the training section (team) was not being involved in supervisions’ gatherings in their governorate or even informed about their updates, though they insist on updating the other group about training plans. In explaining a possible reason behind this, Nibras who is from another governorate but had the same frustration regarding trainers-supervisors’ gatherings, explained that ‘there is a mess and chaos’ - as he described- in organising the two supervision and training departments; besides confusion in understanding each department job. And because there is no clear vision within these departments, he stated “the connection between the departments was not set as a priority for the responsible officials; their role is absent” (Nibras (a trainer), pg. 3). As a result, most of the connections and meetings made between the trainers and supervisors from these two departments appear to have been set as personal initiatives, as suggested by at least 7 participants from two governorates.

In conclusion, two-thirds of participants were not happy about the quantity of meetings between trainers, supervisors and senior-teachers, neither happy about the facilitation of meetings and connections between them. However, this cannot be generalised to the other governorates as the findings showed an opposite example presents satisfaction of training team attending supervisions’ meetings, which is Zahra’s governorate as is stated earlier.

5.3.2 Professional developments opportunities

This subtheme focused on presenting findings related to the kinds of Professional Development (PD) opportunities offered to teacher-educators by the MoE, their perceptions of these events and the reasons why these are counted as ways of communication between the targeted groups.

Apart from meetings, most participants see that Continuous Professional Development CPD' activities and events, like for example, conferences and forums, are great opportunities for communication and professional dialogues, discussions and talks with their fellow teachers-educators who are responsible for the CPDs of teachers in Oman. The majority of the interview respondents highlighted the role of these CPD events in meeting their colleagues and friends, sharing experiences and knowledge with them and being key opportunities for networking and meeting people from their field. Faris supported this point:

“Such as ELT Conferences like SQU one for example, is really brilliant place for networking you know to get to know other people from your field, I met a number of supervisors and also trainers from different regions which I don't know before meeting them in this conference, and we are still in touch from time to time” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 5).

Faris here shares his experience of benefiting from attending ELT conferences in general and provided the example of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Annual English Language Teaching Conference (SQU ELT conference). This conference has been organised annually by the Language Centre of the University since 2001. Theories and practices of ELT related to the Omani context are discussed and it “provides excellent opportunities for sharing ideas, experiences and best practices in different areas of English Language Teaching” (SQU ELT, 2020: 1). The Ministry of Education used to provide opportunities for professionals of English language teaching including teachers and their educators to attend this conference. It also encourages these professionals from all the governorates to attend as presenters not only attendees, and therefore, it used to fund a good number of places (presenters and attendees) for this conference. However, the number of funded places has been greatly reduced in the last five years due to financial issues.

Participants appreciate such events, and benefit from hearing about the latest research in their field, discussing and refining their ideas, gaining new knowledge, and being updated with the latest educational methods and techniques. Shamsa, for example, highlighted:

“...the more professional development opportunities provided by the MoE the more we communicate, meet with colleagues and the more we benefit...” (Shamsa (a supervisor), pg. 4)

As a matter of fact, a number of participants also complained about the absence of the ELT conferences, forums and other regional professional development gathering events and activities that the MoE used to arrange and run annually in different governorates of Oman and some especially in Muscat (the capital of Oman). It is also apparent that some of these events had stopped in some of the regions for different reasons, such as financial restraints, as in response to the international financial crisis, the government unveiled a tough budget for 2009 and the years after, which affected the budget of the MoE and resulted in cutting a number of training courses and programmes (Oman Daily Observer, 2020). Besides, the shortage of staff (especially the shortage of English supervision) and CPD events being prioritised by the regions (i.e. governorates offer the courses or the events being regarded as more important than others). The participants who mentioned these learning events, declared that they were great opportunities for gathering professionals, educators and subject teachers to connect, meet up and share knowledge and experiences. Examples of these events which had already stopped and were mentioned specifically by participants included:

- Conference of English Teachers and Supervisors: This was a three-day annual national conference which usually took place in Muscat and used to provide an opportunity for the MoE English language professionals, teacher-educators and many teachers from all over the Sultanate to participate through presentations, papers, workshops, discussions, debates and posters.
- Regional Conferences of English Teachers and Supervisors. These used to be organised in each region at different times throughout the year, which used to provide another opportunity for professionals/teacher-educators and teachers to meet, share experiences and more importantly present papers.
- Muscat English Senior-teachers and Teachers Yearly Forum. This forum used to be organised in the Muscat region and was organised by English supervisors. It also provided opportunities for senior teachers and teachers to present their new projects and innovations and meet their colleagues.

As just mentioned, these events were usually attended by Omani trainers, training specialists, English teachers, senior teachers and supervisors, in addition to some international experts and guest speakers at some of them. Participants highlighted that these conferences played an important role in gathering them as English-subject teacher-educators together where they shared experiences, skills and knowledge. More importantly, as a good number of them attended as presenters and speakers, they believed that this also appeared to have helped to build their confidence and develop their presentation and communication skills. Therefore, stopping all such events had affected them in one way or another as English teaching professionals and affected their professional development to a significant extent.

A certain budget from the MoE is assigned to each governorate for their CPD plan and the process is supposed to be conducted in a decentralised way (in the governorates). This means each governorate should assign a team of their professionals from the field of different subjects to decide on the training programmes and courses which suit their needs. This process is conducted before every financial year and followed up by staff from the MoE through Qualification and Training department which is responsible for this. However, five of the more experienced interviewees observed in the past, the CPD plan of the whole Sultanate's governorates was conducted centrally in Muscat (the capital); organized by qualification and training department and different professionals from all the governorates and the MoE central departments, like training, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, and supervision. All the people were gathered centrally and used to be divided into groups to decide on the training programmes, courses and CPD events centrally (for the MoE admin staff and professionals) and de-centrally (for the governorates admin-staff and professionals).

This change in the process of CPD plan seems to have caused a level of isolation between some of the targeted groups (teacher-educators) in some regions. However, this is not a general fact as the situation also seems different in other governorates. To clarify this point, Masoud describes the issue in his region below:

“But for the professional development, each department works independently from the others. We don’t even know the professional training development for supervisors” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 5).

I think this issue Masoud just raised can be addressed by Samar’s suggestion below:

“The stakeholders can take part in supporting the professional development between teacher trainer, supervisors and senior teachers through providing clear schedules and year plan of the training programs, also through early financial approval of these programs” (Samar (a trainer), pg.4).

Samar here provided two different suggestions. The first is to provide clear schedules and a year plan of the training programmes as this will help to make all the different programmes planned clear to everyone with some level of detail to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation, for example, the targeted participants and the programme content. Consequently, everybody will be able to consider the timing of the courses. In my experience, this kind of cooperation between work-related departments it used to happen between curriculum, training, supervision and assessment departments. Some spaces/course places in their programmes were left to enable participants from these departments to attend their programmes depending on the content being delivered. The other fact about the CPD plan is that in a few cases, some approved programs sometimes had to be cancelled for different reasons, for example, issues related to the department proposing the programme or issues related to the international expert trainer who planned to conduct the programme. Such cancellations and changes to the programmes could cause a delay in the financial process approval, which is the issue that Samar referred to in her second suggestion.

Having discussed the findings related to professional development opportunities as an effective way of communication between teacher-educators, further findings about another means of communication, namely ‘social media networking, will be discussed next.

5.3.3 Social media networking

It seems that social-media applications, (as mentioned earlier by Elham in the introduction of 5.3) also played a key role as means of communication between teachers- educators within the

Omani educational context. This subtheme, therefore, focused on presenting all the findings related to participants' perceptions and comments concerning this issue. The findings revealed that although Omani teacher-educators make use of the social networks (especially WhatsApp) as means of communication and interaction with each other, they encounter barriers with these Apps which hinder *the smooth flow of communication*.

First of all, it appears that Omani teacher-educators do use different kinds of social-media applications to communicate with each other, as the vast majority of participants described them as efficient ways of sharing content quickly and effectively. The popular ones were those listed earlier by Elham (5.3: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and WhatsApp). Riham below also described her viewpoint about these applications:

“...this was facilitated by the social media... we have WhatsApp groups, twitter and Instagram official accounts...these applications facilitated our communication, we easily can contact our colleagues ... we also try to post useful things in our official accounts as these can be seen also by worldwide people” (Riham (a SET), pg. 6).

Moreover, it appeared that WhatsApp is by far the most popular social media application that is used between trainers, supervisors and senior teachers (sometimes even including parents), either within each group or across groups and regions. As Amal and Qabas explained below:

“There is WhatsApp female group for the three-groups headed by the senior supervisors to share the updates. There is WhatsApp male group for the three-groups headed by the senior supervisors to share the updates” (Amal (a supervisor), Pg. 2).

“You could find WhatsApp groups for jolly phonics which involves teachers, parents and supervisors from all the Sultanate. Not sophisticated but learning and sharing is happening” (Qabas (a SET), pg. 4).

The vast majority of participants stated that they use this application because it is efficient, practical, flexible and an easy access programme for discussing issues, sending updates, asking questions, solving problems, learning information, requesting materials and sharing documents (e.g. word or pdf files, pictures and links). It is apparent that that these participants even have

more than one work-related WhatsApp group shared by different members of professional educators. With reference to social media, Masoud, for example, describes trainers' WhatsApp groups by saying:

“Trainers created about 3 WhatsApp groups, one big group accommodating all trainers (males and females), the second group for males and a third group for females. We should acknowledge the traditional and principles of our society. The main big WhatsApp group is used for sharing the learning experiences, knowledge, works, announcements, and anything relate to the official work. However, the small groups are used to share personal things to comfort each other and sympathies with each other which of course helps to build strong relationships” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 1+2).

On the other hand, in addition to the above-mentioned positive results regarding the use of social networking between English subject teacher-educators, participants reported several negative issues with regard using these social media applications which seems negatively affected the smooth flow of communication. For example, Samar, who is one of the senior-staff members, claimed that activating WhatsApp use during the work-hours' time requires high level of responsibility to follow all the correspondence from different people enquiring issues from different governorates. Which sometimes could take whole days of her time as she claimed. Nine participants also noted that using WhatsApp groups causing chaos in discussing educational issues because of the intensive messages and the time-consuming interaction features that may return as negative effects and eye exhaustion as a result of long-time use over mobile phones. And on the other hand, some people included in these WhatsApp groups do not usually participate in the discussions; and are not always ready at the agreed WhatsApp meeting times. Some supervisors also mentioned that, for example, an effective learning process within WhatsApp groups may be affected negatively when an active discussion is interrupted (or slowed down) because of the delays in communication or broken in the internet connection. They claimed that the internet is not always easily accessible for effective use of these applications, as they faced such situations during effective learning discussions they arranged for teachers.

To conclude, it seems that social media networking was one of the most flexible means of communication for English teacher-educators that mainly used the majority of them. However, it was reported that although the use of social networking has many positive effects, it also

employs some negative aspects and effects. The next section discusses MoE communication platforms used by the participants.

5.3.4 Ministry of Education platforms

This subtheme focused on presenting all the findings related to participants' perceptions and comments with regard to the 'MoE platforms': what are they, their uses and most importantly their role as a way of interacting and sharing between the research-targeted English teacher educators. It appeared that although the MoE was providing a number of technological online platforms, very small number of participants teacher-educators make use of these platforms as means of communication and senior-staff members highly recommending activating these for learning and interaction.

The Ministry of Education has implemented a number of technical and innovative projects that promote the use of technology in the field of education in the Sultanate (Oman Observer, 2018; 1). It utilises and provides a comprehensive set of technological online platforms for all the ministry employees to use for different purposes. Some of these are interactive ones, such as the social media applications, for example "Yammer", which is used between the MoE employees for interactive discussions related to different educational issues, as well as connecting, and communicating with different people across the MoE. Riham, and Elham for example, claimed:

"We were encouraged by the head of the department to sign for the MoE Yammer, we did, I think it is useful, I sometimes participate in discussing different issues with colleagues from different subjects" (Riham (a SET), pg. 6).

"...actually, for example Yammer a lot of educators are participating in discussions there and sharing their experiences and ideas" (Elham (a SET), pg. 7).

Another application the MoE provided is Moodle, which is an interactive learning programme that can be used in different ways, for example blogging, chatting, messaging, short tests and quizzes. In fact, from my own experience, the IT trainers in the main training center are making effective use of this programme when delivering training sessions as it enables the trainees to interact easily with the trainers, uploading and downloading their files, documents, and projects.

In the English language teaching field, we have also made use of this application for the Jolly-phonics project, in cooperation with a curriculum advisor. Elham highlighted below:

“Yes, that’s right, we experienced Moodle in Shared reading, it is really wonderful experience. It’s easy and friendly we used from our mobile phones; it’s good for interaction, imagine it facilitated the learning and communication between all the shared reading groups from all the sultanates governorates” (Elham (a SET), pg. 7)

Other platforms are to share documents and files like the MoE OneDrive, and there is also the MoE portal, which is in itself a huge educational achievement. It is described as:

“An electronic portal regarded a true leap jump in the educational field, and it aims on one hand to connect schools and school districts automatically to the Ministry and on the other hand to provide electronic services to students and parents that increases their interaction with the school, teachers and school district. In addition to the advantages of electronic education and electronic training that aims to achieve quality education and high-impact and effective use of tools which is highly modern and distinguished” (MoE, Portal, Pg. 1).

It is apparent that the MoE authorities encourage all their staff including trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers to use these platforms. In support of this point, one of the senior members of the MoE stated:

“Nowadays trainers, supervisors and senior teachers do have private WhatsApp, Facebook groups to discuss issues related to coaching and mentoring, teaching and learning and sharing best practices of teaching. However, we need them to make a good use of the Ministry of Education online platforms like “Yammer” or the OneDrive programme to share documents or to do online debate via Yammer platform. Recently the MoE in Oman start online video conference where trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers can conduct online training, debate regarding teaching and learning aspects” (Hashim (a senior-staff member), pg. 3).

Moreover, relating to the CoPs model and thoughts of implanting it within the Omani educational context, one of the participants suggested:

“...to make it even better and easier, why don’t we make it a virtual community and use one of the MoE e-platforms like Moodle, for example. It will be more

convenient to everybody I think, and big number of people can be involved and learn” (Hafsa (a SET), pg. 9).

As presented in this section, a good number of participants shed light on the importance of activating the MoE platforms as a means of communication and interaction, as well as using its effective tools for sharing knowledge, experiences, materials and documents.

In summary, although participants declared using plenty of communication tools, the findings proved that not all of these were used effectively (or appropriately enough) between the three groups of interviewees. The next section discusses the findings related to Omani PLCs.

5.4 Omani Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

This main theme covered the findings related to the recent implementation of Professional Learning Communities in the Omani Educational context; including the benefits of this experience (in 5.4.1) and the challenges interviewees faced during the process of PLC implementation (in 5.4.2).

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, the concept of ‘Professional Learning Communities’ (DuFour, 2004) and its culture was familiar to the Omani supervisors, some SETs and trainers. This was due to a training programme conducted by the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers, which began operating in 2014 (please see chapter 2.6- for more information about this centre). This training programme is called the ‘Supervision Experts Programme’ and it targets supervisors of all different specialisations (or subjects) and it is taught in Arabic language. One of the main aims of this programme is to form professional learning communities that are able to develop practices and maintain them in the future (the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers, 2018). The implementation of building professional learning communities occurs in the last stage of this programme, which started in the academic year 2016/2017 for the first cohort of supervisors. As one of the senior-staff members stated: *“In 2014 we started training on the programme but building the real communities I mean PLCs only started in 2016”* (Siham, (a senior staff member) pg.2).

About 17 of my participants out of the total number of 36 across three different regions were those targeted to participate as trainees in this ‘Supervision Experts Programme’. Table 5.2. below presents the division of these participants across the three regions.

Governorates	Male	Female	Total
Governorate-1	2	6	8
Governorate-2	1	5	6
Governorate-3	-	3	3
			17

Table 5.2 The number of participants attended the supervision-experts programme

Two of these participants presented in Table 5.2. above were trainers who delivered the programme for the trainees-supervisors (in this programme), while 3 participants were senior teachers of English who were involved in the professional learning communities created by their supervisors. And the remaining 13 participants were supervisors of English, who were trainees and created the professional learning communities as a task they had to do to pass this training programme and get the certificate. I deliberately decided recruiting some of these participants to be involved in my study as when I was enlightened about this programme. I was keen to know their experience in being involved in such communities. However, some of these participants I know in person, and I invited them to be involved as participants in my study even before knowing that they were also involved in this training course.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, for my study I only involved supervisors of English, as the target group of my participants are professionals of English subject specifically. My interview questions with these participants were divided into two parts. In the first part I concentrated on their experience and the whole story of creating and building professional learning communities for this programme. While in the second part of the interviews and as with the other participants who are involved in my study (and are not involved in this course), I explored with them the relationship between Omani supervisors, trainers and senior teachers in their regions, how they work together as groups within and across each other and then I focused on their views and perceptions of the idea of building professional communities between educators and explaining

the Communities of Practice (CoPs) as another model, which is also similar to the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that they experienced through this training course (please see above in Chapter 3: Literature Review. 3.4 for the comparison of the similarities and differences between PLCs and CoPs.

The interviews' findings of this study showed that the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which were formed for the purpose of passing a training course (and write a 5000-word assignment about it) (see Appendix 16), involved different kinds/groups of educators in each governorate. These are: starting with senior supervisors, supervisors, senior teachers, teachers, head teachers and some principals and some schools' admin/staff. However, the involvement of all these different educators in PLCs differed in different schools and governorates depending on the supervisors' decisions and circumstances of these people at that time. One of the participants even mentioned that they also included some parents to help follow up students (their children) at home. However, the interviews clarified that the only group of English-subject teacher-educators that are not involved in the PLCs formed in the governorates are the regional Omani trainers, even in those regions where the supervisors and trainers have a good relationship.

When I also asked these participants about the existence of the PLCs being formed: whether they were still existing or not. And whether the supervisors were still following them up after the programme had finished, and after the trainees' supervisors had submitted their assignments and received their certificates. Contrary to my expectations, the participants' responses differed. Some of them claimed that the communities were still existing; SETs were continuing their work with PLCs and their supervisors were still following them. Dalal, one of the senior-staff members who also participated in delivering the training programme, was very confident about this issue, and stated:

“Yes, but the success they achieved convinced them with the of PLCs idea itself, the main prove for this is that they are still continuing these PLCs though the programme is already finished and completed but they are still transferring the culture of the PLCs” (Dalal (a senior staff member), pg. 2+3).

Two of the participants claimed that these PLCs were still existing, however, they were slightly different due to other duties and challenges, such as administrative tasks, distances between the different schools and the overloaded schedules of SETs and teachers. This means that they were not following up these PLCs regularly as the same way they were doing that when these PLCs were formed, but they were still encouraging teachers to continue working in these PLCs. Jamal and Faris for example, stated:

“Still continued but in different way.... we still practice it in individual schools where we encouraged all teachers to participate to construct meaningful groups” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 6).

“It is still but in other way... we encouraged teachers to do it in their schools whenever they faced low performance in any particular skill” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 5).

On the other hand, 8 participants claimed that they stopped the communities completely at the end of the programme, again for similar reasons mentioned earlier: for example, doing it only for the purpose of the training course, different schools’ distributions, heavy workload, and other related commitments. In relation to this, the following participants stated:

“Unfortunately, no we stopped due to some other commitments each member has” (Jufar (a supervisor), pg. 3).

“No, we stopped it. It finished because we applied it only for the specialised center course and when the course finished, we stopped following the communities” (Manar (a supervisor), pg. 3).

“I have no idea. As I stopped tracking their progress; unfortunately, I was promoted to admin post. This could be the reason” (Karima (a supervisor), pg. 2).

To summarise this part, therefore, not all the PLCs formed managed to survive after the training course; while some persisted effectively, others stopped due to different work and personal commitments.

Having provided an overview of these Omani professional learning communities, the following section discusses the benefits gained as reported by the members of these communities.

5.4.1 The benefits of Omani PLCs experience

The findings showed that more than half of these PLCs participants that I interviewed were very positive about building these professional communities in their regions as part of this programme. The following quotes by participants are examples which support this point:

“... I personally appreciated working in these professional learning communities and felt that almost all team members were enjoying what they were doing” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 1).

“... I believe that various advantages gained from this project...because it was a practical project and aimed to solve problems and improve teaching and learning” (Faris (a supervisor), pg.3).

“... I was really excited because the people involved in this project were hardworking and my friends at the same time” (Riham (a SET), pg. 2).

From my notes of the facial expressions and body language of these participants during the semi-structured interviews, it was obvious to me that they were enthusiastic when they were describing their experience of building these professional learning communities and the efforts they have made to create and build these communities as well as the work they have done to make them successful communities. Most of the participants described the PLCs that they created as ‘successful communities’ though it was done to pass a training course. Faris and Jufar for example said:

“I think the community was successful. The implementation of PLC was one of the greatest successes as different teachers from different schools have a vision and sought collaboratively day to day to achieve it” (Faris (a supervisor), pg.5).

“Personally, I think it was successful because it has observable impact on some teachers” (Jufar (a supervisor), pg. 3).

The participants, in fact listed a number of important benefits they gained from this PLCs experience. I categorised and divided all these benefits into three main parts according to the people who gained from the experience as presented in Figure 5.3 below

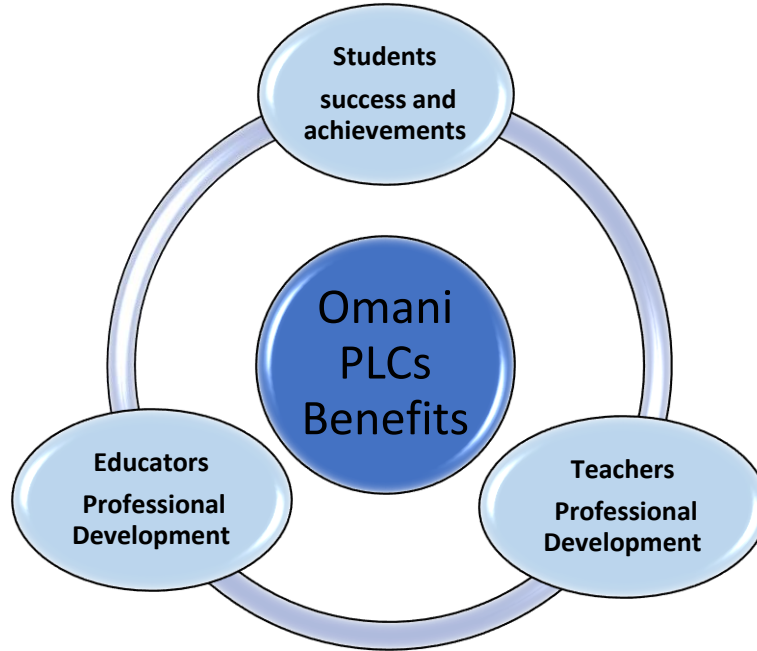


Figure 5.2 Main reported benefits of Omani Professional Learning Communities as categorised from the interview data

As can be seen from Figure 5.3, students, teachers and the teacher-educators themselves appear to have benefited from the PLC experience as they claimed in the interview data. All these benefits will be discussed in detail in the three following sub-sections starting with students' achievements.

5.4.1.1 Students' success and achievements

The main focus of these PLCs, as described by participants, was identifying students' weaknesses or the most important areas for development, and then implementing a number of teaching techniques and activities, such as colour coding strategy, narration of events and stories, introducing structured activities, and filling the gaps tasks (please see Appendix 14 for some examples of these activities). These activities were given to the students over a period of time to overcome their weaknesses and improve their achievements. The students were at different ages depending on the level of schools that the supervisors chose to form their PLCs with, either Cycle 1 (primary), Cycle 2 (preparatory) or post-basic (secondary schools).

The process included a pre-test to measure and evaluate the students' level (of reading and writing skills for example). Then planning, designing and applying teaching techniques and developmental activities on their students depending on the weakness or students' needs. The result of this test was analysed and transmitted into charts by schools to help find similarities and differences later. Then, a support plan was set up using plenty of developmental and additional support tasks and more teaching practices at each level. During this period and process there are a number of observations and follow-up procedures conducted by the PLCs teams. Finally, a post-test is applied as an important tool to evaluate the learning outcomes with the intention of comparing post-support plan practice and activities with performance prior to the plan. This was the process conducted by all the participants I interviewed; the differences were only with the type of students' weakness they diagnosed within the schools they chose to form their PLCs with and the strategies conducted to overcome these students' weakness. For the course purpose (and the assignment requirements), supervisors' trainees need to prove the development in their students' level and their learning progress. Therefore, each supervisors had to prove this by bringing their students' marks (again depending on the level of schools they chose – Cycle 1, 2 or post-basic) before and after the PLCs, either from their observations and students' results, or from the MoE Portal (through screen shots of the students' marks from the portal).

The vast majority of the participants agreed that forming these communities and the work they have done throughout to solve students' problems and weaknesses has impacted positively on the students' achievements. Some examples are presented in the following quotations by participants:

“Yes, we assessed the students with a reading text with open questions words. There was a change with excellent students' performance” (Qabas (a SET), pg. 3).

“The progress of students in writing more effective narratives showed another significant achievement of our professional learning community.... Yeah, really, I think PLCs is one the most important strategy for improving students and teachers performance in schools.” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 5+6).

These two participants, therefore, targeted improvements in two different skills, reading and writing, while others also focused on different areas of developments. The PLCs appeared to not

only have impacted positively on students' achievements, but also developed teachers professionally, as participants reported which will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.1.2 Teachers' professional development

Many of the participants pointed out that the teachers involved in these PLCs benefited from this experience, which has served them as well as the students in terms of all the activities and the events done at schools. Going through these benefits, firstly, as claimed by participants, it developed their teaching skills and practices as a noticeable change in their teaching performance was observed. The following participants, for example, agreed on this:

“...as observed, their teaching experience have been developed when they start planning lessons, observing, and conducting discussion sessions to develop better teaching techniques. In peer observation for instance, their focus has turned in students themselves rather criticising their colleagues” (Laila (a supervisor), pg. 3).

“...one of the successes is the significant change in teacher's practice. Teachers started using interesting activities' suitable to the learners' need which increased the learners' participation” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 6).

“I still see the effects of the project with some of my teachers when they teach reading. It's thrilling” (Qabas (a SET), pg. 3).

These PLCs also enhanced collaboration, teamwork and cooperation between teachers within the same schools and other schools as they are involved in the same PLC. This was stated as follows:

“One successful aspect is collaboration among our teachers to work together to improve teaching practice including looking at student work, analysing dilemmas of practice, and assessing the value of lessons” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 5).

“The PLC has provided the chance for teachers to conduct more professional face to face development activities at their schools in more cooperative teams” (Laila (a supervisor), pg. 3).

Participants also mentioned that some teachers and schools even started to put some of their PLCs' events and activities in their official and formal accounts in Twitter and Facebook and

some put these in the English Forum in the MoE Portal, which is also the official site. More benefits of the Omani PLCs are discussed below.

5.4.1.3 Teacher-educators' professional development

According to the vast majority of my targeted participants, building PLCs (even though it was a task for a training course) impacted positively and professionally on them as educators of English teachers and they gained many benefits. Firstly, more than half of these participants agreed that being involved in these PLCs (either as a leader or a member) developed their teamwork skills, as stated below by some participants:

“...we benefited a lot I think, for example, working in teams and engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning were beneficial for me...” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 1+2).

“I believe it enhanced my teamwork skills as well...” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 2).

Hence, these participants believe that working in these teams resulted in developing their leadership skills as well, as added by Heba and Reem:

“... I have built a good team, and this gives me confidence of being a leader. I also become more responsible, organizer, time manager, cooperative and determined” (Heba (a SET), pg.2).

“... taught me how be a good leader, assign roles and tasks and work under pressure...” (Reem (a SET), pg. 1).

In addition, some participants believe that the PLCs project also developed their different research skills as stated by Faris below:

“This project expanded my knowledge and understanding as I had to read many books and articles. I think it also developed my critical thinking and analytical skills by reviewing and analyzing literature related to my research topic and taught me how to manage the time” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 2).

Besides these benefits, participants also revealed that PLCs made them experience changing convictions, negative beliefs and attitudes, as stated below by Jamal:

“Experiencing how to persuade others, changing negative beliefs, designing alliance, establishing vision, missions and aims with several educators and different schools were challenging and stimulating methods” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 2).

Finally, experiencing how to build a PLC is seen as a benefit itself by some participants.

“Was a good chance for me and one of the great opportunities for me and we learned many things,but the main thing was how to build professional learning communities in the schools” (Reem (a SET), pg. 1).

I have presented an overview of some of the benefits that Omani PLCs practitioners gained as members of PLCs. Briefly these benefits include working cooperatively in teams, persuading others and changing their negative beliefs, developing leadership skills, critical thinking, and analytical skills. The next section will go through the challenges faced by these participants.

5.4.2 The Challenges of the Omani PLCs experience

The supervisors and senior teachers involved in this PLCs’ experience claimed to have faced several challenges during the implementation process of the PLCs. In fact, 6 participants did not express any negative nor positive satisfaction of the PLCs experience; but they reported the challenges they faced in this course and in creating the PLCs, right at the beginning of the interviews, which gave me an indication that it was a tough experience for them, rather than an enjoyable one. These challenges were related to issues such as the high load of work they had to do against the limited time, lack of resources and materials provided by the training center and by the schools in terms of stationaries, and some faced lack of cooperation from their colleagues. I discuss these challenges in this section below, besides one main challenge, which is ‘changing trainees or teachers’ negative beliefs and attitudes, which I discuss separately in 5.4.2.1 as this counted as a major challenge by nearly all the PLCs participants.

Firstly, participants highlighted the huge amount of work they had to do in creating PLCs in addition to their own commitments and other work activities. Workload was also indicated as a key challenge by almost all respondents. They explained that they were under pressure because of the course demands (readings, assignments, and tasks) as well as their schools' or the communities' demands (requests, negotiations, convening and solving problems). As mentioned previously, some participants explained the reasons behind stopping the PLCs after the course finished were their work commitments and heavy workload

Some participants also explained that since these PLCs were like a new CPD strategy for all candidates, unfortunately, they were implemented incorrectly in some of their schools. They added to an already heavy teacher workload, demotivating these schoolteachers and failing to make any difference to pupils' outcomes. Other participants complained about the lack of cooperation from their colleagues' supervisors of the same region who they are supposed to work with; therefore, they had to work alone by forming PLCs with their own schools (i.e., schools that they are supervising). These participants believe that whether this lack of cooperation is due to competition or limited time, it affected their productivity in one way or another.

There are also some general issues mentioned by participants, such as the duration, the timing of the training course and the PLCs induction workshop were all insufficient as the timing was not suitable for some participants and the duration of the course and the workshops were not enough compared with the content. Laila, stated below:

“We have taken a module called PLC in Arabic language. The topic was covered in a two days' workshop, which I personally believe that the time duration was not enough to fully understand a complex concept as we were asked to undertake an intensive case study which took us a two months period to carry out for five different schools. Unfortunately, we were overloaded at the time. Yes, the instructions were given, however things were not clear enough for us” (Laila (a supervisor), Pg. 2).

This would explain that maybe the timing of the programme itself was not that suitable for some of the participants and building the communities was also tied to a tight deadline, which means that the timing was not that flexible for them as it linked to the training programme. More

importantly, they had to deal with the very limited materials, references and reading resources, which all caused difficulties for some participants. Manar below picked up on the resources issue:

“As the first step was to gather more information about the topic, we have clearly noticed that the relevant recourses and literature reviews were limited and outdated where I personally couldn’t find any books at the libraries here... Thus, I had to go for online resources which were generally a limited collection of secondary data such as articles and some YouTube videos” (Manar (a supervisor), pg. 4).

Despite all the above-mentioned obstacles, most of the PLCs participants thought that they experienced a beneficial learning experience in which they learned how to think of solutions to overcome these challenges. Laila in her quote below provided the keys to better implementation of PLCs again in the future:

“In order to get a better result in PLC teachers need to be re-introduced to the process of doing PLC. Training workshops attached with training videos from YouTube website for example and well detailed newsletters that will detail the model of doing PLC. Supervisors themselves need to believe with the benefits of PLC and provide the continuous support and follow up for their teachers” (Laila (a supervisor), pg.5).

Laila, therefore, considered teachers as important elements for the success of PLCs; they need to fully understand the process of forming PLCs through proper training and orientation. Additionally, as the literature resources and materials were important issue, Laila strongly believed that their availability can make a difference in the success of PLCs. Finally, the last point in her speech is related to changing beliefs and attitudes, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.2.1 Changing trainees’ and teachers’ negative beliefs and attitudes

I decided to discuss this challenge separately in this section as the vast majority of the participants described it as an important skill and a challenge at the same time. Siham, one of the senior-staff members, and Jamal, one of the most experienced supervisors, explained this challenge as follows:

“So, they didn’t just start like this.... they needed first to convince the schools, changing convictions and negative beliefs and attitudes towards the idea; and it was a hard job I believe. So, they first choose the schools, then they choose a person or a team from the school to work with.... these people to help them transfer the idea to the schools and teachers; convince them with the idea and help them changing the negative attitudes of the schoolteachers” (Siham (a senior staff member), pg. 4).

“Another difficulty was in convincing teachers in each school to work together as a PLC, we suffered as a team to help schools. Changing teachers’ attitudes to accept change and development also was one of the difficulties” (Jamal (a supervisor), pg. 10).

According to the trainers who participated in writing the course content, they had anticipated this challenge during the planning stage of writing the materials as they have background experience of working with teachers and supervisors in the field. They explained that they had to read about and considered 4 models of changing convictions, since PLCs was a new model. It required persuading the field about it and changing their negative attitudes and beliefs to make it a successful experience. Out of these four models of change they decided to adopt the ADKAR model (illustrated in Diagram 5.4) as these trainers claimed that this model is used in business and best suits their planning.

“Because this is a new idea this PLCs, and to make it succeed in the field we thought it needs changing attitudes and believes to convince the field about it, so we thought we need to read about the models of changing, or changing believes and attitudes, we studied about 4 models of change, Kotter’s model, Kurt Lewin’s model, ADKAR Model and Anderson and Anderson’s model. We took them, we read them, but we only used one model, which is ADKAR Model, because it was used in business. So, we built PLCs with ADKAR Model” (Dalal (a senior staff member), pg. 2-3).

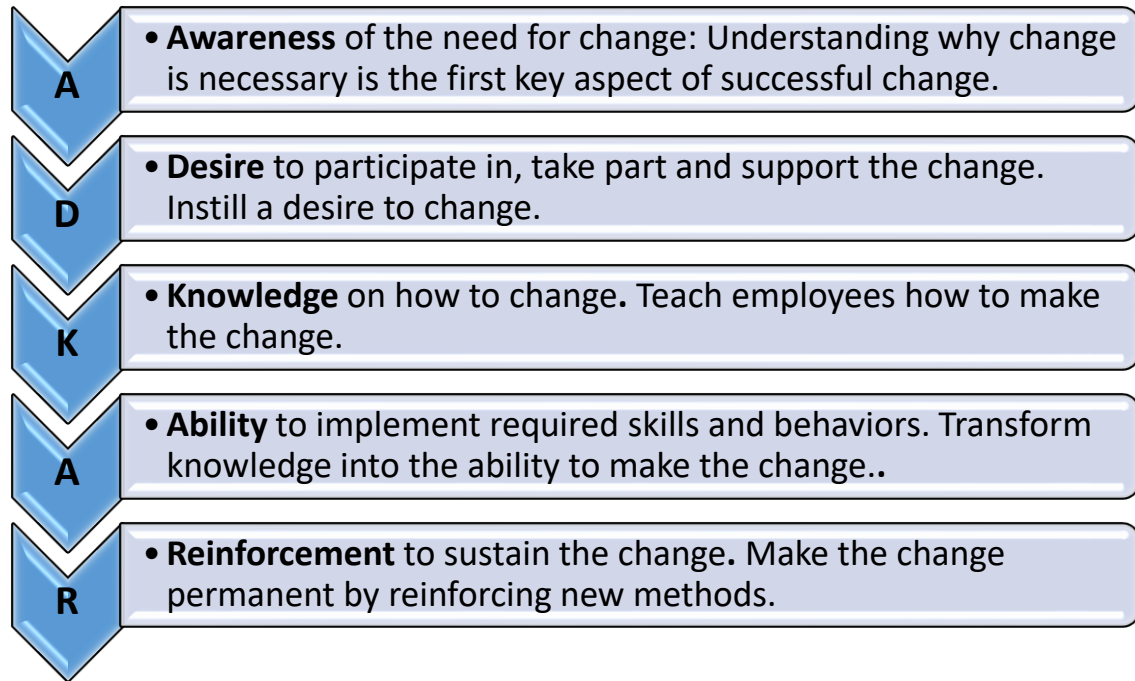


Figure 5.3 ADKAR model of change adapted from Monney (2021: 2)

Briefly, the ADKAR Model, as Monney (2021) stated, was developed nearly two decades ago by Prosci founder Jeff Hiatt, after studying the change patterns of more than 700 organisations. As illustrated in Figure 5.4 above, the word “ADKAR” is an acronym for the five outcomes that an individual person needs to achieve for a change to be successful: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. This model is based on the understanding that organisational change can only happen when individuals change. Thus, it focuses on individual change—guiding individuals through a particular change and addressing any obstacles along the way. Interestingly, this was explained by the two trainers who participated in writing the materials for the supervision experts’ programme. These trainers expressed that although developing their training course materials based on such learning theories took them intensive great effort, in the end it deserved this effort as they observed their programme succeeding.

Ultimately, it appeared then that within the context of the Omani PLCs experience, some supervisors and senior teachers acknowledged that not all the teachers were enthusiastic to this

opportunity (of being involved in a PLC). They faced teachers who were more critical attitude toward this initiative, which they described as an effective strategy for developing schools and students' achievements as they reflected. Working towards convince teachers with this initiative was one of the main challenges they handled.

5.5 The CoPs' model in the Omani educational context

As already mentioned, a number of participants involved in this study were experienced in forming and building or being members of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) through a certified training course. There were also some participants who did not experience such involvement in these PLCs; however, they were familiar with the professional communities' concept (and both CoPs and PLCs models) through personal readings or colleagues' experiences. Finally, there were a few participants (mainly senior teachers) involved in this study who said that they did not know/learn about these concepts before, and this was their first time for them they hear about professional communities. One of these participants, a senior teacher, claimed that although this was her first-time hearing about the CoPs' model in particular as a concept, but she realised that this was similar to what she was doing with her teachers in her school, under the designation of Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

For all these groups of participants, even the senior staff members, I clarified the meaning of the CoPs model and for those who had experienced PLCs, we briefly discussed the two concepts, their similarities and differences. After explaining the concept of CoPs, I explored these different groups' opinions and perceptions about the implementation of the CoPs model in our Omani educational context. In particular, between the three posts of English-Subject teacher educators (trainers, supervisors and SETs). I analysed my participants' perceptions, coded their views into themes and subthemes as mentioned earlier and then divided their views into anticipated *Potentials* and *Obstacles*, as presented in Table 5.1 above, which will be discussed in this part of the Chapter.

5.5.1 CoPs' model potentials

Most participants perceived implementing the CoPs model as an innovation or a development project that needs to be considered. As the participants welcomed the idea of CoPs, they anticipated a range of benefits for its implementation in the Omani context. Besides some general advantages such as, improving teaching and learning in Oman and developing practitioners problem-solving and thinking skills, which I discuss beneath in this section, participants talked about the use of the CoPs in bridging the gap between English Subject teacher-educators that I discuss in 5.5.1.1. and sustainable development that I discuss in 5.5.1.2.

To begin with, some participants, for example, focused on the advantages that the CoPs may offer in solving teachers' problems, developing students' achievements, and generally improving teaching and learning in Oman. In this regard, for example. Manar highlighted:

“There is a strong need for implementing such community model among the three groups. It will help them to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and improve teachers' teaching and pupils' learning” (Manar (a supervisor) pg. 10).

Moreover, some supervisors expected that these CoPs will help to develop a number of skills in trainers, supervisors and senior teachers: for example, critical thinking skills, research skills, identifying and solving problems and analytical skills', as Riham mentioned underneath:

“Based on my experience with PLCs, this will be similar, and I think it will improve the members' skills like needs analysis, identifying problems and planning skills as well...It will also involve them all in one plan where they all move step by step together until they achieve the target” (Riham (a SET), pg. 8).

Besides these benefits, I also coded two main advantages: ‘bridging the gap’ and ‘sustainable development’, which I decided to mark as subthemes for the CoPs potentials as I mentioned earlier and are discussed in the following subsections.

5.5.1.1 Bridging the gap

A good number of participants pointed out that there will always be a gap between these three groups of educators as long as there is distance between them, even if it is only a place or building distance. Many of these participants supposed that implementing the CoPs- model would help in bridging this gap between trainers, supervisors and SETs. Qabas, for example, said:

“I guess working in such community with SETs, supervisors and training could bridge the gap in different areas such as the kind of training needed for teachers, exchange ideas from the field. I think building practice communities would help in better understanding the learning environment which will result in realistic solutions to the current problems. Also, it will help designing curriculum that based on reality” (Qabas (a SET), pg. 6).

Jalal is another example of those participants who claimed they faced different situations of disappointment (and gaps) in training-supervision work relationships and he hopes that implementing the CoPs model would help to bridge this gap, as he explained below:

“Yes, of course I wish we have such community, at least it may bridge the gap between us...we actually need to be closer to supervisors...if there are any decisions by assessment or curriculum, we need to agree what is our role in facilitating these decisions. In the end we need the teacher to work efficiently and produce quality work” (Jalal (a trainer), pg. 9).

Jalal 's quote also indicated another potential advantage of the CoPs model, which is helping to define roles and responsibilities of trainers and supervisors as part of bridging the gap between them. This point was highlighted by a good number of regional trainers' participants. In support of this viewpoints, Juma, one of the senior staff members stated:

“..... Having this kind of community, as I said, will make the role of each one clear, so supervisors might not be willing to do training for their teachers. Also, trainers might be asked not to visit teachers at schools as supervisors might argue this is their role... resulting in solving their problems and more collaboration” (Juma (a senior-staff member), pg. 8).

These participants, therefore, trusted that defining the roles and responsibilities of the three parties of English-subject teacher educators, and making their roles clear to everyone would help to bridge the gap between them. This would then lead to less misunderstanding and conflicts between these teacher-educators, solve their work complication and facilitate their shared work. Then all this would result as they thought in more cooperation and collaboration between the two departments (training and supervision). As, for example, Juma anticipated above that one way of achieving this is through having CoPs involving these teacher-educators. The following section will discuss ‘sustainable development’ as another main potential benefit.

5.5.1.2 Sustainable development

It appears from the interview data that the phrase ‘sustainable development’ is well-known to the participants teacher-educators especially trainers and the senior staff members as it is used by a lot of them. It appears that this was because the Ministry has been trying recently to adopt and integrate this concept into teaching and learning in Oman. For example, one of the training department participants, Jana, anticipated that implementing the CoPs model in the Omani educational context can be one way to achieve sustainable educational development. She stated:

“Yes, I think building a community of practice which involved SETs, trainers and supervisors is a great idea, very useful. It can achieve the aims of the Ministry in doing sustainable development because nowadays sustainable development is a concept where it is discussed and also people are all questioning it and considering it in all type of work. And how to achieve it is sometimes maybe a concern shared by stakeholders” (Jana (a senior-staff member), pg. 7+8).

This phrase was also linked to the CoPs’ model by some other participants, for example a senior teacher who seemed to desire better relationships between the three parties of professionals stated:

“... I wish we apply it here... I mean if we all worked together as one hand supporting each other... develop our knowledge, skills, practices and develop teachers and students’ levels rather than working like each one in a different island... I think we will develop a sustainable education system... (Hafsa (a SET), pg. 9).

I did not focus on this term ‘sustainable development’ or discussed it in more detail with participants during the interviews, but it seemed to me that those who mentioned it understood it and were confident about what they were talking about. I noticed at the time of the interviews that they linked the CoPs’ model to such idea or as a plan by the Ministry.

Having discussed the CoPs’ potential benefits mentioned in the interview data, the next section presents the obstacles anticipated by the participants about implementing CoPs in the Omani context.

5.5.2 CoPs’ model obstacles

Participants anticipated a number of obstacles that we might face in implementing the CoPs’ model in the Omani educational context. By coding all the issues they mentioned, I divided these obstacles into three subthemes: 1- *Change management* (in 5.5.2.1) briefly related to changing people’s negative beliefs. 2- *Project management* (in 5.5.2.2) related to managing the communities, identifying leadership, allocating members, dividing roles and 3-*Time management* (in 5.5.2.3) related to balancing time between their work, the community and their personal issues.

Some of the participants expected these based on their background and knowledge of the context and people’s mentalities, attitudes and ways of thinking, while for others these were also linked to their experiences of applying other projects or similar ideas in Oman. For example, the supervisors and senior teachers related these to the obstacles they faced when they formed the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a task for their training course. Interestingly, many of the participants thought of these obstacles from the point of managing them, in order to overcome any challenges that we might face.

5.5.2.1 Change management

A large number of participants believed that one of the main challenges (or issues) we might face in adopting the CoPs model in our local context between teacher-educators is managing people’s

attitude to change and getting them to ‘step outside their comfort zone’ to a more successful and comfortable one. They predicted that there are a good number of people in our Omani educational context who will reject such a model (maybe straight away without even discussing it), just because it is a new idea. As for these people, change is not easy and adopting a new or different concept is naturally hard for them, especially in the workplace where change is needed for development and progression.

For example, one of the supervisors’ participants Karima expected that many teacher-educators may resist the idea of CoPs because they are happy about their work and very much content with their results and therefore, they would not see any reason for change (or for adopting the CoPs model in other words). Thus, the change here or their involvement in CoPs will require them to question their comfortable and familiar routines and habits. Another participant, Jufar highlighted this challenge below by saying:

“... it’s really difficult. working with human beings’ brains can be tough sometimes they don’t accept changes easily. I would advise you before stepping forward with applying this project, I mean these communities of practice you read about managing changes its mainly in business but from my experience its important and beneficial...” (Jufar (a supervisor), pg. 10).

Other participants also offered some reasons for why teacher-educators may reject adopting CoPs model (or even any other kind of professional communities), such as thinking that this would increase their workloads and it would disrupt their other projects or activities, even personal activities. And some educators may question their ability, for example, can I do this kind of work and how. Another reason is if there is any lack of information or resources provided because this could make things worse. Some participants therefore suggested offering enough information and resources about the CoPs model in advance, especially that this kind of change is something that not done by them or coming from their inner or intrinsic motivation, its rather something which done to them, which is again another reason that would make them resist the idea.

Hence, more than half participants highlighted that to be able to introduce, adopt and build any new developmental idea in Omani educational society, we need first to invest great effort in

spreading its positive culture and encouraging it to grow first as a good habit and then be part of their nature and culture, which they described as a challenging step. Masoud, for example, addressed this point here:

“I think anything you start from the scratch needs a lot of effort to success. I think the first challenge would be to instill the culture of collaborative learning of these practice communities, shared vision, values, and goals, and willingness to share experiences and support” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 10).

Besides the challenge of growing the good habits culture (of the CoPs), some participants also emphasised the need to first get rid of the negative habits culture which exists among our practitioners. For example, Samar pointed out:

“Working in group’s culture should be forgotten, as this causes what we are facing nowadays, and creating the teamwork’s culture where everybody shares and works to achieve one thing together with everybody” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 12).

Therefore, Samar here stresses the need to discard the selfish behavior and unwelcomed practices that she experienced (as discussed in 5.2 section) with some colleagues who work in smaller groups within the same region, and do not share experiences and achievements with their colleagues. Samar counted this issue as a challenge, since it seems she was not successful in tackling it. One of the concerns worth considering here also is the mixed-gender issue, as for example, Heba stated:

‘There might be a challenge in gathering the three groups at the same place and time, if they planned face-to-face meeting for example, I mean males and females; you know it’s a culture issue” (Heba (a SET), pg.7).

Participants also believed that motivation plays a vital role in managing change, helping people to act and be free of a bad habits culture and adopting a better new culture. As Faris, for example, pointed out below:

“You know without a proper motivation; these people are willing to stay and live in their comfortable zone and completely happy with their daily routine, I think they need to be

motivated to be involved in such learning and practice communities and at the beginning they need some support you know ZPD...” (Faris (a supervisor), pg. 15).

Two issues were mentioned by Faris here: motivation and ZPD which as mentioned earlier, stands for Zone of Proximal Development, the Vygotsky’s (1978) notion defined by him originally as:

“...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (pg. 86).

In teaching/learning this simply refers to the space between what a learner can do without assistance and what a learner can do with guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Theoretically speaking, this ZPD emphasises the essentially social and collaborative nature of knowledge construction, which leads to a growing interest in dialogic and collaborative forms in any professional or learning community. Therefore, what Faris suggests above is motivating the targeted groups of teacher-educators to join such professional communities because with the amount of work they have, he believes they will not be interested in or even think about joining these communities. Besides motivation, he suggests supporting and guiding them, especially when first joining the communities so they are not lost or lose interest. After passing this stage, they will be able to create, initiate and innovate within their communities.

Finally, professionalism is another challenge. Karima, one of the senior supervisors, explained this challenge:

“Some would only take advice from their supervisor who is going to write their end year report but not anyone else. So, a change should be introduced when it comes to the overall well of the teaching and learning away from formal teacher evaluation and grades. This also applies to some supervisors who would refuse to be involved in such voluntary practices because they are not part of their duty; old poor mentality” (Karima (a supervisor), pg.5).

I noticed that professionalism is one of the assessment categories that regional supervisors are assessed on in their end of year report. They link this concept with work reliability. To be a professional person in your career means taking your responsibilities seriously by utilizing

reliable ways of achieving them that are respectful to your workplace colleagues. It means you show professionalism in all aspects of your job to be able to provide society with the best education you can, even by being involved in voluntary practice to serve your society. Finally, then from the discussion above, I have listed some factors from the participants' interview data that affects change management as presented in Figure 5.4. below.

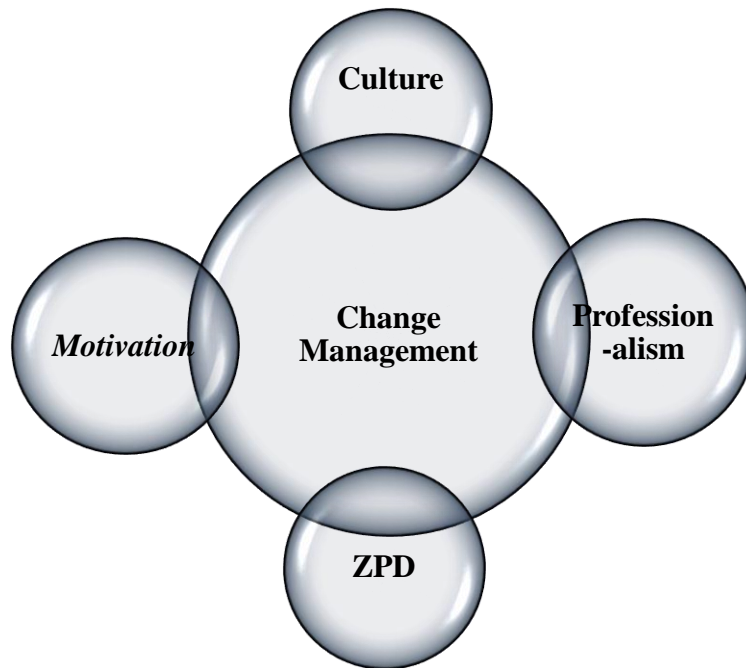


Figure 5.4 Factors affecting change management from participants' interview data.

As illustrated in Figure 5.5, I categorized the above factors around change management as mentioned by participants in the interview data. The factors are motivation, ZPD, professionalism and culture. Participants suggested thinking carefully how to motivate and encourage these professionals or teacher educators to be involved in communities of practice CoPs and how make them relevant to their needs, beneficial and worth their involvement. Several teacher-educators participants suggested that leaders, responsible officials or initiatives of this model-adopting need to have an open dialogue and clarifying conversations about the meaningful implementation of the CoP model initiative in their local context in advance. They claimed that teacher-educators normally desire meaningful conversations with their officials or leaders about the implementation of any initiative. These clarifying conversations would provide

insights to these responsible officials about the individual explanations for resistance and frustration by teacher-educators and the different reason they have toward change and initiatives as these may vary.

The next section presents another obstacle can be faced in implementing the CoPs in the Omani context anticipated by this research' participants as derived from the interview data.

5.5.2.2 Project management

Fifteen participants talked about project management, they believe that managing these communities could be problematic, although it was explained to these participants that CoPs can be informal, initiative professional communities by educators to develop their practice and can be self-managed by its members and the educators who build them. To explain this point, an example given by one of the participants, Hafsa, raised a number of questions below:

“...who will manage this project? If we described it as a project for example, who will be the leaders, will they be the head people of the supervisors or Trainers? what about senior teachers? and what are the roles, you need to think about these questions...?” (Hafsa (a SET), pg. 9).

Hafsa considers the roles of the different groups of the teacher-educators as a CoP' members, the leadership and other members that might join. Interpreting her thoughts, she suggests there might be some conflicts occurring between the existing leaderships of different departments in managing these communities. This thought is illustrated b, Masoud:

“Also, it won't be easy to build the dynamic of the group including the 3 groups especially with the nature of the relationship between supervisors and senior teachers. Senior teachers might feel the power influence and might be reluctant” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 8).

Masoud also thinks it would be difficult to gather all these three kinds of teacher-educators in one community of practice, as they share different responsibilities and roles, making it difficult also to mix them together as he highlighted here:

“All these 3 groups have different job responsibilities and duties, the difficulty would arise from identifying the shared vision, values, and goals. Also, are all members of these groups willing to collaborate and support each other. The subdivision among the groups is very challenging to mingle them and let them focus on learning from each other” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 8).

A number of participants also expressed some concerns with regard to CoPs goals and vision. Juma, for example, claimed:

“Also, the goals and vision should be very clear and encouraging for all. Otherwise, they might push back the call for the change” (Juma (a trainer), pg.5).

Maybe the main concern by Hafsa and Masoud with regard roles, is that if these teacher-educators have contradictions and conflicts within their real posts, how would this be if they joined the same community of practice? Hence, they recommended defining roles and responsibilities within the CoPs to avoid any conflict. Like Juma, he suggested defining the goals and making the vision of the communities clear from the beginning.

Having explained what the research participants means by project-management as an obstacle that can be faced and needs to be addressed to avoid conflict when building CoPs or any kind of professional communities in the Omani educational context, I shall now discuss the third obstacle of the CoPs suggested by participants of this research.

5.5.2.3 Time management

Nearly all the participants agreed that time-management will be an issue and some of them anticipated that members would face difficulties in finding a balance between their daily work and work-related activities, other personal commitments related to family, friends, and society besides participating in these CoPs. For example, the following participants stated:

“...I think the first main issue that everybody will face is managing time...finding time to participate in such community. You can't imagine the crowded schedule of supervisors who are involved in different works such as schools' supervision, training, assessment, and other commitments” (Amal (a supervisor), pg. 8).

“Time is one important challenge. Senior-teachers are busy with their lessons and other school activities... its hard-to-find time for extra work unfortunately, it might affect something else” (Talah (a SET), pg. 6).

These two examples of participants and many other participants thought that teacher-educators may experience obstacles to effective use of the limited time. They claimed that the time which might be available for certain professional task - such as this involvement in professional communities- is somewhat limited, or that the demands on that time exceed what is available. Therefore, participants expected that teacher-educators may experience high work pressure, lack of recovery time, and exhaustion, especially the Omani English-subject supervisors as they are already facing this situation with their own workload, as expressed by the fast majority of participants.

In fact, participants mentioned a number of expressions in different ways to express this issue like ‘managing time’, ‘lack of time’, ‘time pressure’, ‘shortage of time’, loaded schedules, ‘workload’ ‘heavy load’ ‘different works. Masoud and Shahad, for example, stated:

"Another challenge is the time and the place learning to happen. With the overload of work, people in the three groups barely find time to finish their work” (Masoud (a trainer), pg. 8).

“There are some challenges like lack of time for actual practice. Also, lack of following up could be one of the challenges” (Shahad (a trainer), pg.8).

This means that participants expected that it is not only building the CoPs which is an issue, but there might also be difficulties related to continuing and participating, in these communities besides allocating a suitable learning place for their meetings.

5.6 Summary of Chapter 5

A detailed analysis of the findings mainly interviews data analysis (the main method used in this research) compared where appropriate with data analysis of the other supplementary methods,

was presented in this chapter. The chapter was divided into four main parts apart from its introduction and this summary.

The first of these main sections (5.2) presented the findings related to the professional and workplace relationships between the targeted groups of participants. The workplace relationship was counted as a main theme that included healthy work environment and supportive leadership as subthemes. This former included different categories of cooperation, collaborative problem-solving and developing sharing as a habit, which all reflect the kinds of relationships are hoped between trainers, supervisors and SETs. The results showed that participants hold different perceptions about their workplace relationships with their colleagues' teacher-educators. Nearly two thirds of the participants do not believe that they have or share good relationship with the other teacher-educators' colleagues in their regions, while about a third of them claim to share a very good and strong relationship with each other as teacher-educators in their governorate and work together as one team. It seems that these views, both positive and negative, regarding relationships were formed due to a number of factors as the findings of this research indicated. These factors are the authorities or leaders' support and encouragement, lack of motivation including different priorities and work expectations by some of these educators, overlap and contradiction in some roles and responsibilities of trainers and supervisors, and finally the physical workplace's building in addition to a number of culture issues, such as mixed genders and friendship.

Section 5.3 presented findings related to the methods of workplace communication of the three targeted groups of teacher-educators. The research findings showed that trainers, supervisors and SETs used various ways of communications in the workplace to update and share information, experiences and knowledge. These are face-to-face meetings, professional development opportunities and events, social media applications and the Ministry of Education official platforms. It appeared that some of these ways of communications are very flexible and easier for example the social media applications, while others require a number of formal processes and financial budgets, such as central meetings in Muscat (the capital of Oman) and some CPD events. Furthermore, the findings indicated that participants hold strong positive beliefs about the importance of professional development opportunities through face-to-face verbal

communication in building strong professional relationships with colleagues. These beliefs seem to be generated from their experience of participating in CPD events, which have been cancelled and reduced recently by the MoE because of financial issues. Furthermore, in their opinion these CPD events, such as mini conferences, forums and meetings, would help to spread the idea of professional communities and develop them further.

Moreover, findings from this research also revealed that hundreds of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been formed in the Omani governmental schools in different subject fields through a training course delivered by a specialised center for training teachers. Findings related to these communities were presented in 5.4. The findings showed, as the research participants involved in these communities claimed, that these PLCs have great success in furthering teacher-educators' professional development and in teachers' teaching performance and practice which in turn positively impacted on student achievements. On the other hand, participants also listed several challenges they faced with these communities. They all agreed that the most key ones are the overload of work and changing the negative beliefs and attitudes of teachers, convincing them about the PLCs and its activities and encouraging them to work together as a team.

Finally, 5.5 discussed findings related to the CoPs, as these were also discussed with this research's participants as another option of professional communities to be implemented in the Omani educational field. The large majority of participants regarded the CoPs model as a strategy for professional development. At the same time as observing potential benefits, they also mentioned obstacles that need to be addressed, which are related to change management, project management and 'time management'. These were summarised by the idea that although CoPs need to be developed in a natural way without artificial rules, and without the complication of memberships and roles divisions that might hinder the learning process, CoPs at the same time should not be left alone to work in silos as some people know how to collaborate, but they do not do enough or do not participate actively enough.

Having presented the research findings, I will now move to the discussion chapter which elaborates and reflects on these results. The key findings will be discussed in more detail in relation to relevant policies and scholarly references.

Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6

In this Chapter, I return to the Research Questions (RQs) shown in table 6.1 below, identify and synthesise the seven main Key Findings from this research. I consider their significance in light of the Omani Educational Context discussed in Chapter 2 and the Literature reviewed in Chapter 3, and in relation to how they address the RQs.

RQ1- What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers are required to work?

RQ2- How do these three groups of professionals (Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers) work within and across groups?

RQ3- How do Trainers, Supervisors and Senior Teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional community models (such as CoPs and PLCs) within and across their groups?

Table 6.1 The present study's Research Questions (RQs).

This Chapter discusses the Key Findings mainly derived from the 36 semi-structured-interviews with 8 trainers, 13 supervisors, 10 senior teachers from 3 different governorates in Oman and 5 of their senior-staff from supervision and training departments. Besides, the findings from my analysis of policy documents, my notes of the non-participants' observations of PLCs members' meetings (see Appendix 13) and my researcher diary notes (see Appendix 14). The chapter is divided into 10 sub-sections. After this introduction, each subsection presents one of the Key Findings that would address one -and sometimes- cover two of the above Research Questions. Starting with Key Finding 1: *A Gap between reported practice and policy intentions* (in 6.2), this section addresses how the Ministry of Education's policies require them to work with each other - related to the three targeted groups of participants 'jobs; showing the gap between the real practices happening in field and what the policies put in theory. Then, Key Finding 2: *Current overlapping roles and responsibilities creating tensions between trainers and supervisors* (in

6.3) presents how overlapping roles appear to create conflicts between two groups of Omani teacher-educators in some regions (trainers and supervisors). After that, Key Finding 3: *Mixed attitudes regarding collegial workplace relationship* (in 6.4) explains how different groups of teacher-educators in different regions perceive their collegial relationships. Later, Key Finding 4 – *Participants calling for more supportive leadership* (in 6.5) discusses the need for more supportive leadership which is an issue that was mainly raised by two groups of teacher-educators: Supervisors and Trainers in two governorates. Then, Key finding 5: *The need for more collaboration between English Subject teacher-educators and increased CPD opportunities* is discussed (in 6.6) as raised by almost the majority of participants. Next, (in 6.7) Key finding 6: *Participants adopting different ways for communicating with each other*; identifies the various communication tools participants used to communicate and highlights the need to make use them more effectively between all the different groups besides activating the MoE's platforms. Afterwards, (in 6.8) Key Finding 7: *Culture change and environmental factors as main challenges for adopting PLCs and CoPs models*; synthesises participants' experience and perceptions of the two models of professional communities and shed lights on some of the main obstacles of professional communities for the purpose of addressing them by MoE authorities for future practice. It contributes to a fuller understanding of the implementation of the professional communities - either CoPs or PLCs- or any other kind of professional communities in the Omani English Language Teaching Context. Finally, the chapter illustrates the relationships between the 7 Key Findings (in 6.9) and summarises the key points discussed (in 6.10).

6.2 Key Finding 1- A Gap between reported practice and policy intentions

This section aims to address RQ1: *What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers are required to work?* and goes beyond that by partly addressing RQ2: *How do these three groups of teacher-educators work within and across groups?* As it reviews some of the examples that demonstrate how English-Subject Trainers, Supervisors and Senior-teachers work actually in the field in different governorates.

Briefly, it has been mentioned in Chapter One (1.3) and discussed in Chapter Two (2.2.2) that a major reform in the Omani educational system started in the academic year of 1998- 1999- as a

result of reviewing the previous system. The preceding educational system was described as the real education process in Oman started in 1970, which aimed at spreading education all over the country -Education for all (Ministry of Education and UNICEF Muscat, 1999). While the previous system mainly aimed at quantity, the 1998- 1999's reform aimed at quality and develop the educational system and infrastructure. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education made significant steps towards improving the quality of education and had a comprehensive plan to modernise the country's educational system to meet the global challenges and the needs of the 21st Century. It implemented the first phase of reforming primary education and replacing it with basic education in 1998/1999, it called for improved quality in public education in order to prepare citizens with the critical thinking skills required by the demands of the 21st century. Such as building on soft skills, encouraging learners to better develop their communication skills, and self-learning. For the preparation of this stage, the ministry also focused on important aspects of education such as assessment, educational supervision and educational activities; with the aim of creating an education system that would match those of advanced countries and the international standards (International Bureau of Education of UNESCO, 2006). Consequently, as mentioned previously, the 1998/1999' reform witnessed a number of changes such as: the identification of three different jobs of teacher-educators for English and other subjects in the field. One of these is the Senior English teacher job, which was introduced in each school with at least four teachers of English (to supervise, monitor and support their colleagues' teachers in their schools). Besides, appointing at least 2 -3 regional trainers in each governorate (to deliver in-service training courses). The supervisors' role has shifted from inspecting teachers' work to mainly guiding and supporting senior teachers (more details were covered earlier in Chapter 2.2).

As it is stated earlier, the Ministry of Education aimed at evaluating and promoting the educational system, hence the MoE in cooperation with international research institutes conducted several studies aimed at identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the education system. Many studies have been completed on various issues such as: assessment and evaluation methods; education management systems and methods; and educational guidance methods and personnel (International Bureau of Education of UNESCO, 2006). Some of these studies were such as the Ministry of Education evaluation report, 1987; the World Bank report 1991; the Ministry of Education, 1993; and the Ministry of Education and UNICEF Muscat, 1999). And

among the most notable and more recent studies are: “Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality,” which conducted in 2012, in cooperation with the World Bank and the “Evaluation of the education system in Oman for 1-12” in cooperation with the New Zealand Association for Research in Education that conducted in 2013 (The Education Council, 2016).

After about one year of the implementation of this reform, particularly in 2001, the MoE highlighted in some of its official reports’ documents (see MoE, 2001 and 2004a) - as a part of the reform plans- that the effectiveness, the efficiency and the quality of education depend upon the capabilities, efficiency and effective performance of its various administrative bodies. Therefore, as a part of this reform, the Ministry implemented a number of procedures, which included undertaking a systems analysis of the various administrative and organisational structures of the MoE in order to make sure that there were:

- “Channels of communication and information flow at central and regional levels”.
- ” ...vertical as well as horizontal communication links, coordination, collaboration, and flow of information (Ministry of Education, 2001: 10-11).

In this official document, therefore, the MoE clearly declared to develop, employ and activate various channels, links and means of communication between the different administrative parties (of employees) and departments, encourage coordination, and collaboration between these departments and assure the flow of information between them at both central (capital) and decentral (regional) levels. Later in the same report, the MoE also confirmed and stated that its Educational Development Plan (EDP) (MoE, 2001) demanding enhancing the efficiency of the administration by employing also a number of practices which included improving channels of communication and facilitating administrative procedures. Besides, initiating a role for community in helping to achieve educational objectives and ensuring a flow of information in a flexible manner between the various departments of the Ministry” (see The Ministry of Education, 2001: 22-23). Therefore, all these procedures of changes were introduced in the structure of the Ministry of Education (the 1998/1999-reform) in order that the staff could communicate and take actions in an easy, fast and more efficient way.

Similar procedures were also stated in advanced policy documents like, the 2010 trainers’ competencies document used by English Training department, which support the encouragement

of building good relationships with colleagues and activating various communications links with them. The document encourages ‘team building’ and developing ‘effective relationships’ with colleagues and administration, creating a ‘supportive and healthy working atmosphere’, adopting a professional attitude to personal relationship, motivating, encouraging, and supporting colleagues. Besides, developing a productive and supportive working environment in the training room (MoE, 2010: 2 - Trainers Competencies). Recently, the 2016’s Supervision Performance Standards and Indicators document also encourages these good practices between colleagues by stating:

“Activates various communications links:

- Builds on positive relationships with his/her colleagues and other stakeholders.
- Employs various communication means” (MoE, 2016: 3- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators-Trial Version.).

The comparison of findings from the semi-structured interviews data and documentary-analysis proved that there is a gap between what the MoE plans for its employees and departmental’ relationships (example extracted stated above) and the actual practice occurs between the targeted English teacher-educators in field, as reported by participants. In other words, what the Ministry of Education (MoE) stated in its ministerial documents’ guidelines (dated for the 1998-1999’s educational reform) is not reflected - to some extent- in these teacher-educators’ practice.

More importantly, regardless all the above stated manners and guidelines by the MoE, this research’s fieldwork and findings revealed nearly a third of the participants complaining about communication problems that occurred between supervision and training departments and reported different cases of poor communication channels with colleagues of the different groups. For example, there were several examples of cases where regional Omani trainers were not involved or being informed about some events arranged by supervision department. One case, for example was reported by one of the trainers’ participants below:

“one example, once there was a training.... for the new English books for the Elective Grades 11 and 12, they are new books, and they were a training programme. Supervision department informed teachers and supervisors to attend, however trainers were not informed at all, we came to know after the meeting was done, after the main training was done, we came to know by accident!” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 6).

The above quotation by Samar shows that there are issues with regard the 'flow of information' between the two departments 'training' and 'supervision' at least in her region for this case. The data also showed a similar example by another participant who reported a similar situation in another governorate (see Chapter 5.1). While these can be individual cases in individual departments or even in individual governorates, and hence it cannot be generalised to the other governorates, the reality is that such misconnection occurred and might still occur. More importantly, the interviews data showed how it impacted negatively the research participants and their views about the kind of collaboration between their departments. There might be different reasons for such misconnection such as the physical distance and separation of places/buildings between departments or the heavy load schedule of some groups, different agendas/plans, or even differences in perceptions and points of views that may create misunderstandings among departments. I would argue that one of the more important forms of the MoE communication is the inter-departmental communication. For example, the regular ongoing communication between training and supervision departments is crucial as they are most connected departments with regard teacher-education and development, unfortunately they are separated and counted as two departments. Thus, following the MoE policies with regard interdepartmental communication is a key and vital to strengthen their relationship strong, maintain an efficient flow of information, updating each other with their plans, plan together and achieve success in work and make the MoE stay efficient and productive; this is likely to increase success in the educational process, teaching and learning at schools.

Another possible explanation of the causes of such miscommunication between departments which lead to this gap between them, might possibly be the shift between the previous system in the 1970-90s which aimed at quantity development in education more than quality to shift to the new basic education 1998-1999 system which aimed at more quality. To some extent, it seems that this gap has resulted in affecting achieving some of the 1998/1999 reform aims, plans and current aspirations. Although the Ministry of Education value the importance of collaboration, the flow of communication and other good manners between departments at the time of the reform, it did not specify in documents or through professional training of staff how these could be done in practice. This interpretation supports Al-Lamki's (2010) study findings, as he highlighted the reality that there is no overt statement available outlining the degree/type of

collaboration that is expected as part of the education reform. In the same study, Al-Lamki (2010) found that there was a lack of guidance in different professional development activities and programmes arranged by the MoE. Al-Lamki added that there were no documents that explained the aims of the different CPD programmes and how to conduct them, and because of that, targeted groups of educators or teachers applied these activities differently, which eventually led to different outcomes. This suggests that there has been a degree of lack of clarity of the 1998 reform aims and plans. Or maybe the reform aims were not very clear or reached by some of the departments or employees' staff. Al-Hinai (2006) stated that ambiguity of aims can cause lack of motivation and difficulties in setting goals for one's own learning and can lead to confusion during the implementation stage of any programme. In a similar context, Darling-Hammond and Mclaughlin (2011) pointed out that in a time of reform, teachers need to be given a rationale for the necessity of change.

In fact, the results of some studies conducted in Oman (such as Issan and Gomaa, 2010) regarding the effectiveness of the new educational reform system (and the changes in responsibilities) which all aimed to encourage autonomous and develop the life-long learning skills indicated that modifications were still needed for the 1998/1999 reform. An example of these studies is Issan and Gomaa (2010) who indicated that teachers were not well prepared to fulfil the aims of this reform at the time of the implementation. Al-Mukaini (2017) stressed that the educational reforms that is imposed on field and are put in place by officials often do not achieve the desired results. I believe that any reform needs to take into consideration the differences among targeted staff or even departments in the field. These differences would include materials, human capabilities, the organizational structures and the extent of their readiness to implement the reform. Besides, the acceptance of this reform by the employees, which play a big part in achieving the desired goals and results, otherwise the results would be below the required standard.

In conclusion, this study suggests that any reform in education needs to be well planned and followed up to have the best results. Besides, the official policy documents that encourage good practices such as communication and collaboration between departments and staffs would need to be provided with more clarifications and details such as practical examples of collaboration

that would help to fill the gap and put the MoE intentions into practice (implications will be discussed later in Chapter 7). The next section (6.3) discusses how overlapping some roles and responsibilities creating tensions between trainers and supervisors and help to deepen the gap between these two groups of educators.

6.3. Key Finding 2: Current overlapping roles and responsibilities creating tensions between trainers and supervisors.

This key finding partly covers RQs 1 and 2 (stated above), as it also compares between what the MoE states in its official documents and what is reflected and were put in practice by teacher-educators.

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, the 1998/1999 educational reform included appointing trainers, Senior English Teachers (SETs) and revising some roles of the supervisors (who were called inspectors before this time) to give them more coaching and mentoring roles rather than mainly inspecting roles. However, the research findings demonstrated a sort of overlap in roles and responsibilities between ‘trainers’ and ‘supervisors’ as defined in their jobs’ specifications official policies documents. This overlap is particularly due or specified in two very related issues, which are: 1- Conducting and delivering training programs, courses, and workshops 2- Visiting and observing teachers in their schools.

Starting with conducting training programmes issue, the finding showed that the vast majority of participant trainers were not very comfortable with supervisors being delivering training programmes for teachers in the field. Trainers believed that training is their main duty and they are qualified and appointed to do this job/post which is conducting training programmes besides other supplementary roles. However, supervisors were encouraged and allowed to conduct training workshops and programmes as well and to the best of my knowledge they used to receive payment for this training in the past. For the purpose of this issue, and by returning to their job-description official document, it is found that, the delivery of training programmes and helping with it is clearly stated in the supervisors’ job description. One of the roles they were asked for is to participate in defining, preparing, and implementing training programs for senior teachers/teachers of the subject/field, and for all the groups he/she supervises and following up

its impact (see Subject Supervisor's job description, pg.1 in Appendix 12). This means that both trainers and supervisors are doing or sharing the same job description which is training. This overlap (un-clarity) in roles and responsibilities are proved through the finding of this research study to be stressful and unpleasant for the majority of the trainers (participants involved in this research). For an example here, one of this research participant trainers 'Samar' who declared:

“... I believe this is of a high important to me.... many trainers get upset with this situation and they get to resign and leave their job to go somewhere or stop working effectively as before, for me I don't want to reach to that level where I think about a job I love so much this way” (Samar (a trainer), pg. 9 of her interview's transcription).

Samar here was expressing her frustration of many issues (such as lack of collaboration and passive coordination them and supervisors and trainers in her region) including the overlapping of conducting training role by them and supervisors. It seems that this issue has created some sort of tension and conflicts between trainers and supervisors in some governorates for a period of time, particularly, since the creation of English training in 1998 and defining roles for three different posts of English teacher-educators. It is perhaps possible to argue here that defining these roles of supervisors and trainers has not been successful, which I would describe as one of the 1998's reform/system shortcomings. In their study about the effectiveness of the current supervision system in Omani government schools, Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2019) found that, supervisors themselves are generally either neutral or even negative about the supervisory system. Their findings indicated that Omani supervisors hold negative attitudes towards a number of items associated with their professional roles, such as the contribution they make to teachers' professional development. For example, they disagreed with their roles concerning responding to teachers' instructional concerns, or ensuring that senior English teachers are doing their jobs properly, or training teachers in creating a portfolio to demonstrate their professional development. They also disagreed about the contributions they make to the professional development of their teachers, about whether they encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practice, whether they provided guidelines (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2019). The question that was also raised by some of this research trainers/participants, if supervisors were complaining about their extensive and intensive supervisory roles, which are their main duties, then a fortiori is they should not be interested in conducting training courses which is the main duty of the trainers (see 5.2).

There was also another issue raised by three trainers' participants, from two different governorates- during the interviews related to defining roles and responsibilities. This issue also seems to cause a conflict between trainers and supervisors, relating to "conducting school visits" by trainers to follow up the impact of their training. It seems that visiting teachers in their schools to be monitored, supported and evaluated is the main job and responsibility of supervisors. Therefore, some trainers believed and felt that they were not very welcomed by teachers' when they visited them in schools, as the interviews data presented (see 5.2 and 5.5.1.1). Some trainers also expressed their dissatisfaction of an official letter that was sent to schools by the MoE in the academic year 2009/2010, specifying the people who were allowed in school visits and trainers were not included in that letter. Regardless of that letter, some trainers indicated that when they sometimes conduct school visits to follow their training impact, they sometimes face contradictions with the kind of feedback provided for the same teachers by them and the supervisors. I would highlight here that trainers seem to provide teachers with a great understanding of the knowledge and skills related to teaching, even their job requirements and responsibilities, besides enhancing their confidence and overall performance. Therefore, following up the impact of training in schools is needed by trainers to assess the learning and the knowledge and skills acquired by teachers and their commitment to the training (Kirkpatrick, 2013). I would argue here that visiting teachers by trainers in schools needs to be included in their roles and responsibilities official document if the MoE is looking for better practices and professionalism of teacher educators (in this case teacher trainers).

To conclude, as highlighted by Espinheira (2019: 1) that 'responsibilities overlap' can be challenging and individuals can find it difficult to develop the required skills if their jobs are not well defined. Therefore, these teacher-educators' posts would need to have clear job-descriptions that include roles and responsibilities that do not intersect with other jobs. Unclear job descriptions may lead to conflicts, poor working relationships, and may cause employees to lose interest in their jobs.

6.4 Key finding 3: Mixed attitudes regarding collegial workplace-relationships

This section mainly addresses research question two RQ2: How do these three groups of teacher-educators- Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers- work within and across groups? The

section focuses on answering this question by analyzing and discussing different participants' perceptions from the semi-structured interviews.

To better answer this research question, I will clarify the meaning of perceptions. Perception is something occurs in people's mind which influences how we focus on, process, remember, interpret, understand, synthesise, decide about, and even act on reality (Taylor, 2019). Mergan (2018) claims that perceptions determine how individuals treat others and possibly determine the treatment they receive; therefore, they are counted as a determining factor of how individuals may react in an environment and are usually formed through the observation of one's surroundings. Hence, it has been claimed that personal perceptions influence a person's organisational behavior consequently influencing their work success (Elnaga, 2012) and they influence interactions within a work environment, therefore knowing more and learning about people's perceptions can help to understand their impact within their organisation, their society and the relations connect them with others

As shown in Chapter 5, the interviews findings presented a kind of contradictions in teacher-educators' perceptions (participants of this research) as regards how they work within and across groups. While some participants have positive views regarding how they work, others thought the opposite. These views and perceptions will be summarized shortly according to each group of teacher educators as appeared in Chapter 5.

Starting with the group of 'Omani trainers', the findings showed that all involved participant trainers agreed that their colleague trainers are cooperative, supportive, always work as one team like a 'Community of Practice'. They claimed that even if they were not officially described as a CoP, but they performed most of the same features of such a community. For example, they thought that they developed a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems (Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Besides, the new members were always well supported and if they faced any work-related problem, they share suggestions and ideas to solve it. The interviews findings indicated that these trainers' relationship reflects, to certain extent, how they were trained to support each other when they were first formed as regional trainers' team by the expatriate consultant trainer and then started conducting training in their governorates officially in 2005. As Etienne and Beverly Wenger-

Trayner, 2015 highpoint that such CoPs features mentioned take time and sustained interaction to be acquired and become a habit. The Omani regional trainers supposed that by time they developed such practices within their own training group and then each new members and generation is affected by this culture and shared practice of the more experience trainers. Secondly, regarding the English-subject regional supervisors, although some of them talked about their good relationships with their peer colleagues and their collaboration together, a good number of them, however, expressed negative attitudes about the kind of cooperation they have with their mate supervisors. Some supervisors also expressed that they were unsure whether their fellow-supervisors are cooperative or not, or whether they communicate or work well together. These findings were not very encouraging. Because, the policy analysis showed that, in fact supervisors were encouraged to cooperate with their colleagues in a number of their policies or guidelines such as 'English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators' and were assessed on their collegial cooperation in their annual 'Regional supervisor appraisal form' (see Appendix 18). A possible explanation for these results may be the large number of the administrative and technical tasks and duties they have. This finding matches the results to Al-Mahrooqi and Denman's (2019) study, as their findings showed that supervisors, have somewhat neutral views of their fellow supervisors, including a lack of agreement about whether their colleagues were cooperative or perform their work professionally. Finally, regarding the senior English teachers (SETs), a good number of them agreed that they share formal but good relationships with their mate SETs in their governorates and sometimes from other governorates who they met through formal meetings, forums, workshops or conferences. They claimed that they do share some work-related documents and examples of lesson planning, schemes of work and other related documents and sometimes they do organise formally and sometimes informally peer observation visits between their schools. As Picard (2005) highlighted that when educators (or teachers) have the time and opportunity to work together, they find solutions to instructional dilemmas while also working on ways to improve their teaching skills. Reid Ervin (2011) further indicate that collaborative teachers gain confidence, are better prepared, and become more effective and efficient. It also seems that some of the SETs were doing such good practices because they are ambitious to do well in their job which will be reflected on their fellow teachers, while for others because they are followed up by their regional supervisors and their annual plans. And so that was a summary of how these teacher-educators work within their own profession groups.

As regard how these educators work across groups, although, my observation of the two meetings conducted between the supervisors and senior teachers in two different schools as part of PLCs meeting, showed mutual respect and flow of communication between these two groups of teacher-educators, the interviews data and results evidenced a kind of contradiction in participants' views in this regard. As well as that, different participants hold different and opposite perceptions about their workplace relationships with their colleague teacher-educators within and across their governorates. The interviews findings showed that less than nine of the participant teacher-educators believe that they share very positive, friendly and strong cooperative relationships with each other in their governorates or specifically in some cities within the same governorate. About more than two thirds of participants, however, hold negative attitudes with regard such relationships and complained about the lack (or little) of formal cooperation between these three parties (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers); and they hope for more collaboration and more professional development opportunities between them as teacher-educators.

The above findings might mean that people's perceptions vary from one person to another and the meaning we take from those perceptions varies as well depending on the different situations we face and experience. Sometimes different people perceive different things about the same situation. There are some factors affecting perceptions such as motivation and some situational factors such as the timing of perceiving others, work settings, social settings (Fawcett, et al, 2005). Besides these, there are some other factors like perceptual learning which is based on past experiences or any special training that we get, every one of us learns to emphasize some sensory inputs and to ignore others. Therefore, I would say that the above presented perceptions might only be these participants' perceptions at the time of this research has been done and hence cannot be generalised to the others. Kreitz and Ogden (1990) claim the question of the frame of reference an individual use in assessing their work environment, their work relationships or even their job is problematic because of their attitudes about work, changing needs and perceptions over time. Therefore, those teachers 'educators' perceptions may change overtime or depending on different situations or positions. Also, it might be that these views were built and developed due to a number of factors that they mentioned related to work challenges they faced during the

interviews. Such as the work overload and the huge amount of administrative work, their authorities' support and encouragement, (lack of) motivation, the overlap in some roles and responsibilities of some posts, different priorities and expectations, workplace building besides a number of culture issues, such as mix-gender and friendship (see Chapter 5.2).

I would conclude this section by saying that for understanding human behaviors, it is very important to understand their perceptions and how they perceive the different situations. Sometimes, what we perceive from our work situations influence our work relationships, enthusiasm and productivity. Leaders and authorities need to understand how their employees individually perceives the workplace. I think and agree that our work's perceptions should influence decision-making within an organization which needs to be more supportive as the following section discusses to address RQ2.

6.5 Key Finding 4 – Participants calling for more supportive leadership

As we have seen in Chapter 5, leadership appeared to be one of the key factors (or in other words 'variables') that played a big role in affecting the way those teacher-educators were working together. Therefore, again this section focuses on addressing RQ 2 (How do these three groups of teacher-educators (Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers) work within and across groups?)

The findings of the current research showed that more than half of the participants hoped for a more 'supportive' and 'flexible' leadership as they claimed. They requested, for example, a leadership who could initiate and facilitates easier meetings between English subject teacher-educators without the complication and the obstacles of the long formal and complicated process and financial procedures. These participants also expressed their need for a leadership who plays a big role in strengthening their collegial professional relationships, defining vital purposes for their CPDs and gatherings, supporting and leading collaborative dialogues between them as professionals and educators of teachers. Those participant teacher-educators felt that although the above-mentioned tasks should be part of the authorities' roles, and they were appointed to do these tasks, what was happening was still not meeting their satisfaction in their leadership. In other words, they thought that this leadership does not exceed the limit of their work, or do not go beyond what has been offered by the MoE of facilities and procedures. Some blamed the slow

long official process that hindered achieving things; the formal and huge administrative processes that were required to proceed in executing the work besides the reality of bureaucratic and complex procedures underlying the results. One of the participants trainers highlighted that, authorities were controlled by rules, regulations, legislations, lots of bureaucracy, limited power, and short resources which all hindered the flow of the processes. The reality implies that some meetings were cancelled, CPD proposals sometimes faced rejections or long delay, and recently financial support was denied due to short budgets, which all might be related to how the system works and authorities' power and support.

On the other side, these above views of authorities' support were opposite to participants perceptions of the Omani PLCs' leadership (explored within this research). This research findings suggested that one of the main elements for the success of these Omani PLCs (which were created within a training course) was the 'supportive' leadership formed to manage these PLCs. Starting from the participant supervisors, senior-supervisors, SETs, schools' principals, staff and administrations. Although the number of the leadership (including schools' principals and staff members) reported differed in quantity in different governorates and different communities, most of the PLCs participants compliment on the 'supportive' leadership they had during their membership of these communities. Shared and supportive leadership plays a key role in establishing and sustaining PLCs. Hord (2009: 42) believes that shared leadership is "where power, authority, and decision making are distributed across the community" and when leadership is shared, it even gives 'teachers' the opportunity to lead, and build communities of learners (communities of continuous inquiry) in schools. This is similar, to some extent, to what was reported by some SETs and supervisors in this study about PLCs leadership. Some supervisors mentioned that one of the skills they learnt is leadership skills (see Chapter 5.4.1). A similar finding but in different context, reported by Antinluoma et al (2021: 1) in their study about practices of professional learning communities. Their results showed that the principals played the main role in the progression of schools as PLCs; they started positive progression, shared the leadership, and created commitment to common goals.

At the same time, this study PLCs participants highlighted the fact that their PLCs leaderships were advised from the beginning and were chose and formed for the purpose to make these PLCs successful within the project of the training course and its assessment. Consequently, most of

them believed that their chosen leadership did not save an effort to support and help to achieve the success within these PLCs during a period of time planned. Highlighting that some governorates and schools had better practices of PLCs compared to others which might depend on the role of leadership initiatives.

In conclusion, based on the interviews 'findings, this research emphasises that leadership is not only about having a position, a job-title, or a designation. Nor it is as an action of an exclusive leader (Wren, 1995). It is rather an interactive practice between leaders and followers in which they share goals, plans and processes. The study highlights that effective leadership needs to take such interaction, communication and cooperation into consideration if they were looking for effective, successful and productive work environment. More importantly, leaders need to have a model role for their followers because sometimes it is difficult to have followers cooperating effectively without leaders having the same qualities (Al-Mukhani, 2017).

6.6 Key finding 5: The need for more collaboration between English Subject teacher-educators and increased CPD opportunities

This section also partly addresses RQ1 and RQ2 by focusing on two issues that are discussed separately in two different subsections below. This is because, based on the interviews data, the vast majority of the participants demanded more collaboration between the three targeted groups of teacher-educators and agreed that they need more opportunities for continuing their professional development.

- Collaboration

As discussed in Chapter 3, collaboration is a process that involves developing shared meanings; sharing, joint responsibility, exchanging information, trust and team building, which all take time and patience, besides, side-by-side efforts, drawing together the valued contributions of all (team members) to reach the best possible solutions (Lindeke and Sieckert, 2005: 3).

The findings from this research showed that collaboration makes a difference in teacher-educators' relationships within and across groups as well (see Chapter 5. 2.1); and as Hazelrigg (2017:1) stated that "when educators work together, they form important professional and personal relationships". Evidence from the interviews data demonstrated a good example of

collaboration between the three groups of teacher-educators in one of the governorates involved in this research which I called Governorate-2. The vast majority of this governorate's teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers) admitted that they work collaboratively; cooperate and support with their expertise and skills, and more importantly they respect each other, and as Kramer and Schmalenberg, (2003) claim that effective professional collaborative relationships require mutual respect. The interviews-data showed that the kind of collaboration occurred between senior-teachers, trainers and supervisors in Governorate-2 has positive results on their activities and the events being conducted and achieved in the governorate (Please see Chapter 5.2 example quotes by Zahra and Reem). These participants agreed that because of their collaboration, most of their work is done smoothly; if there was any kind of students or teachers' problems raised, they coordinate and work together how to solve it, and they work out together how to meet their teachers and students' needs. They further claimed that their roles are divided, and particularly they do not have any conflicts regarding school visits or co-training. For their meetings, these participants claimed that they make sure that members from the other parties are there, attending, participating and their views are considered and respected (see Chapter 5.2). Such collaboration presented by Governorate-2 in this research has been emphasised in the literature, for example, this achieves what Coeling and Cukr (1997) stress about collaboration which involves an exchange of views and ideas and it considers the perspectives of all the collaborators, whether or not an agreement is reached in the interaction. Webber (2016) also claims that collaboration allows us to benefit from each other's experience; where newer members focus on experimentation and the more experienced members observe and benefit from the role of expertise. This example of a competence regional collaboration in this study also reflects different collaboration features mentioned above by Lindeke and Sieckert (2005) where valuable partnerships are created and a shared language is developed between individuals (and groups / parties) which reflects the diversity of contributing disciplines all helped to build the team (or the community) in this governorate. And when discussing about PLCs, Leonard and Leonard (2001) state that professional learning communities are identified by professional collaboration to improve students' learning. Such professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators/ leaders work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and develop plans for the purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. Leonard and Leonard (2001) further claim that collaborative practice is demonstrated when all the staff

members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to generate more effective teachers and their students become more successful learners (p. 10). DuFour (2004) also highlights that the powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities (PLCs) is a systematic process in which teachers work together in teams, engage in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning, analyze and improve their classroom practice. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. Even with regards the CoPs model as well, Oguz et al., (2010), for example, stress that Communities of Practice (CoPs) play a vital role as an informal communication mechanism in initiating, improving, and fostering collaboration, the management of shared knowledge and create value for both their members and organizations. Similarly, in her study, Dallmer (2004) investigated teacher educators' collaboration in 3 Dutch subject-departments of a teacher education institute. She founded that teacher educators' collaboration plays a significant role in the improvement of teacher education, and that educators' collaborative networks lead to more coherent and dense relations; with the assistance of key players who were important to support and sustain collaboration. Concluding this part, Governorate-2 then presented a good example of collaboration in practice, and this study highlight that it needs to be considered for modelling future practice in the field by the MoE officials and further implications of this finding are discussed in the next Chapter.

On the other hand, we have also seen through the interviews-data findings opposite examples of participants' perceptions complaining about the 'lack' or 'little' collaboration between different groups of teacher-educators in their Governorates; (again see Chapter 5.2 example quotes Nibras and Shahad). These findings are rather disappointing. More than half of the participants from these governorates expressed their hope in the interviews of the need for more cooperation between these parties, for their benefits that would impact positively on their work, teacher's performance and students' achievements. In the Omani context, supervisors, teacher trainers and SETs are appointed to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning and teachers' work performance, they supposed to reinforce effective teaching methods and encourage teacher's growth and professional development. Therefore, if they are collaborated and united together, their power of support, change and development will be even stronger. However, the current research findings have shown some resistance for cooperation even within the Omani

PLCs, as some of the research participants have complained about examples of teachers, schools and colleagues who were not cooperative, which force them in some cases to work independently with their own schools or with some teachers. Generally, the interviews data showed that one of the main challenges the Omani PLCs leaderships faced is to convince teachers to work cooperatively as one team and share learning and best practices. It seems that this can be true with other contexts as DuFour (2004) describes a similar situation with PLCs as he states that despite compelling evidence indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation, although the educators who built the PLCs created structures to promote a collaborative culture and encouraged teachers to work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning.

- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Opportunities**

It was noted earlier in Chapter 2 that the CPD as a term was recognised and accepted recently in the Omani context as has been shown in many projects, documents, and local conferences organised by the MoE (AL-Lamki, 2009; AL Balushi, 2017). Al-Balush (2017) claims that the MoE used to spend a lot of money each year to provide many CPD opportunities for in-service English-subject teachers and their teacher-educators. However, it seems that, since, 2014, teacher-educators' CPD opportunities in Oman face some challenges mainly due to financial issues and shortage of staff - as the findings of the study revealed. The findings exposed some participants' depression about the cancellation, pausing or ending of a number of CPD events that they used to have and attend either regionally or centrally in Muscat. These events were provided by the Ministry of Education and were cancelled mainly for financial reasons and/or other reasons such as priorities and shortage of staff (see Chapter 5.3.2). Participants believe that this may negatively affect their performance for the long term, and they expressed their hope to get the same amount of CPD opportunities as they used to have in the past.

We have seen in the previous chapter; a great number of this research participants value the Continuing Professional Development CPD events such as conferences and forums that were and are provided to them by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Oman. These participants hold strong positive beliefs about the importance of these events- especially the ones which have face-to-face - verbal communications in strengthening the professional relationships with their

colleague teacher educators. These beliefs seem to be generated from their experience of participating in such events. Some explained how these events provide great opportunities for discussions, communication, and professional dialogues with other professional colleagues, and for sharing experiences and knowledge. The findings also showed that one of the justifications behind valuing the CPD opportunities was the fact that interaction with teacher-educator colleagues in such events provides opportunities to share and reflect upon real examples based on their daily practice (see example quote by Faris in Chapter 5.3.2.) which can lead to CPD. This could mean that that CPD opportunities becomes more effective if it involves interaction among teacher-educators and collaboration between them.

I would conclude by arguing that although trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers are teacher-educators; who they themselves encourage teachers' reflection, autonomy and CPD, and they can care about their own CPD, they still need to be provided by the MoE CPD opportunities.

6.7 Key finding 6: Participants adopting different ways for communicating with each other

This Key Finding covers RQ2: How do these three groups of teacher-educators - trainers, supervisors and senior teachers- work within and across groups? as it partly reviews the different tools of communication that research participants utilise to communicate with each other at work. This section also partly addresses RQ1 as it provides examples of how the MoE encourages various communication between its staff and employees.

Firstly, with regard RQ1, the findings showed that all participants of this study employ various ways of communications at workplace within groups and regions, for updating, networking, communicating, and for sharing ideas and experiences. These include social-media apps such as WhatsApp, Instagram, twitter, Facebook and their own personal e-mails besides of course the face-to-face departmental meetings, and some CPD opportunities and events which are still available by the educational system and the MoE. The findings indicated that the social media applications are used as initiatives by these participants as they are interactive and very flexible for communications, while others would require a number of formal processes and financial budgeting such as meetings and the CPD opportunities. Example of these were the central meetings that need to be conducted in Muscat Governorate - the capital of Oman, besides most of the CPD events require formal process and arrangements

with and by the MoE. For such process, the MoE utilises an official e-system for correspondence between departments, besides to the MoE official e-mails, which is for every employee within the MoE.

However, the interviews findings exposed that not all the above-mentioned ways of communication were used effectively; nor they involved all the three different groups of teacher-educators (see section 5.3. and 5.3.1 regarding meetings). Shedding light on the importance of meetings for example, by linking them to collaboration between teacher educators. Gideon (2002) claims that collaboration will not happen automatically and must be purposeful, planned, and structured into the regular workday of educators and administrators. As Straus (2002) stresses that numerous meetings must be conducted as part of the collaborative action process. These meetings can help determine the quality, productivity, and effectiveness of the collaboration process. Additionally, at the beginning of the collaborative process, meetings must be modelled the best of collaboration in order to reach three dimensions of success in all collaborative meetings: (a) results, (b) process, and (c) relationships (Straus, 2002; Reid Ervin, 2011).

Secondly, regarding RQ2, the research findings revealed about four participants including two of the senior-staff being interviewed, expressed their enthusiasm and passion for adopting the 'MoE recent technological and communication platforms such as Yammer for example (see Chapter 5.3.4). Although only few participants mentioned these platforms, I thought its worth highlighting here, as these participants expressed that they would exploit the opportunity of this research stage, to encourage their teacher-educators' colleagues (either trainers, supervisors or senior teachers) to consider activating these platforms as they are also interactive virtual learning environments. Those participants argued that these MoE platforms are not used sufficiently by the MoE employees, although they are valuable resources and provide different communication and flexible services as they claimed.

Based on policies analysis; it was noted earlier that the Ministry of Education (MoE) itself do encourage its departments and individual employees including these teacher-educator professionals to activate and employ various communications links and means (MoE, 2016a).

However, maybe the defect that the MoE do not specify details of how or what in its official documents. It is well known that in any organisation or workplace environment, communication facilitates the flow of information and understanding between different people and departments (Carey, 2009; Cooren, et al, 2011). This flow of information is vital for managing human resource, work-effectiveness and decision making. Not neglecting the role that communication plays in removing any misunderstandings between departments or individuals at work place, understanding people better, clarifying issues and generating clarity of views and thoughts, which all discussed and raised by the research participants. That is why our MoE and responsible authorities and officials of English teacher-educators need to pay more attention to facilitate communication and eases issues between them.

There also can be a suggestion by forming virtual CoPs or PLCs in one of the MoE interactive platforms and make use of their benefits. Loureiroa and Bettencourt (2013), virtual learning environments have information and socialization places, and where members are not only active but also actors, are not restricted to distance education and integrate multiple tools, complement the physical space of the classroom and are represented explicitly.

6.8 Key Finding 7: Culture change and environmental factors as main challenges for adopting PLCs and CoPs models

This Key Finding focuses on answering Research Question Three RQ3: *How do Trainers, Supervisors and Senior Teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing professional community models (such as CoPs and PLCs) within and across their groups?* The section therefore starts by mainly synthesising participants' perceptions of the two models (potential and barriers) from the interviews' data/findings. Then, highlights the main challenges in order to be addressed by responsible leaders in the Ministry of Education.

Starting with the PLCs model, as mentioned previously in the preceding Chapters, this research targeted senior English teachers, supervisors and trainers from three different governorates of Oman. About 17 participant supervisors and SETs were involved in this research, experienced being leaders and members of Professional Learning Communities PLCs through a training course conducted by the Specialized Center for Professional Training of Teachers (SCPTT).

Briefly, as discussed in details in Chapter 2, the SCPTT, which was established in 2014, put in practice forming PLCs in the Omani Educational field through the Expert Supervision training course in the academic year 2016/2017. Hundreds of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were formed in the Omani governmental schools which included different kinds of teacher-educators (of different subjects). These educators included senior supervisors, regional supervisors, senior teachers and head teachers besides administrative staff and schoolteachers. The research findings showed that the vast majority of these 17 participants (the ones who were members in these PLCs and involved in this research) claimed that these PLCs successfully achieved their aims and helped to develop both teachers and themselves as teacher-educators professionally and hence positively impacted on students' achievements (see Chapter 5.4.1). Examples of some of these participants' work and data of these PLCs, such as pre and post students' tests and examples of workshops they conducted is presented in Appendix 11. On the other hand, these participants also highlighted a number of challenges they faced during their journey with implementing and forming these PLCs such as, for example, the excessive workload of members including supervisors and SETs, teachers' passive attitudes and other challenges (see Chapter 5.4.2).

Regarding the CoPs model, as mentioned earlier, the researcher discussed the idea of CoPs with the research participants and a large majority of them welcomed its theory and regarded it as a strategy for professional development. Comparison this finding with those of other studies in the literature, this finding was also reported by Chalmers and Keown (2006) and Looi et al (2008) who highlighted the significance of building 'communities of practice' for lifelong learning and continuing professional development of teachers and educators that prepares them for 21st century skills. Similar findings mentioned by Al-Shammakhi (2020) in his study of the effectiveness of current teachers' continuous professional development, as one of his respondents (senior teacher) raised that the lack of CPD opportunities was because there were no professional communities between schools.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, participants of this study have listed potential benefits for the CoPs, besides they anticipated different obstacles that need to be addressed and put into consideration for the implementation of the CoPs (see Chapter 5.5.1 and 5.5.2- for the listed advantages and obstacles highlighted by participants). Some of the participants anticipated these

potentials and drawbacks based on their experience of the Omani educational field and others used their experience of forming and working in the Omani professional learning communities (PLCs) discussed earlier.

For the purpose of addressing RQ3 above, I compared between participants' perceptions of both models benefits and challenges and I synthesized the shared ones in table 6.2 below.

CoPs and PLCs Shared Benefits and Barriers in Education	
Benefits	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving Teaching-Learning environment through sharing and using variety of teaching/learning techniques, activities, and resources. - Deepening and sharing of knowledge and practice. - Increasing of innovation, expertise and more experts in the educational field. - Developing different skills including leadership skills, analysis and critical thinking besides cultural awareness. - Developing materials and resources. - Coordination, varied communication tools and regular interactions. - Collaboration, problem-solving and common values such as respect, support, and team-work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-management; balancing between the communities' work, their original post duties and responsibilities and other personal commitments. - Accepting change and diversity; including the challenge of changing negative beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of some communities' members; and the challenge in building culture of independence and professionalism between the members. - Funding and support; including the need for more facilities, services and covering the lack of resources, paperwork, and materials needed for the communities. Besides the need of the availability of a supporting leadership. - Managing the continuation of the communities; including the challenge of keeping members committed, enthusiasm and interested.

Table 6.2 - Shared benefits and barriers of CoPs and PLCs models. Synthesised from the perceptions of this research's participants- from the interviews data.

As illustrated in Table 6.2 above, these are mainly the significant shared benefits and challenges mentioned by the participants from the interviews data. I think that this synthesis of potentials and barriers would support the argument that these two models are the same in their core (Bouchard, 2012) as groups of various interested people - in some aspect getting together - forming learning communities to learn, help others learn and empower each other. Highlighting that the models' benefits noted by the participants above (listed in Table 6.2) is something that would seriously encourage us to consider adopting these models in our work system. What we need is to focus and work on a plan how to overcome the obstacles that we might face. In this section, I decided to focus in more detail on the obstacles faced by the participants (listed above

in table 6.2), hoping to be addressed by the MoE in their future practice. I summarized my discussion of these challenges in the two subsections below:

- **Negativity and Culture Change**

Donahoe (1997: 245) states “If culture changes, everything changes” (p. 245). Generally, the term culture, as noted earlier in the previous Chapter, includes beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and even rules that shape and influence every aspect of how people function in a society either positively or negatively depending on the kind of these aspects. And in a learning community, members’ beliefs and attitudes are key factors driving the success of the community and achieving its aims and objectives (Hollins, 1996; Hargreaves, 1997; Hinde, 2014).

This research interviews’ findings have shown that changing participants’ negative beliefs and behaviours was the first step that the ‘Supervision Experts’ course’s trainers thought about and considered in designing the course materials. Which then also became one of the first and main obstacles that the participants-supervisors and senior teachers who were involved in forming the PLCs in the Omani schools (see PLCs Challenges in Chapter 5.4.2) faced during this experience. The negative attitudes that were reported by this research’s participants in the interviews: arguments and constant complaining about work-related issues (e.g. policies, extra duties or overloaded work), selfish behaviours (non-cooperation and avoid team working, unhealthy competition between members, selfish ambitious). These members with negative attitudes, to some extent, had negatively affected their colleagues, or in other words, had undesirable influence on their collegial activities. Such attitudes at workplace could create unhealthy atmosphere by causing distrusts between colleagues and leading to unhealthy competition between them, as some participants extended, which might result in achieving the success at the expense of each other. Hinde (2014) claims that negative culture come from the members who are unwilling to change whose tone is oppositional and acerbic. Peterson and Deal (1998) stress that these people would only recount the stories of failure and the negativity dominates their conversations, interactions, and planning. In fact, this was supported by Al-Zidjali (2018) in her study about her PLCs project, she found that there is a group of female teachers who have negative energies or drives; these teachers as she claimed have their own methods of disseminating their negativity among their colleagues-teachers to

frustrate them. The researcher claimed that she tried to address this issue by holding individual meetings with them. She tried to highlight their strengths and urging them to exploit their abilities and capabilities for the benefit of the professional community.

We have also seen through this research findings, how the ‘Supervision Experts’ programme’ trainers and materials’ designers thought about studying different models of change and integrated one of these in their materials. They decided to use ADKAR model for change (see Figure 5.4 and section 5.4.2.1) because, as they reported, it was easier to learn, its letters are simple to remember, and they thought it was suitable and would suit their trainees’ supervisors. According to Malhotra (2019: 1), ADKAR model aims to facilitate change and used to limit resistance to organisational change by setting clear steps to be reached throughout the process. Every member included must reach each goal, and that different people may achieve different goals at different periods or times.

Based on these results and participants’ experiences, this research would emphasis that changing negative attitudes need to be considered as main issue to be faced during the implementation of any professional communities’ model in the future. In order to build these communities in the right environment, we need to establish a positive cooperative culture; changing participants' negative attitudes and behaviors that are influenced by the environment. According to Happe (2020:1), the ability to change behavior is the primary success metric in the initial stages of building the community.

At the same time, and considering ADKAR model, and for better results, this research suggests the need to understand and accept the slow nature of negative behavior and culture change and commit to a long-term effort for the communities building, which will require maintaining the integrity of the members (Webber, 2016). Nasr (2005) in his study emphasises that managing change is a complicated process that requires creativity in its practice. He further claims that its success depends primarily on the enthusiasm for the change by leaders and on the commitment of those affected by change to implement. Sarason (1996) also points out that the problem of change is a problem of power, which means that we need a delicate balance between mandating change (the attitude, or the practice that is usually unsuccessful or negative) and bringing the targeted people of change either teachers or

teacher-educators to believe in the need for and efficacy of the reform or change. This way would allow these people to gain and feel a sense of ownership with the goals and process of change. Darling-Hammond (1997) also strongly endorses the more democratic curriculum education reformers that have to overcome many long-standing traditions and obstacles. In other words, in places where the authority structure is such that the leadership makes most decisions and the staff other members are not involved are less likely to embrace change. And the opposite is true for places whose community members are involved in decision-making. Therefore, maybe we need to make sure that members join the CoPs or even the PLCs are voluntarily based on a shared interest and internal motivation and eventually move from a state of peripheral engagement to full participation (Wegner, et al, 2009). Most importantly, collaboration and interaction among members of the CoPs or the PLCs could play important roles in their willingness to change, which also need to be taken into consideration by the MoE leaders and authorities.

Having discussed ‘negativity and culture change’ as one of the main professional communities’ obstacles, I will discuss the other listed barriers (in Table 6.2) that need to be taken into account under the following subsection.

- **Facilities, Space and Time for learning**

The interviews findings have indicated that time-pressure (or time-management) was one of the matters that have negative impacts on different issues related to how teacher-educators (participants of this study) work across groups and governorates (please see examples above in Chapter 5.1). Teacher-educators’ relationships were affected because of the short time left for their communications, collaboration; as working full time and having to keep up with their work-responsibilities left some of those professional teacher-educators with little time to work on their professional development PD or engage in new Continuing Professional Development (CPD) ideas, innovations or resources in the field of education.

With the Omani PLCs, we have also seen how the participants (involved in this project) complained about the time pressure with the huge amount of work they had to do in creating the PLCs besides their own commitments and other work-related activities as well as personal commitments. Similar findings of PLCs challenges were highlighted by Al-Yahmadi and Al-

Shammakhi (2021) as well. Time-management versus workload; was indicated as a key challenge by almost all respondents who participated in these PLCs. This finding is also congruent with Clarke's (2014) study findings, which concluded that inadequate time for planning and preparation was one of the largest challenges. Hence, it is evident that the overload timetables is one of the most hindrance that faced by the PLCs members everywhere. One of the instruments that DuFour et al (2006) suggests in PLCs is organising working hours in order to make time for collaboration and generate input to the strategic plan implementations. Hord (2009) also stresses that PLCs' leaderships must identify or arrange space for meetings and learning which accommodate all the PLC's members besides he highlighted the important role of the leadership in encouraging PLC's members' cooperation in finding or creating time for their meetings. This issue needs more attention and needs to be raised and highlighted to the Ministry of Education officials and considered by them if they want teachers, senior teachers and supervisors to have the opportunity to practice and implement PLCs activities effectively. The role of the authorities in our context is also to listen to those teachers and their educators even before involving them in any additional CPD, innovation or a project. They also need to make sure that they are not complaining about the workload or work-related activities or even personal commitments they have before asking them to join any CoPs or PLCs.

Based on this research interviews 'findings and from the above discussion I can reach to a conclusion and recommend that both CoPs and PLCs models have valuable meanings and purposes; therefore, in order to implement these purposeful learning communities, we need to develop them in a natural way without artificial complicated rules; and without any complication from members' concentrations that might hinder the learning process. At the same time, these purposeful learning communities (either CoPs or PLCs), should not be left alone in silos because some people know how to collaborate, but they do not do enough. Therefore, if these professional communities to be set and formed in the Omani contexts, they need to be looked at by supportive leaders and authorities, properly funded, get enough support, and guidance where possible. Having present the key findings drawn from the current study, the following section discusses the connection between the key findings discussed above.

6.9 The Relationships between the Key Findings

All the key findings of this research (discussed earlier in this chapter) are strongly related and connected and each one influences and builds on the other in certain ways as demonstrated in figure 6. 1 underneath:

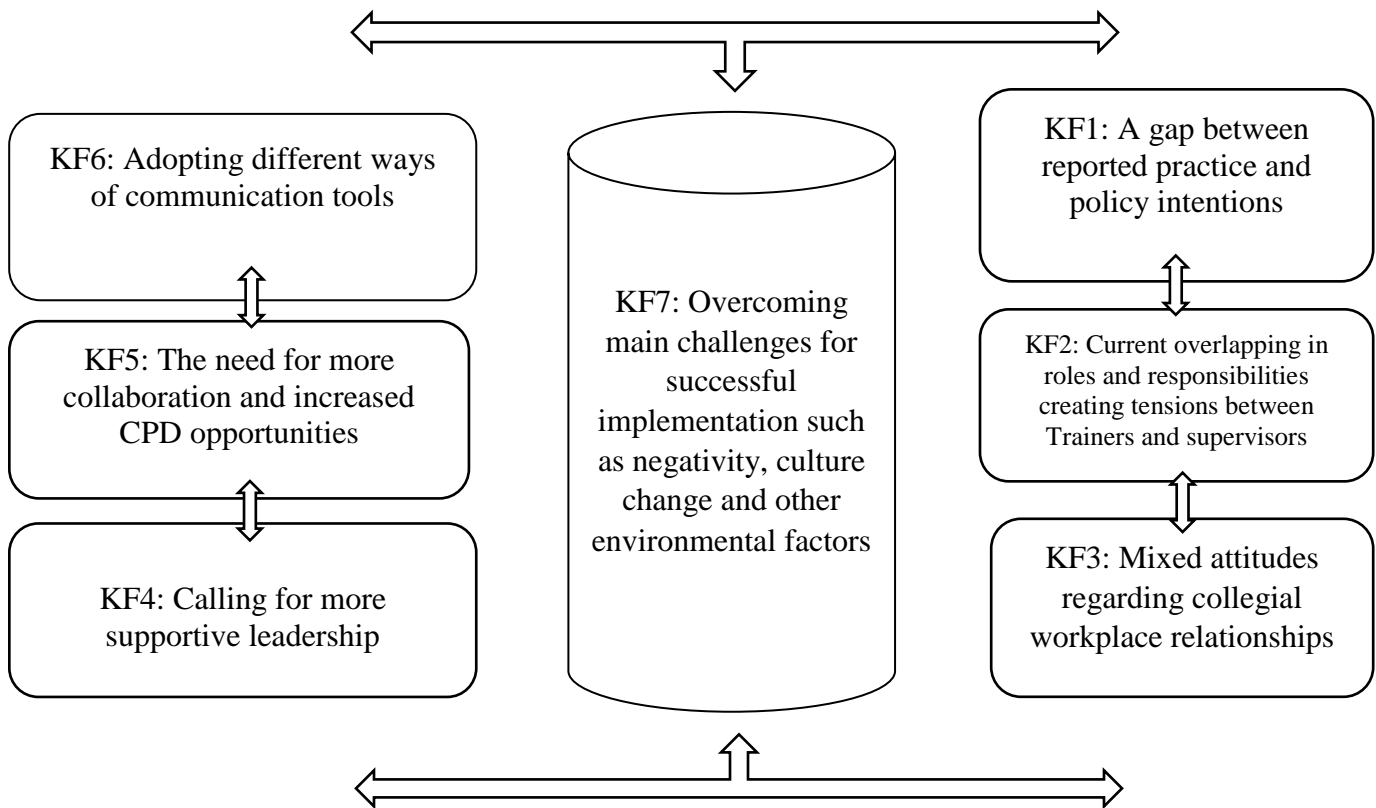


Figure 6.1 The Relationship between the Key Findings of the current research.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the links (and connections) between the key findings, as presented in the seven shapes of the figure, each component influences the other. These key findings somehow form cause-and-effect or problem-and-solution relationships. The first three KFs (1,2+3) on the right can be the causes and/ or the problems, while the other four key findings on the left and middle (4,5,6, and 7) work as effects and/or solutions that we could adopt to fill in gaps and avoid possible tensions or issues between teacher-educators. For example, without communication tools (KF6 in the Figure) and information exchange, employees cannot learn from others or from expertise (Weber, 2001). The collaboration and CPD opportunities (KF5)

cannot happen without communication; these elements in whole, work together to support the learning environment, and learning is not possible without communication (Lei et al, 1999). It is a prime factor for learning, either verbal or nonverbal (i.e. through social media applications). Duncan and Moriarty (1998) describe communication as the human activity that links people together and creates relationships; it is at the heart of meaning-making activities; and hence, communication affects workplace relationships (KF3).

Also, research also suggests a strong link between communication and the supportive leadership (KF4) (Hackman and Johnson, 2004). Weber (2011) states that some communication problems would occur because of the top-down leadership that is significantly different from the supportive leadership that builds in effective PLCs. Effective leadership has been described as a motivational tool that can be used to influence others towards achieving specific learning outcomes and aims. Hence, this kind of leadership can be one of the main keys in achieving the Ministry of Education's plans and policies in the field. Moreover, supportive leadership significantly influences employees' decisions about staying in their current job; it is expected that leaders' demonstration of supportive behavior towards their followers may influence the sense of duty of the followers to remain committed to the organisation they belong to (Anis et al, 2011). Therefore, effective leadership requires to know how to communicate with various groups including different kinds of employees and administrators within the organisation. Effective leaders also need to be able to adapt itself and their practices based on the group they are communicating with at the time considering collaboration with and between employees to drive the organisation's success and build strong workplace-relationships. Certainly, this latter, is built with the collaboration between employees or the individual members between each other and their leaders using the most flexible and effective ways of communication. Moreover, with the opportunities of continuing professional development and learning (such as meetings, conferences, and discussions) even within a community will help to develop employees' thinking, performance and skills and strengthen their workplace relationships. Last, defining roles and responsibilities influence all other elements as well and moves in the same cycle. As setting clear roles to everyone help to establish clear norms or goals, which would lead to a smooth communication and strong relationship between members themselves and between them and their leaders. At the same time, these meet the characteristics of successful PLCs or CoPs.

All the key elements as shown in Figure 6.1 above work in a moving cycle and each element affects the other either positively or negatively depending on the performance of the members' and their leadership.

6.10 Summary of Chapter 6

In this chapter, I have discussed the major Key Findings of this study in light of the research questions, the Omani Educational Context and the existing literature. I started by reviewing a number of Omani Educational documents, highlighting that the Omani policies originally encourages collaboration and interactive relationship between its departments and employees generally. And this is therefore applying to the English-subject teacher-educators as they are part of its bodies and are employees of its departments. Besides encouraging them to utilize tools of communication that enable employees and departments to better work together, regardless of their location or used devices. However, it seems that these policies are not all applied - or achieved properly- in the same way they were set and planned. This is because the findings of this research have shown very little and limited collaboration which sometimes also lack between the targeted groups of teacher educators in two governorates (out of 3 involved in the research). One of the Key Findings that was suggested to be one of the reasons for this lack of collaboration is an overlap in roles and responsibilities of trainers and supervisors, which approved to create a kind of conflicts and tensions between these them at workplace. Accordingly, these participants are hoping for more collaboration between them and requested more CPD opportunities for their professional development's sake as quite a lot of professional development programmes were cancelled by the MoE for financial reasons.

The Chapter also discussed mixed attitudes and perceptions of the targeted groups of teacher-educators related to their workplace relationship. Highlighting the role of the supportive leadership that could play in assisting and inspiring colleagues, building trust and encouraging collaboration between them and overcoming any encountered challenges, which are characteristics that more than half participants of this research expressed to hope find in their leadership.

Later in the Chapter, in order to address RQ3, I synthesised benefits and challenges of both Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) models that are

revealed from the interviews' findings. Focusing on the barriers to be addressed for any future practice and emphasising that PLCs and CoPs are ones of the professional development models that are well worth considering to be practiced as means of developing learning and building sustainable improvements in the Omani Educational context. They can be powerful tools that enable both individuals and the MoE as an organisation to increase their effectiveness. *However*, PLCs and CoPs change over time in different ways and in particular aspects that may or may not be planned as circumstances change; therefore, we need to understand their stages of development because these kinds of communities are also like living things, they go through a natural cycle of birth, growth, and death. They start as a mere potential, then they develop progressively into their mature stage, and then they continue to evolve until they are no longer relevant (Wenger, 1998). Understanding these stages of development provides some useful insights into their changes and would help to provide ways of responding to them in each stage and identify what needs modifying to be of real help if they are to be of further use to practitioners. This is because these communities depend on the passion of their members, their death always remain a possibility at any point of their development. However, as Wenger (1998) advises we need to work on making their will to live an expression of the human spirit and whatever legacy they leave behind more meaningful for practitioners and researchers. Given my practical conclusion that the general idea of both CoPs and PLCs models worth adopting in order to promote teaching and learning and sustainable development of education, I suggest that the Ministry of Education, policy makers, and schools should take forward the findings and the recommendations in this research. Finally, the discussion in this chapter illustrated in one diagram the relationship and the interaction of all of the above major or Key Findings, each one influencing the others in some certain ways.

The next and final Chapter highlights this study's original contributions. It also considers the implications of the research for policy and practice, its limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research. I end this thesis with my personal reflections and some final thoughts about the study.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7

This final and concluding chapter presents a summary, implications, recommendations and final comments about my research study and journey. The chapter is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction of the chapter, 7.2 reviews the research by presenting a brief research summary and addresses its three research questions. Then, 7.3 discusses the original research contributions to knowledge, which is divided into practical and theoretical contributions of the study. Section 7.4 provides implications for policy and practice. 7.5 considers the research limitations, while section 7.6 presents suggestions and directions for future inquiry, offering both theoretical and practical recommendations based on the study's findings and discussion. Finally, section 7.7. provides the researcher's personal reflections of the research process. In this section, I briefly reflect on this PhD journey, as carrying out this study has had a significant impact on my professional practice and allowed me to shape a new researcher identity.

7.2 Addressing the Research Questions

In the current study I originally aimed to explore the adoption of professional communities amongst the Omani English-subject teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors and senior English teachers- SETs). Two models of professional communities were particularly investigated in this research: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Communities of Practice (CoPs). Both these models have gained international attention for facilitating and deepening the learning of knowledge, skills and experiences as well as for collaboration amongst professionals in both public and private sectors. Therefore, since these models have proven beneficial to other professional fields, I aimed to explore their status within the Omani educational context, specifically between the Omani English teacher-educators in terms of how they may support English teachers, and in some cases are advocated during their professional development. I believed that it might be useful to generate an understanding of the importance of the CoPs and PLCs and explore their current adoption and potential in Oman as a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) strategy, to enhance teacher-educators' learning and improve their skills and knowledge.

The overarching question guiding the study is: What is the status of professional communities amongst English teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers) in Oman? In attempting to investigate this, my study was guided by the following three specific Research Questions (RQs), which will be addressed directly in this Chapter:

1. *What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani trainers, supervisors and senior teachers are required to work?*
2. *How do these three groups of teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers) work within and across groups?*
3. *How do trainers, supervisors and senior teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adopting and further implementing professional community models (CoPs and PLCs) within and across their groups?*

To answer my research questions, I adopted four data gathering tools including semi-structured interviews, policies-data analysis, observations (see Appendix 13) and my research diary (see Appendix 14). I conducted interviews with 8 trainers, 12 supervisors, 11 senior teachers and 5 of their senior staff; making a total of 36 participants (from both Training and Supervision departments). In addition, I used document-analysis as a support method particularly to help me answer the first research question: *What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers are required to work?* I managed to collect several official policy documents, such as MoE achievement reports and participants' job specifications (see Table 4.5 in 4.4.2). This study investigated whether policy guidelines and practices at the time of data collection (2019 and 2020) facilitated Omani trainers, supervisors and senior teachers to cooperate and build strong relationships with one another in any way. Finally, I conducted two non-participant observations of Omani PLCs members meetings attended by four participants of the interviewees and reflected on them in my diary, to complement my fieldwork.

I conducted a thematic analysis of rich data from these different methods (presented in Chapter Five: Findings) and discussed seven key findings emerging from analysis of this data (discussed in Chapter Six: Discussion). I considered these findings in the light of the existing research and literature (reviewed in Chapter Three) and within the Omani contextual background and educational policy (presented in Chapter Two). In the following three subsections, the three research questions will be addressed in turn.

- **What is the provenance of the current policies on how Omani Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers are required to work?**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, key finding 1 entitled 'A gap between reported practice and policy intentions', mainly addressed this research question. As the Ministry of Education is responsible for managing education at all stages (Grades 1 to 12), it takes the responsibility of developing the educational policies, guidelines, curricula, and schoolbooks. The Directorates of General of Education across all governorates are responsible for implementing the Ministry's plans and policies. In return, the Ministry works toward conferring financial and administrative powers on these directorates and has a central role to play in optimizing education system performance. The Ministry of Education takes decisions of educational reforms based on its participations in internal and external international evaluations and reports of its educational systems (such as Ministry of Education, 1987; World Bank report 1991; Ministry of Education, 1993; Ministry of Education and UNICEF Muscat, 1999; World Bank report 2001, TIMSS 2007; UNESCO World data on education, 2011; TIMSS and PIRLS assessments 2011, World Bank, 2012, New Zealand Education Consortium, 2013, TIMSS 2015). So, the first influencing factor of existing Omani policies, are international reports about Omani education.

The Ministry of Education's documents reviewed, historically and as part of recent reforms, encourage communication and collaboration between its employees and departments (e.g. MoE, 2001, 2004a, 2011). By educational reforms, I refer to the reform that was planned and implemented after 1995 and particularly began in 1998, when the Basic Education system was introduced. The Ministry's organisational structure was reviewed, and measures were taken to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the central administration in order that the staff could communicate and take actions in a more efficient way. These changes included improving channels of communication, facilitating administrative procedures, encouraging collaboration between departments, and ensuring a flow of information in a flexible manner between departments of the Ministry at central and regional levels (MoE, 2001).

Along with this 1998/1999 reform, the Omani Educational context witnessed the identification of the three different roles of teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers). Besides, the previous instructional supervising system that was characterised by authority and control

(inspectors were to inspect if teachers were doing their job in the correct "prescribed" way) changed to a more collaborative process between supervisors and the teachers (MoE, 2001; MoE, 2004a). The supervisors were encouraged to replace the role of inspectors who are looking for mistakes, and be more like facilitators, advisors and most importantly, colleagues. They became also responsible for monitoring and developing the performance of senior teachers as professionals and as leaders of a team (Harrison and West, 2001). This was meant to change supervision of teachers to a more school-based model in which senior-teacher posts were created to be heads of English sections in their schools, work closely with their colleagues' teachers and have an important role in their professional development. Senior teachers were regarded as resident supervisors with the role of monitoring and developing the performance of teachers of English inside and outside the classroom. Senior teachers, in this different supervision model/system, were required to attain different qualifications (a minimum of a BA degree) and assume these different responsibilities in order to support their colleagues. (MoE, 2001 and 2004a; General Directorate of Educational Supervision, 2006).

To summarise the previous point, it is worth highlighting the fact that the MoE guidelines (or policies), include expressions that encourage positive facets of healthy workplace relations. Phrases such as teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, communication, support and community are actually found in a number of MoE policy documents (e.g., MoE, 2010/2011). Some of these documents include clear statements that encourage collaboration and communication links between the different related departments and their employees and bodies, including flow of information (e.g., MoE, 2004a). However, I would argue that maybe the missing part in these documents is that they do not specify procedures, ideas or suggestions about which kind of collaboration activities and which MoE departments need to be involved. It would be better if some similar details were included in these policies specifying (or naming) related departments for collaboration, and who is responsible to set up and follow through on such collaboration.

On the other hand, the analysis of policy documents supported by the interview data demonstrated some overlaps or contradictions in some of the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and trainers. This overlap specified in the task of 'conducting and delivering training courses, programmes or workshops' can be found in the 'supervisors' job-specifications' policy

document (MoE, 2018). Whereas trainers believed that this is their main role and duty which is what they qualified and trained to do. The findings of the interviews proved that such overlap in roles and responsibilities may create conflicts between trainers and supervisors, as was indeed stated by a number of trainers during the interviews.

Finally, as this study is mainly concerned with the professional communities (CoPs and PLCs models), the policy documents review also set out to see if there is any mentioned information related to these models in any policy during our recent educational reforms, especially after the 1998 reform. Using the search facility, the policy analysis showed that the word ‘community’ standing by itself was mentioned in one of the MoE achievement reports (2001) regarding “enhancing community participation” through the establishment of Parent Councils in all schools. However, this was about encouraging parents to communicate with schools and participate in their children’s’ learning process. The findings also showed that there is no direct mention of forming or encouraging adopting the Communities of Practice (CoPs nor is there any direct mention of CoPs as a concept itself in any policy document. More importantly, there is also no direct mention of any other kinds of professional learning or practice communities formally within the MoE policies until 2014. This is when the Specialised Centre of Professional Training for Teachers (SCPTT) was established. This centre aimed at forming ‘Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs) in schools through the requirements of some of its training courses. For example, the ‘Supervision Expert’; which is partly investigated by this research, through the Omani PLCs. This course targeted different subjects’ supervisors, including English, who formed PLCs, back in some of their governorates’ schools. They were asked to write an assignment of 5000 words about this PLCs experience. The general aims and the contents of this training programme were first proposed, planned and designed with an external international institute which is the ‘Centre for British Teachers’ (CfBT). CfBT signed two-year contract via an open tender with the Moe to manage the implementation of the Supervision Expert’ course besides two other programmes. This would indicate the Western provenance and contribution to the Omani educational policies. Please see 2.6 for more details about this programme.

- **RQ2- How do these three groups of English-subject teacher-educators (trainers, supervisors and senior teachers) work within and across groups?**

Key Finding 3: *‘Mixed attitudes regarding collegial workplace-relationships’* and Key Finding 4: *‘The need for more collaboration between English Subject teacher-educators and increased CPD opportunities’*, that were discussed in the previous Chapter, mainly outlined how participants believed they work within and across groups. The interviews data showed different participants’ views and perceptions; not all the teacher-educators had the same point of view with regard to their workplace relations and how they work within and across groups.

Looking at the specific groups, all the trainers involved in this research revealed that they had a good relationship with each other, and that they related well with their colleagues either in their governorates or across the Sultanate. They all agreed that their trainer colleagues were cooperative, supportive, and always worked as one team like a ‘Community of Practice’, as they described themselves, albeit an informal one. The majority of senior English teachers (SETs) involved in this study agreed that they shared formal, yet supportive relationships with their colleagues SETs in their regions and across regions. They declared that they arranged formal and informal events with their SETs colleagues (as mentioned in 6. 2.2), such as peer observations, visits, and also shared model lessons and work-related documents (e.g., plans, projects, and innovations). Finally, the supervisors involved took a neutral stance about the cooperation and the support of their colleagues, as they were unsure whether their fellow-supervisors did cooperate, communicate or worked well together. Mainly, most of the supervisors involved complained of the large number of administrative and technical tasks, which they considered as a reason that hinders building good relationships with their colleagues.

Regarding the relationships and collaboration across these three parties, some participants believed they share good relationships with other teacher-educators in their governorates, while others thought that there was a lack of or little collaboration between the three groups in their governorate. For example, the vast majority of trainers, except for two trainers from one region, complained about their relationship with their colleague supervisors and expressed their hopes for better communication and more collaboration with them. Here, the research findings demonstrated a number of cases reported by research participants as examples of lack of cooperation and impediments to the flow of information and communication between supervisors and trainers. It may be that these cases are only examples experienced by the

participants' special circumstances and do not represent the general reality of the organization. However, these examples actually occurred despite the fact that the MoE issued instructions to the contrary. For example, one of the participants talked about non-transparency and not being informed about or involved in an important work-related meeting conducted by X department and that her training-team was supposed to be part of that meeting. This resulted in an embarrassing situation, because she was the trainer who was supposed to deliver the training for the teachers, which discussed in that meeting. This participant explained that they always had to push to have meetings with this X department in their governorate; if they did not, they would never be informed about anything related to teachers that goes on in that X department related to their work. Another participant related another embarrassing situation when he had not been informed about a change of plan to his training in front of the trainee teachers.

These simple examples prove a lack of communication and collaboration between trainers and supervisors in some educational governorates in Oman, which needs to be highlighted and addressed by these departments through positive intervention by their senior-staff members or authorities' leadership.

- **7.2.3 How do trainers, supervisors and senior teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adopting and further implementing professional communities' models (such as CoPs and PLCs) within and across their groups?**

Key Finding 7: *'Culture change and environmental factors as main challenges for adopting PLCs and CoPs models'* addressed this question in the previous chapter. The vast majority of this research participants encouraged adopting these two models of professional communities to enhance their professionalism and for their valuable benefits they listed (see 5.4.1., 5.5.1 and 6.8). However, at the same time the participants highlighted considering facing the main obstacles that would combine the implementation process, for the sake of effective adoption of these communities.

Starting with the benefits considered by participants, firstly they strongly believe that such communities hold the potential of developing a culture of cooperation and effective collaboration between the three groups of teacher-educators who are responsible of helping, mentoring and

educating teachers. Several participants used the expression that these communities would ‘bridge the gap’ between them as English-subject educators in different areas and in many ways such as discussing teachers’ needs, difficulties and students’ weakness, discussing training, and exchanging ideas, resources and materials. Hence, participants declared that these professional communities would help in developing different skills, such as critical thinking, identifying problems and solving them, research/analysis skills and leadership skills. Participants believe that professional communities can work as a vehicle for them to enhance their continuing professional development, thus improving both teacher education and research on teacher education besides developing students’ achievements levels. Finally, participants also outlined and discussed a good number of benefits that were presented in Chapters 5 and discussed in Chapter 6, such as knowledge deepening and sharing, cultural awareness, supporting MoE sustainable development, increasing innovation, increasing expertise in the teacher-education field, regular interactions, developing materials and resources. Other benefits would also include common values such as respect, support, and team-work.

On the other hand, the participants outlined a number of challenges that would be involved in implementing professional communities based on their own experiences and understanding of the Omani educational context. The majority considered time-management as a major challenge and the need to balance their involvement in these communities, their work, other duties and personal commitments; especially since a significant number of supervisors are complaining about their current workload as well as a shortage of staff. Another challenge considered by participants was managing and accepting change. In other words, changing negative beliefs, culture and attitudes, while also and considering how to motivate colleagues to join such communities, move on, get out of their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) point and be skillful, competent and independent. Additionally, in terms of adopting a culture of independence and work-professionalism, a few supervisors in this study pointed out that some of their colleagues need to take their responsibilities seriously and not linking it with a person, to shine or get promotions or (to only pass) an assessment, as some of them do now. Finally, participants also mentioned project management as a further challenge with regard professional communities including finding members, deciding on and dividing roles and responsibilities within the communities, finding sponsors and providing resources.

Having summarised the main findings of the study and addressed my research questions, I now move to consider the contributions of the study.

7.3 Original Contribution to Knowledge

Based on my key findings, this section outlines the main original contributions of the study to the existing knowledge and research on English-subject teacher-educators who act as trainers, supervisors and senior teachers in Oman. The section focuses on the practical and theoretical contributions concerning crucial aspects such as professional workplace relations, supportive leadership, collaboration between teacher-educators and their CPD. It also highlights the contribution of the study in the development and support of professional communities models (PLCs and CoPs), in the Omani English-subject educational sector.

7.3.1 Practical Contributions of the Study

This study had the privilege of tackling a number of significant issues between the three identified groups of teacher-educators for the first time within Oman, as discussed shortly below:

First of all, to the best of my knowledge, this research is the first to investigate workplace and professional relationships between these three distinct groups (trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers), who are responsible for supporting teachers in their respective educative specialism. No previous research from the Omani educational context examined this sensitive area before, though it would appear to be an issue of great importance. As such, this study contributed original insights in unfamiliar terrain within this area of research, with potential to be extended by future research.

This study is also original for clarifying an area of conflict between trainers and supervisors as a consequence of some overlap in their roles and responsibilities represented in conducting training courses; although it is the main role of trainers, according to their job's title and description (MoE, not dated). The study considered this overlap to be one of the primary factors which negatively affect workplace-relationships between English subject trainers and supervisors in different governorates. Furthermore, this study queried the purpose of asking supervisors to

conduct training workshops and courses, which is the main original job of trainers. This occurs despite supervisors' complaints of feeling overloaded with duties and work, including administrative work and the provision of technical support for the hundreds of schoolteachers they supervise.

In addition to this contention of overlapping roles, the current study also highlighted how more consideration should be paid by the authorities to relationships between the three distinct groups of English teacher-educators as previously identified. The study contributed by considering the important role of the leadership and its effect on the professional relationships of teacher-educators. The study called for a more supportive leadership, which would be expected to play an active and effective role in bringing these educators together, strengthening their connections and motivating them to work as one consolidated team. A culture of collaboration within and across this educational organisation (or what this study would prefer to call 'community') could provide a healthy working environment for these educators and their leaders. Furthermore, it could encourage them to become committed to their own learning and that of their peers (in particular, the less experienced ones), working together to develop collaborative solutions to their work-related challenges.

The practical contributions of this study are also related to the shortcomings that were reported by interviewees within the study. Again, some of these shortcomings related to their collegial professional relationship, such as facing a lack of cooperation from colleagues, and other negative attitudes. Other challenges related to their profession itself, including the overwhelming workload, the extensive range of duties demanded, and broadly overlapping roles and responsibilities. The current study therefore extends teacher education research (e.g. Al-Yahmadi and Al-Shammakhi, 2021) and in response to these findings (mentioned earlier in previous chapters), this study calls for new policies and practices, in order to improve the professionalism of English-subject teacher-educators within the Ministry of Education in Oman. This can be done, for instance, through lightening their workload where possible, stimulating work enthusiasm by helping teacher-educators to meet their expectations, respecting their colleagues, and improving their work environment and working conditions.

More importantly, my study adds to the area of the targeted Omani teacher-educators' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and extends this field of research. Although the area of CPD is acquiring broader interest in Oman, it still does not receive the attention it deserves. There have been some developments in research focused on generalist school teachers and their CPD (e.g., Al-Lamki, 2009; Al-Balushi, 2017) and a number of researchers focused only on supervisors investigating their perceptions of the supervision system and their CPD (e.g., Al-Abri, 2009; Al-Mahrooqi, et al., 2016; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2017 and 2019). However, the current research is the first to target these three distinct groups of English subject teacher-educators professionals simultaneously. This includes trainers who deliver training courses for English teachers; supervisors who guide and mentor teachers; and SETs, who are school-based mentors and support teachers. This teacher-educator relationship has been figuratively illustrated as a three-sided triangle, as shown below in Figure 7.1:

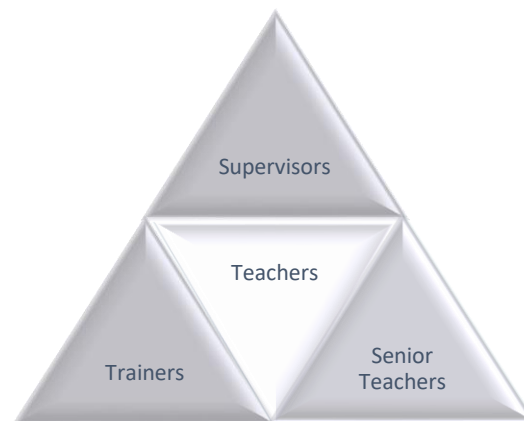


Figure 7.1 The three **distinct** groups of teachers- educators providing support for teachers.

Concerning teacher-educators' CPD; firstly, the current research contributes to the initiation of adequately shared CPD opportunities. This study highlighted a growing need to provide shared CPD events (and to an extent, more CPD opportunities) for these three distinct groups of English subject teacher-educators, who are responsible for training, guiding and supporting teachers; and involving them together, and collaboratively, in some of the same CPD events and activities where possible. Secondly, this research contributed to the administration of these educators CPD events. The current study suggested administrating these CPD events in collaborative forms. This

means that the identification of suitable shared CPD programmes, dates, venues, and the selection of external experts and guest speakers, should be undertaken as collaboration between these three distinct teacher-educators' groups (through identified representatives).

Finally, I would note that the research findings are valuable in relation to the wider context of the study. I outlined earlier in Chapter 1 that there had previously been very little research focused on the development and support of professional communities in Oman, and more specifically none which have targeted these three distinct groups of English subject teacher-educators. The educational significance of the study lies in the provision of an overview of the current status of professional communities and their potential, as seen through the eyes of the English-subject practitioners, in the context of the Omani Education system, which as noted has rapidly evolved since the 1990s.

7.3.2 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

To begin with, this research has made an original contribution to academic knowledge and research by presenting a theoretical comparison between the distinct PLCs and CoPs models of professional communities (see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3.4). This comparison illustrated the similarities and the differences of these two models, while providing an overview of the connections between them. Additionally, based on interviews findings, this study also offers practical integration and synthesis of the shared benefits and barriers of the two professional communities' models (see Table 6.2); and how they can both be described as context specific models. For example, the identification of some of the challenges faced by Omani practitioners in their local context such as a 'lack of cooperation' between colleagues, an 'overload of work' and lack of time, and a 'lack of resources and materials' provided by schools and the training center. This knowledge contributes to the transferability of both PLCs and CoPs models and theories, and hence may be considered and employed as a reference by educators and researchers all around the world.

Furthermore, this thesis acknowledges the potential importance of both CoPs and PLCs models as vehicles to drive the development of teaching/learning and knowledge-sharing within an organisation (such as the Ministry of Education in Oman, which is dispersed into different governorates). It reinforces that these models of professional communities are able to influence

teacher-educator practices, as well as their CPD and professional learning; although it may face significant challenges during its implementation, such as culture change. In doing so, the study expands on the findings of previous studies that investigated the PLCs model (e.g. Al Mukhaini, 2018, Al-Shuaili, and Ibraheem 2020 and Al-Yahmadi and Al-Shammakhi, 2021) and extends the limited research available on the understanding of CoPs in the Omani educational context (e.g. Abatayo, 2018).

In extension, Arab culture is known as a communal culture, where ‘community’ is enacted as a concept that is seen and practiced. Individuals within such a community are continually encouraged to ask one another for opinions, help, advice, and more. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3 (see 3.3), Islam as an institutional religion stresses the significance of cooperation between people not just in terms of religious belief but also in their social lives, as well as sharing and participating in common matters and collective discussions, as referenced in many verses of the holy Quran and teachings by the Prophet Mohammed (Osman, 2012). This means that the sanctified principles of supporting, sharing and cooperation between people are those that underpin the professional communities’ models. As always, an emphasis is placed on the benefits of collaboration within professional communities; as such, in theory, it should not be unusual to Muslim teacher-educators all around the world. Therefore, another theoretical contribution for this study is the comprehension that the professional communities’ models can work effectively among Muslim teacher-educators in Oman and further afield.

Furthermore, this study contributes original insights by drawing connections between PLCs and the use of a systemic change model (see Figure 5.4 above) for successful implementation. This study suggests that practitioners must acquire a general understanding of change, during and even in advance of the implementation of the PLCs, as the real change requires time. Doolittle et al. (2008) emphasises that the implementation of PLCs can be less than effective without proper planning and prior discussion regarding the aims of included members. Building on existing relationships, implementing collaborative teaching activities, benefiting both students, teachers, leaders and other members; all of these require sustainable change that in turn requires time and effort given to a systemic process monitored and supported by visionary leaders. This encompasses multiple opportunities for discussions of the relevant professional learning community values, and building commitment to the development process in order to improve.

More importantly, it is ensuring the existence of a shared vision and mission between all involved partners and collaborators, and developing the necessary trust with members and schools. This study then contradicts Fullan, Hill, and Crevola's (2006) claim that shared vision is less than (or less important than) a precondition for success.

Finally, it should be noted that, while the results of this research cannot be completely generalised, they do have wider practical implications, and may well be relevant for other dispersed organisations in Oman; not only the Ministry of Education, but elsewhere across the Gulf (GCC), or even further afield. To a large extent, these countries share common factors such as ethnic groups and culture, geographic features, and religious beliefs, and to some extent similar educational contexts. Accordingly, this study could be of interest, as it offered an additional, newly-distinguished perspective on how to look at and positively develop teacher-educators' relationships and collaboration. Besides this, it also provided an overview of the implementation of professional communities; their benefits and challenges in similar contexts.

Having illustrated the significance of the study in terms of its practical and theoretical contributions, the next section sheds light on its implication for policy and practice.

7.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

This research's findings throw light on several issues that contribute to the educational practice in Oman as well as provide some recommendations for practitioners, policy-makers and the authorities in charge of developing teacher education field within the MoE. Hopefully the educational policy-makers and officials will use the results and the implications of this study to improve policy and practice in teaching as well as in teacher education and development.

7.4.1 Implications for Policy

Findings exposed some gaps between educational policy and its actual implementation in professional practice by teacher-educators and their authorities. This was relating specifically to the flow of information, communication, collaboration and relationships. Based on my findings, I would recommend the following:

Firstly, it is vital that documentation relevant to these three groups of English subject teacher-educators, such as their roles and responsibilities specifications, is made accessible to them, corresponding to those in authority, the stakeholders, and the practitioners. More specifically, documents which contain practical guidelines related to English-subject, curriculum or assessment updates plans, provisional meetings dates, special events organised, all need to be produced and made available to all groups of English-subject teacher-educators.

With regard to the overlap of roles discussed earlier, which affects the relationships between English-subject trainers and supervisors in different governorates, I would recommend revising the trainers and the supervisors' job descriptions (or job specifications) to make them clearer, voiding any contradictions in roles and responsibilities between the two posts especially in terms of delivering training courses. This would help each group of teacher-educators to focus their efforts on the issues that are important for their position and avoid any kind of conflict and unwanted personal ambition.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the system does encourage coordination and communication between MoE departments. However, discussions with the participants indicate that most of the policy documents do not specify procedures for collaboration between MoE departments (what, how or who). I would recommend specifying some details in these documents, for example suggesting of some types of collaboration that these three groups of teacher educators need to be involved in. These details can start at managerial level and carry on through their departments to encourage as their active involvement and participation in the planning and delivery of teachers' CPD. There should be transparency in calls for meetings as well.

The interviews findings also shed light on a significant issue, which is teacher-educators' excessive workload; especially the supervisors. They were the most group suffering work overload due to different reasons such as range of responsibilities and shortage of staff. An excessive workload with long hours could lead to stress in the workplace, a tense working environment, and negative competition between coworkers (Dowd, 2020). One way to solve this is new recruitments of sufficient number of qualified individuals in each job of teacher-educators, especially supervision. There is a need for increasing the 'financial grades' of each

job; this means employing new members of supervisors, trainers and supervisors to be able to cover the shortage of staff. Hence, teacher-educators can have more time for their own professional learning, have less work stress and could participate in professional communities to develop their practices.

Besides, as this thesis partly explored the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Oman, and the findings proved its successful implementation in the Omani schools though it was implemented for the purpose of completing a training course and it presented many challenges. I would endorse continuing the implementation of these PLCs in the Omani schools even after covering the targeted groups of participants by the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers. I would also recommend funding these PLCs financially where possible and provide them with sufficient stationery in order to achieve their activities.

This study also demonstrated a good example of collaboration in practice by one out of the three governorates involved. Based on this finding, it would be advisable that such practices of collaboration were to be modelled to the other governorates across the Sultanate. One way to achieve this would be by providing the opportunity for this governorate (by teacher-educators representatives) to present their experience of collaboration and good practices between the different groups of teacher-educators to the other governorates through shared CPD events.

To sum up this section, in order to improve the current situation, it is recommended that officials and policy-makers at the MoE in Oman would need to assess/evaluate the implementation of English subject teacher-educators' policies (trainers, supervisors and SETs), genuinely support, facilitate issues and show their commitment to their staff, and abolish any bureaucratic process that reduces work effectiveness (see Chapter 5.2.2).

7.4.2 Implications for Practice

This thesis highlights the need for more developmental CPD opportunities for the targeted groups of this research the English subject teacher-educators and greater attention to developing their capabilities, expertise and skills. Additional implications for practice would be developing a

culture of collaboration between English teacher-educators a motivating work environment, relationship building is an essential tenet of supportive leadership. Besides, making effective use of the social media sites and MoE online platforms for better communication between these educators. All are discussed shortly in this section.

It is crucial to recognise the vital role of CPD for these teacher-educators. Such recognition should not be merely stated on paper, but also be reflected in reality. Senior teachers, supervisors and teacher-trainers need to be provided with proper training and sufficient support in order to be competent, capable of performing their job efficiently and able to make a positive impact on teachers' CPD and provide appropriate support for teachers. Hence, I would endorse various CPD activities, such as training courses and conferences, to be made available to these teacher-educators because of their significant impact on teachers. These CPD events, besides developing their knowledge and skills, will provide opportunities to meet and talk to each other, discuss issues and share their experiences and knowledge. Moreover, these CPD events need to be documented and contain practical guidelines which explain their aims and the processes. It is extremely important to be made information about dates and venues available to the CPD coordinators at the MoE. Also, a confident level of these teacher-educators' involvement in the planning and suggestions of the kind of their CPD activities may encourage them to offer more professional development activities. It is also essential that sufficient resources to support these CPD activities are made available for these educators. However, I would argue that teacher-educators should not limit themselves to these MoE CPD opportunities, as they might not be available for various reasons including financial. Therefore, I would highlight that, departmental meetings, for example, can be a CPD opportunity if they are used effectively to encourage professional dialogues (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995), in addition to external and internal visits between departments.

The present study raises the significance of creating and spreading the culture of collaboration and a work environment that is supportive, cooperative and stimulating for sharing and learning are further recommendations to emerge from this thesis. This work environment needs to be characterised by establishing teamwork, trust, open dialogues and transparency and respect among the different groups of teacher-educators and avoid selfish ambitious.

Moreover, leaders and authorities need to assess regularly how employees perceive their jobs. Observing their motivation, enthusiasm, commitment and satisfaction and understanding how their employees individually perceive the workplace will positively influence their productivity and perceptions about their work. Motivation plays a very significant role in the professional performance and productivity of teacher-educators. Here the importance of the role of leadership comes to the fore; supportive leaders are aware of their duties and responsibilities and able to encourage their subordinates. Shared and supportive leadership empowers and influences its followers, leads to job satisfaction and a positive work environment that fosters respect, trust, cooperation, and emotional support (Banai and Reisel, 2007; Schyns et al, 2009).

One form of collaborative learning activities that MoE can encourage teacher educators to adopt is joint PLCs and CoPs models as methods for their CPD and peer-learning. These would provide opportunities for English subject educators within each governorate to share their experiences with colleagues from the other 10 governorates and up to the central level including some of the MoE authorities, stakeholders or policymakers. Through these communities, teacher-educators could be involved in different sorts of CPD activities, including group discussions, sharing resources and peer observations. These models would create reasons and opportunities for frequent interaction and regular meetings between these educators besides establishing positive relationships with colleagues (Jita and Mokhele, 2014). To a large extent, close association with like-minded colleagues or similar interests generates professional growth and development. I am not proposing these models as such as the best recipe for action or the best answer and solution for these teacher-as such educators' professional development; in fact, there is no one recipe for learning and there always can be variety of ways for CPD.

Embracing a new initiative may not always be met with positive reactions, but it is worth trying nonetheless. Therefore, a suggestion that alongside with the implementation of the Omani schools' PLCs, CoPs model would also be worth adopting within the MoE teacher-educators as well. For example, considering its informality feature and that members do not necessarily work together on a daily basis, hence, different groups of teacher-educators could easily build informal CoPs between themselves to solve their issues. This model would serve as a vehicle for them to extend their learning and develop more than a culture of collaboration amongst them. On the other hand, PLCs could be kept to develop students' learning and achievements in schools,

bearing in mind that other members need to be involved in this model such as the head teachers and other staff.

The interview findings showed there was a shortage of materials, guidelines and documented handbooks that clearly explain the concepts of professional learning communities which have been implemented in the Omani educational field for more than five years now. Accordingly, this study recommends that more of these documents are needed to be available to everyone to guide teachers and other members to implement PLCs effectively. Additionally, as suggested by some supervisors' participants, materials that would also explain or related to other professional communities' models, such as CoPs, need to be made available for educators and/or in MoE libraries. These would serve the purpose of providing different options or models of professional communities; especially, that CoPs model are not yet implemented officially by the Ministry of Education. The availability of such materials within the MoE would contribute to the understanding and use of the CoPs theory as well. These materials would help to guide interested educators including even teachers to read about, think of different ideas or theories of learning and make use of them. More importantly, clarifying professional communities' different models, their advantages, use and critiques is also crucial for decision-makers and those responsible for education, in order to explore applications for education, reflect on challenges and act on them. Having said that, this study highly recommends that MoE officials and policy-makers should consider acting on the challenges raised and faced by this research participants regarding the implementation of Omani PLCs. Find best strategies to overcome these obstacles; listen to practitioners in the field and facilitate issues for them in order to achieve more effective implementation of this model in Omani schools.

Another recommendation from this study, is benefitting from the social media platforms in facilitating communication and creating learning networks between all the three different groups of English Subject teacher-educators. This is because, social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram...) became part of our lived social experiences. Krutka and Carpenter (2017) emphasize that social media presents not only opportunities for communication and engagement, but also opportunities for connected learning and occasions for re-creation of identities and selves. Social media allows educators to discuss and share ideas with thousands of other educators, all over the world, and at a time that suits them best (Allison, 2014). Hence, this study

recommends getting the most out of these sites, despite the limitations reported by this study's participants. One way of achieving this is through activating the conundrum of this modern life and make use of the social media platforms as a rich resource for teacher-educators' CPD. And if teacher-educators are to be responsive, they should consider how to effectively, intelligently engage with them and overcome their limitations.

Finally, this thesis also highlighted the importance of activating and make effective use of the Ministry of Education online platforms to provide resources, information, references and articles for teachers, educators and staff members to use and benefit from. This could help solving the issue of limited reading resources and materials that is raised by participants of this study. Besides, allocating **skilful** members in information technology to do this work, Hord (2009) suggests assigning somebody from the PLCs to be responsible for organising the various sources of data in formats that are user-friendly, as he claims that reviewing, studying, and interpreting data is the foundation of professional learning communities.

In terms of the next steps to implement the changes suggested above, the recommendations and the implications of this study would be shared with the MoE and its directorates, such as the Directorate General of Human Resource Development and the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers including their officials, stakeholders and policy makers. Presenting this research's findings in local conferences would also be another way to share my study recommendations. To a wider audience

Having highlighted the implications of my recommendations, the next section considers the inadequacies of the study.

7.5 Research Limitations

No research is perfect and all research can be enhanced in some respect, this research is, of course, no different. This study was carefully developed and has contributed to knowledge in the field; nevertheless, it is important to consider its limitations, some of which are acknowledged below.

Overall, the present study was valuable in providing a picture of the relationship between three different groups of Omani teacher-educators who are responsible for supporting teachers. However, teacher-educators within the Omani Ministry of Education (MoE) exist for all different subjects. This study investigated the beliefs, experiences and practices of only one subject (English). Participants in the study were representative of this group only and, therefore, the results obtained are not necessarily true of firstly the remaining groups of English teacher-educators and secondly the other groups of teacher-educators for other subjects. However, the relatively long experience of the teacher-educators involved and consequently the influential role they may have on their colleagues may give a certain level of relevance of the findings of the study to other groups of teacher-educators in the other regions. Moreover, the study only involved participants from three out of the 11 different governorates in Oman. Hence, the study is context-bound and not generalizable to the other governorates of Oman.

Furthermore, the scope of the investigation was restricted, as the study was limited to investigating the views of teachers-educators- and some of their senior staff, who are responsible for observing the application of strategies, evaluating the practices of employees, suggesting alternatives and raising proposals. However, the study did not involve the officials or policy-makers, for example, who are more responsible for the education system and taking decisions. Nor did it consider the impact of the Omani PLCs inside the classroom by interviewing students or their parents. Both elements would have provided further insight into the study.

Finally, one of the limitations is that I have not found the scope of policy I originally planned to obtain for documentary-analysis. Some documents were not available or accessible. Unfortunately, not all the policy documents I obtained provided all the necessary information required to answer my first research question in a historical sense, which was the intention at the start. Some Ministry of Education documents only provided a small amount of useful data, some none at all, and other documents were incomplete.

Despite these limitations, the study generated rich data for the thematic analysis, which contributed to the knowledge of the relationship between teachers-educators' beliefs and

practices in CPD in an era of reform. A number of areas for further research are suggested in the following section.

7.6 Directions for Further Inquiry

This study opens the agenda for further research and allows for additional interesting themes and topics to arise that would be worthy of further investigation in the Omani educational field, particularly in teacher education. The following are suggestions for future research:

Firstly, one of this research limitations that it covers only participants from three governorates in Oman, thus further research needs to be carried out in Oman covering a wider number of participants from more governorates. A more focused investigation of specific aspects of the PLCs or the CoPs that contribute to improving teaching and learning practices and supporting students' learning and achievement would be helpful. With the MoE's goal to increase students' learning and achievement and the educational process and with the evidence pointing to the fact that PLCs and CoPs can contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and learning, more research should be conducted on the best approaches for conducting PLCs or CoPs, either in schools or within the MoE educational departments which can utilise the best practices. Knowing the effective components, aspects and leadership strategies of the CoPs and PLCs will give educators greater insight into implementing effective CoPs and PLCs that affect students' achievement and teachers' development. This knowledge can then bring educational leaders greater focus and, thus, increase the likelihood of raising the level of achieving students' achievements.

This research revealed some contradictions in perceptions regarding collaboration between the participants teacher-educators. Therefore, I would suggest that future research can investigate purposeful collaboration focused through either professional learning communities or the communities of practice. For example, action research studies could be organised to provide leaders, educators and teachers insights into purposeful collaboration. to drive the excellence and continuous improvements within the ministry of education. In which, for example, participants work and collaborate through PLCs within the same school or the same governorate and through CoPs across a wider number of schools and governorates across the Sultanate.

Although the area of teachers' continuing professional development is gaining interest in Oman, I think the area of the teacher-educators' CPD (which includes trainers, supervisors, and SETs) might be an area to focus on in future. Therefore, based on the research finding that teacher-educators feel depressed about the cancellation of CPD by the MoE, it would be interesting to conduct some research exploring the kind of CPD events needed by each of these groups of teacher-educators.

Finally, further research should draw broadly across various methodologies to document the implementation of Omani PLCs and their impact with the support of the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers. For example, it would be interesting to conduct longitudinal observational studies (both quantitative and qualitative) could document changes in teaching practice as teachers work in PLCs, and in-depth case studies could investigate changes in teaching practice and student achievement. Moreover quantitative and qualitative documentation including in-depth case studies of changes in student achievement over time as teachers engage in PLCs and also the nature of teachers' work as they analyse their students' work and how this changes.. Although the analysis of data about student achievement is time-consuming, it is essential in building the case that PLCs are powerful types of reform (Vescio et al, 2007).

7.7 Personal Reflections on My Research Journey

Doing a PhD is often described as a journey and it is claimed that it positively changes individuals and develops their thinking and their ways of looking at things. Looking back to my 'first day' when I started this journey years ago, and comparing it with my thoughts and feelings now, I would acknowledge that I am a different person with a developing academic and personal identity. The process of carrying out this research study positively impacted and influenced me as a researcher in many ways. Being a PhD student is not the whole story nor it is only a story of getting a good degree. It was a big challenging part of my life full of different experiences that included fears, tears, depression, sadness, happiness and fun. It has been amazing to watch my thesis grow starting from the first paragraph on from the first page through data-collection until drafting the last page.

Doing my Ph.D. at the University of Glasgow was an exceptional experience for me and a prodigious learning opportunity that developed my personal and practical skills. I found

everything in the University interesting and motivating. For example, one of the things which enhanced my experience was the fascinating office with a wonderful view in St Andrews Building that I shared with my doctoral colleagues. This office included a number of international colleagues of different nationalities from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Chile, and China. We had a number of useful discussions and meetings, through which we shared different cultures, customs, ideas, experiences and even different food recipes.

Unfortunately, we missed such wonderful opportunities in the second half of my third year till the end of the fourth year because of COVID. With some of these colleagues, I admit having what I can describe a small 'Community of Practice', in which I experienced sharing or having similar concerns and passions for our studies as well as experiencing collaboration and teamwork with this small group of PhD colleagues. I initiated forming a WhatsApp group for these colleagues, which I always considered as a CoP as I am concerned with this topic. It was not a formal group; at the beginning we decided to form it for the purpose of friendship, chatting and supporting each other with anything that we did not know in Glasgow, then as we got deeper in our studies we started to chat about our topics and research studies. Although, it was a small group of 5 students, I felt it was really supportive; exactly as described by Epstein (2018) we were colleagues who were united in our experience of similar obstacles or similar challenges. Once this group (or community) was formed, we established trust and accountability, which smoothly moved this community/team forward. We built a common language and desire for learning together. The trust we built from the beginning allowed us to do this with ease because we had faith in each other and our solid community. Honestly, these colleagues were always there to help, either in generating ideas for my research, or in sharing what they have learned from their own research and or to help with any personal issues. We gathered in many evenings for chats and discussions, and we attended some of the University of Glasgow's workshops and courses together; we shared thoughts, opinions and ideas about the usefulness of these courses for our own research. That is why this group may be called or identified as a 'Professional Community of Learning and Practice'.

Before carrying out this research, particularly I had faith in the significance of the collegial relationships and the importance of building trust and collaboration between colleagues. Therefore, in conducting this research, and my interviews with different kinds of participants,

listening to them, talking about these relationships, everyone with different perspectives, views and hopes. Looking at my relationships with my office colleagues and their support, all these things strengthened my belief in the importance of paying attention to our collegial relationships and connections, not only at the workplace, but also those made as part of the research journey. All these definitely strengthened my view of the importance of building professional communities, even just smaller ones that serve our needs. After these years with my PhD and particularly with this topic, I am now aware of the importance of building critical and thoughtful-relationships with workplace colleagues and beyond. My hope is that I will be able to build useful and productive relationships in the Specialised Centre for Professional Training of Teachers, -my workplace building, and with the related departments within the MoE, especially the Supervision Department as a key department working with teachers and senior teachers hoping to support others and promote an inquiry attitude to our pedagogy.

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Appendix (2) Consent Form



Consent Form

Title of Project: An investigation of the 'Communities of Practice' between those responsible for the professional development of English teachers in Oman and the role of the stakeholders in supporting these communities.

Name of Researcher: Salima Khamis Sultan Al -Sinani

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
 3. I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.
 4. I consent that the researcher is observing me and taking notes during groups meetings.
 5. I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.
 6. I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.
 7. All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
 - The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
 - The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
 - I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
 8. I agree to take part in this research study
- I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Salima Khamis Sultan Al-Sinani

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix (6) Request Letter of Participation

College of Social
Sciences

Letter of Request**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

You are being invited to take part in a doctoral level research study entitled " An investigation of the 'Communities of Practice' between those responsible for the professional development of English teachers in Oman and the role of the stakeholders in supporting these communities". Details of the study and researcher will be provided to you in a "Participation Information Sheet" (Plain Language Statement). To take part in the study, you are asked to sign a formal consent letter to express your willingness to participate, it will be prior to the beginning of the interview and observing you (only if possible) and taking notes during your group's meetings. Your participation in this interview and observation will be greatly appreciated, as it will enable the researcher to contribute for improving the 'teacher education, training and development' system at the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the Sultanate of Oman. The interview will take more than 60 minutes to complete.

Yours sincerely

Salima Khamis Sultan Al -Sinani

PhD researcher – University of Glasgow

Appendix (7) An Example of Coded Interview

3	
<p>classes, we taught young learners, it was a very good experience. And we presented that in Ireland. It was successful. We got a certificate of the best presentation. When we came back, several supervisors called us to repeat the workshop. So, things like that.</p>	
<p>Researcher: <i>Ok so from this point, I would like you to describe the relationship between the trainers - the Omani trainers, as a group, how do you work together, and what kinds of things you do together, what kind of activities - and how exactly do you describe their relationship between each other? The Omani trainers as a group -</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani Q: How trainers work with a group across the Sultanate.</p>
<p>Zahra: <i>You know, Oman is a very wide country, so we don't meet regularly. Some from Salalah, it's difficult to meet. But we have a WhatsApp group, and we have also sharing emails. So whatever new, we put it in the WhatsApp group. Anyone writes anything, or has an idea about any issue - training issue - they just put it in the WhatsApp, and say "What do you think of this?" Or say, "I tried this one" - like, I did this work last November, I did a workshop for Cycle 2 teachers about developing writing, in Cycle 2 classes, and that was my own work. So I sent it to the WhatsApp, I said, "I've done this and this and this" - I am posting, I am sharing ideas.</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani Trainers' relationship - how they work with their group.</p>
<p>Zahra: <i>You know, Oman is a very wide country, so we don't meet regularly. Some from Salalah, it's difficult to meet. But we have a WhatsApp group, and we have also sharing emails. So whatever new, we put it in the WhatsApp group. Anyone writes anything, or has an idea about any issue - training issue - they just put it in the WhatsApp, and say "What do you think of this?" Or say, "I tried this one" - like, I did this work last November, I did a workshop for Cycle 2 teachers about developing writing, in Cycle 2 classes, and that was my own work. So I sent it to the WhatsApp, I said, "I've done this and this and this" - I am posting, I am sharing ideas.</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani WhatsApp group uses</p>
<p>Zahra: <i>So those who want to try this workshop, they emailed me: "Please send us the materials." So I sent the materials by email. And if they have any questions. And they do the same with me, if I read something interesting, I want to try it, I email that person: "Please send me the materials." So I think now the technology helped us, social media helped us.</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani Sharing</p>
<p>Researcher: <i>So, most of the experiences, or most of the topics, you are sharing them in the WhatsApp group?</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani What is shared in WhatsApp group</p>
<p>Zahra: <i>Yes, even videos, links, books we read - we share them in the WhatsApp group.</i></p>	
<p>Researcher: <i>And what about problems, challenges you face?</i></p>	
<p>Zahra: <i>Mainly we discuss these in the meetings, because we have 2 meetings a year. So that's I think enough - we share ideas, we share challenges, solutions. We support each other.</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani How trainers face problems and challenges</p>
<p>Researcher: <i>And do you think that meeting twice a year is enough?</i></p>	<p>SA Salima Al Sinani Trainers meetings</p>
<p>Zahra: <i>Yes, because our meetings are not 1 day. Usually, it goes for 3 days. So, we stay in the same hotel, and we see each other in the (inaudible) as well, we go outside together as trainers, also.</i></p>	

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Researcher: **So even informally, you go out like friends?**

Zahra: Yes, yes. We meet for dinner, for lunch - and we discuss, beside the morning meetings, the formal meetings, when we sit and we butcher our problems, and others can give us solutions and ideas.

Researcher: **You are sharing this procedure from long time, or just recently?**

Zahra: **So, we are sharing it... I became a trainer in 2006** there were few Omanis only. At that time, it was also to meet, but not like now, now we meet 2 times for 3 days. Previously we met 4 times for 1 day. So now I think it's **more rich**. Although it's only 2 times a year, but it's rich. And then when you are not in the meeting for a reason or another, they send you the materials, the idea of what happened.

Researcher: **And during the meetings, you as experienced trainers, do you think that you are used, or within the meeting you share your ideas, you are welcome to share?**

Zahra: Yes, yes, yes.

Researcher: **How do you think the feeling of new trainers - even in the WhatsApp group, or during the meetings - do you think they are supported?**

Zahra: Usually when they start - if you want to have a new trainer, the strategy or the process is that you do first an interview for them in Muscat, with head team. And then they present a short presentation. So usually when they go to these interviews, before they become even trainers, they contact us. And then, so, before they become trainers, they usually take the numbers of all trainers - all experienced trainers - and they call us. And they say, "Tomorrow we have an interview - what do you think the questions will be, what do you want us to know?" So we give them suggestions, recommendations - we give them some instructions: say this, avoid this, do this. And then when the presentations... Not last year, the year before, I revised presentations of 3 new trainers. They're not trainers yet; they want to apply for the job, so in the process. And when they become trainers, they have 1 year to do a portfolio, for a trainer's profile. And that's a profile we have to do lots of readings - they read, and then they apply with their colleagues or students. So usually, they send us things to revise. I have here in the region, 2 trainers. Both trainers, I revised their profile, and also I supported them in the things that they need to become trainers. Someone [inaudible], also revised her file and supported her in the interview. So things like that.

Researcher: **So you think that they are welcome, they are well supported -**

SA Salima Al Sinani
The group of Trainers Relationship

SA Salima Al Sinani
Trainers - rich meetings in the past

SA Salima Al Sinani
New trainers - New members - How are supported.

SA Salima Al Sinani
The procedure of supporting new members in the training team.

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Researcher: **So you didn't move?**

Zahra: We didn't move. And we are not moving, because this is the thing that makes our relationship with the supervisors so successful - among all the regions. And this is always a credit that is shown in the Ministry of Education. Whenever, and wherever, we have a meeting, a person from the ministry said that this is the only region which has no problems at all with the supervisors and the headmistress, and we have **that smooth relation with the teachers** - we know the teachers, we know the supervisors, we know the senior teachers, we know their levels - their linguistic level, language - and the methodology. **So we know their practices**, we are aware of what problems they have, and we are aware of those who are very good, excellent teachers. **So we use them in our training as well**, like [inaudible], now we are doing this for the 4th year training.

Every year I have a senior teacher that supports me, every year. Because I know the senior teachers who are perfect teachers of reading. I know the senior teachers who are perfect in another skill. **So I bring them to deliver training with me**. **So I show them up**, and I use them as well, at the same time. **So they're doing the job**. And they like this thing, when a trainer calls them to deliver training for other teachers in the region. They feel that they are appreciated.

Researcher: **Do you think you didn't feel in any way that this can affect your position as trainers?**

Zahra: No, not at all. It's the opposite. I feel that I'm welcomed at the events, and sometimes many **many** schools when they do events, they contact me to revise the **programme**. Because they want to surprise their supervisors. So, they call me and say, "Come please, have a look at our **programme**" - because when supervisors come, we want them to say "Wow!" for the event." So I go, I support them, and when the supervisors come, they **don't** know that I supported them. And I revise the **programme**, so I am also giving them some help in a way or another. I also revise the workshops that they present, I revise the research they do, for both teachers and supervisors.

Researcher: **So, your relationship with the supervisors is very strong -**

Zahra: Yes, I attend all the meetings they do, with the teachers -

Researcher: **Really, and how are these meetings in terms of formality?**

Zahra: They are formal, I guess, but in every meeting, if you have a look at the agenda of the meetings, there are 15 minutes for the trainer. And this is a rule in the region -

SA Salima Al Snani
Trainers and Supervisors sharing the same office.

SA Salima Al Snani
Building workplace relationship and healthy atmosphere

SA Salima Al Snani
Completing each other- trainers and SETs

SA Salima Al Snani
Encouraging SETs and Supervisors to do training.

SA Salima Al Snani
Strong relationship

SA Salima Al Snani
Participate in their meetings - about 15 minutes

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Researcher: To do what?

Zahra: To present whatever new we have as trainers, or to say something about our training, our job - to advertise ourselves, to advertise our programmes. In every meeting, for the males or the females - or mixed in [inaudible] - in every meeting for the supervisor, there are 15 minutes for us. And this has been done for years now. And it will inshallah continue. Even the new trainers, I ask them to do the same. So if I'm not attending, then a colleague is attending. But we are there, in their community. And even in the English events, in the schools, we are always invited.

Researcher: So can I say that you are working as one hand, one group?

Zahra: One team, yes... Even with the senior teachers -

Researcher: So can I describe [you as a professional learning community, or a community of practice?]

Zahra: If you wish yes. Now some of the senior teachers are taking the programmes in the centre, in Muscat, [inaudible] specialised teacher. I revise for them, the materials they do, it's in Arabic, but still, I revise for them. They come to the office, tell me this and this and this, and this is my job. I mean the trainer's role is beyond giving or delivering workshops. We are here as professional people. So they come to us, for advice, and for help, for support. We should be here for that; it's not just a matter of delivering - it's the easiest thing just to deliver courses, the easiest thing in our job.

Researcher: So, in any way, you don't feel you face any problems with the supervisors? Conflicts?

Zahra: In our region, no, because we have good relations. Now, you came here today to the region, you saw who was with me - the lady whom you met, is an office [inaudible], who was doing the job for the supervisors. I have nothing to do with her, but she's supporting me in everything. She came - she met you, she brought all the materials you see, coffee and things. And I have nothing to do with her. I'm a trainer from a training centre, she's a [inaudible] office. But we have this relation, of being one team and one family.

Researcher: I think this is maybe unique within this region only, I mean I don't -

Zahra: I'm not sure, I didn't... I think it's a unique thing to have this strong relationship.

Researcher: Can I say, for example, if they face problems - I think you mentioned this in one way or another - that they also contact you to maybe... If they face any problems with teachers -

SA

Salima Al Sinani

Attending supervision events and meetings

SA

Salima Al Sinani

They are working as a CoP or PLC - same features

SA

Salima Al Sinani

An example of cooperation

Zahra: Yes, like for example, if one teacher is very weak in the language. And they don't know what to do with her. They just tell us. So what we do is, we take nearby schools - teachers who are the same - and we give them courses. So we are not focusing on that teacher - we brought some other teachers who have the same problem, and we give them the courses, or the programme, or the workshop. So they don't feel that, she is the one with the focus. Because the supervisor doesn't want to do that - not to have conflict with her. So she passes that to us, and we do our job in trying to solve that problem. And to go over the witnesses the teachers have in class.

Researcher: So, with all these effective ways, and these strong relationships between you, supervisors, trainers, and senior teachers, how do you feel - or how do you evaluate - the effect of this efficient working on the levels of teachers and their performance?

Zahra: [When teachers attend our courses, as trainers, they see the supervisors in the course. In every course we do, there must be one supervisor at least. So when they attend the course, and they see the supervisor is there - so they feel, "Ah, it's not just for me" - so it is also for the supervisor, so they feel it's ok just to come. They have this idea that courses are just for weak teachers. When they come, they see their supervisors there, they feel relaxed and they do come to the courses. This is the first point.

The other point is that they see the relation between the trainer and the supervisor. Because they see us with the supervisors everywhere; so, when you ask them to do something between their schools, they feel that it's ok. Two, three schools work together to do something - to do an event, to do research, to do practice. To apply something. They don't feel that this is something unusual, because they see us working together, so it's ok for them to work together as well.

[And regarding their performances, as I told you: if they feel shy to tell their supervisors, or they feel hesitant in telling their supervisors - because the supervisors at the end, they have to write reports on them - so they come to us, they feel free to come, and call us and say, "I have this problem, can you give us suggestions?" These are the teachers. Because I don't write reports, I don't give scores, for the teachers, and they know that. So I tell them, why don't you try this strategy, or, why don't you read this book, it can help you - why don't you attend this workshop, it helps you.]

Researcher: So, I don't want to talk about the impact of training, but at least your relationship with the supervisors, and with the senior teachers; do you think that it helps to improve and develop the level of teachers in this -

Zahra: Hopefully, at least we have a good reputation here in the region. As trainers.

SA Salima Al Sinani
An example of working together to support teachers.
Roles completing each other

SA Salima Al Sinani
Working as one team - good impact on teachers

SA Salima Al Sinani
SETs are closer to trainers because they don't write their reports

Researcher: From where you got this -

Zahra: From being in schools. We are seen in schools; we are not hidden. They see the trainers everywhere - in the events, they see the trainers, we go to classes, we attend classes, we attend shared lessons - when teachers do something, they invite us: "Come, please see what we do." We go to schools together. Like 1 hour and a half from here, just to see what teachers are doing something. When they invite us, we go, we don't say no, we don't want to go, it's not our job, because if they invite you, that means they see... They want us to see their practices. They also contact us to see their... Whatever we gave them in the courses, when they apply things - like methodology - they call us: "Please come, I want you to see how I am applying this and this." So, I take one of the supervisors, and I go, and we observe them in the classes.

Researcher: You take supervisors?

Zahra: If they wish. I take permission from the teacher, "Do you want me to come alone, or do you want me to come with a supervisor?" If the teacher says, "Please come alone, I don't want my supervisor to see me, because this is something new, I'm trying".

Researcher: And this is part of your job, or it can be something which you do -

Zahra: Well, I think it's one of the roles of the trainers; I have to see teachers, otherwise my job is useless. If I give them, if I deliver the courses and then that's all, then what's the benefit? I think we have to be in classes. And real classes, seeing real practices. I think this is one of the roles. I'm not sure whether it is formally one of the roles or not, but I believe it is the most important role: to be in schools, in classes.

Researcher: I will go back to your relationship with supervisors. Do you also share any WhatsApp groups with them?

Zahra: Yes, I am part of, I am in the groups of the supervisors, and senior teachers, we have one group. For seniors and supervisors, I am in them, I am in the group. Mr. Abdullah is also in the group of the males, so we see what they write, we participate with our ideas.

Researcher: So you don't have one group for male and female?

Zahra: No. But there is one group for the supervisors only, and we are not in that group, because, you know, maybe they want to discuss something - although they invited us, but I think it is something for them, we are in the other group, where they are there, with their supervisors and their senior teachers.

Salima Al Sinani
Cooperation between trainers and supervisors in this region

Salima Al Sinani
Procedure

Salima Al Sinani
Sharing a WhatsApp group with Supervisors and senior teachers

Researcher: Are you dividing it like this, I mean, how about working together, identifying the needs, or even for designing the training sessions or the training materials - do you think they need to work together -

Zahra: Yes, they **haye iq** put the plan together, and from the Ministry of Education, it says so. When we put the plans, as trainers, we **haye iq** have the supervisors with us. When the supervisors put their plans for the year, they **haye iq** have trainers with them. This is from the Ministry of Education. This is a formal order from the Ministry of Education. And it's very clear, that when you put your yearly plan, you have to have supervisors w you. For us trainers. And when trainers, when supervisors, we are with them as well. But does that happen in all regions? I **doq** think so. That is one.

And the second one is because you are a trainer, you are the best one in the region. You are a trainer because you have the chance. But maybe some people are much better than me. They are good, but they **diqn** get the chance to be trainer. So why **doq** i use them, to achieve my goals, instead of fighting.

Researcher: What do you think if the supervisors delivered any of training sessions, do you think that this will affect the status of the trainers, or like they are taking their roles? What is your point of view here?

Zahra: They're not taking my roles. They are supporting me. But you **haye iq** be there, in the planning process. I **haye iq** be with them. So we sit together, we plan, we put our ideas, and they deliver. And **tu** there observing them. Or sometimes we do co-training.

Researcher: And in the end, this **doqqn** affect your status in any way?

Zahra: It is the opposite. It shows you as a professional person, you are sitting there at the back, you are supporting supervisors, to jump to a further development - instead of just being a supervisor, they can be a trainer in one day. So, you are supporting them to do **something**, if they have the ability to train.

Like we have 2 or 3 teachers, supervisors, and senior teachers, they presented outside Oman. Because they tried to deliver here, they tried it in the region, so **they** confident. So this year we have one -

Researcher: So, **yyu** actually supporting senior teachers, or even supervisors, to stand and deliver?

Zahra: Yes, for sure. And this year, we have 1 teacher, English teacher. He presented an idea he did in his classes, he presented in Japan. We revised the presentation for him. We revised as trainers. And then he came, and last month, he participated in Kuwait, or Bahrain, I **can** remember. We also revised the material

SA Salima Al Sinani
Example of working together.

SA Salima Al Sinani
Roles and Responsibilities

SA Salima Al Sinani
Relationships and describing the cooperation between supervisors and trainers in this region.

SA Salima Al Sinani
Helping supervisors and SETs

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for him. He came he, he presented in front of us. So the first step is, we revise the material. And we give him idea. The second, when he was ready he came here, and he presented in front of us. And we gave him some ideas, opinions, advice. And then he went to Rahrain and he delivered there. So this is our job - they are not taking -

Researcher: So you are now working like, a more experienced professional, you are advising, you are supporting - like even an expert - you are here to support everyone?

Zahra: Yes, they are not taking your roles. Your role is there, their role is there -

Researcher: Actually, it's like, for me, i can say that it's actually building your status here. It makes you even stronger -

Zahra: Yes yes. They see you as a reference in the region. They don't go to other regions. They don't go to Muscat. They say, "We have a trainer here who can support us." And this is what Zahra, what Sami doing. From the first year of when Sami came as a trainer, I told him, "You are not delivering courses. This is the easiest thing of your role. Your role is to be in schools. So you have to be a member of the WhatsApp group, you have to be there," -

Researcher: For this role, do you think supervisors think that this is their role there, that they should be in schools?

Zahra: I don't go to any school, unless I get the permission of the supervisor. And this is what I told -

Researcher: And you don't have any conflicts with this role, the supervisors at all?

Zahra: So far, Alhamdulillah, no. Not with me, not with my colleagues. They will help us. Because we, you know, if you show them your position, we are not taking their position. We are asking them, you call them, "I want to go and see Eriana in her school. Is that ok for you?" And then the supervisors, "Why do you want to go?" "Because I want to do this and this and this." And they will say something like, "Do you want us to be with you?" I said, "Not this time, maybe next time, but I am taking your permission to be in school." So, they hear that they're important, I don't go to school and then they heard that from other people. I take their permission, because at the end this is is their schools, and the teachers refer back to them. So we take their permission. Even in courses, when teachers register to the course, before starting the course, I take their names of all supervisors. "These are the teachers in the course, and this is what we'll do." We

SA Salima Al Sinani
No roles conflicts in this governorate

SA Salima Al Sinani
Visiting schools - No conflicts in this region

SA Salima Al Sinani
Taking permission from Supervision

SA Salima Al Sinani
Smoothly working together without conflicts

Appendix (8) Codes and Themes emerging during data analysis.

Themes	
Professional and Workshop Relationship	
1-	Hashim describes the relationship between these three parties "there is a friendly rapport between supervisors, trainers and senior English teachers in Oman. Supervisors and trainers are playing a major role in equipping and enabling the senior teachers with adequate strategies and skills regarding teaching and learning aspects. I will give an example. For instance, the trainers coordinate with the supervisors and senior teachers regarding the training needs to nominate trainers for in-service training courses like Cycle 1 course for grades (1-4) teachers, Cycle 2 course for grades (5-9) teachers, Post Basic Course for grades (10-12) teachers and Research for Professional Development (RPD) course where supervisors, seniors teachers are trained by regional trainers on Action Research Skills..... also the trainers, the supervisors and senior teachers implement joint supervisory visits on English teachers who have been attended the training programmes to monitor the impact of training in practice. Err, ok then the trainers provide the regional supervisors and senior teachers with a summative report on all the trainers' teachers performance in the training programmes regarding their efforts, attendance, contributions in the course and remarkable best practices, skills they have mastered in the in-service training for better quality monitoring of teacher professional development."
2-	Masoud describes the relationship between trainers and supervisors "I am very disappointed with this kind of relationship between us. We tried to create a homogeneous cooperative group, however, we are faced with their challenges and overload of work."
3-	Jufar describes the relationship between trainers, SETs and supervisors in his region "I think the relationship between these three groups is very good in my region. For example, when trainers plan a course or workshop, they always keep in touch with supervisors and SETs in order to nominate teachers who are really in need for the training".
4-	Jana describes the relationship between trainers, SETs and supervisors "err regarding the relationship between SETs, supervisors and trainers. First of all, the relationship between supervisors and SETs is official so the role of the supervisors is to supervise those SETs in their job as a SETs. As both of them are responsible to support and I mean to provide support for teachers. And this is official, its official..... this is all done in official way. Because SETs and supervisors are involved in assessing teachers and writing their appraisal reports. So, it's all official it's not a voluntary, it's not maybe a relaxed I mean not always a relaxed relationship... but most of the time there is a real cooperation there is a satisfying relationship between supervisors and SETs in providing support for the teachers. On the other hand, the trainers' relationship is more relaxed with the teachers, they are training, so they can visit them, it is just a support visit, they are not writing a report about the performance of those teachers, they are also not involved in appraising them or writing their appraisal reports".
5-	Juma describes the relationship between trainers, SETs and supervisors "I think they are complimentary to each other as the trainers usually ask supervisors and senior teachers to help them in analyzing the training needs for the teachers. Supervisors and senior teachers are closer to the field than trainers as they usually work in school so they know teachers better. Trainers build design their courses based on the feedback and comments they receive from supervisors. Moreover, supervisors and senior teachers usually attend the courses delivered to teachers by the trainers so they can understand the objectives and content of the workshop/courses the teacher attending. Therefore, they can follow up with them when they are back to their school to see the impact of the training on their teaching and practice."
6-	Rham describes the relationship between trainers, SETs and supervisors "Regarding the relationship between the supervisors, SETs and trainers I would first say that communications and cooperation are really important between these three groups of professionals, as I would describe them as the most three elements important and are the basis or the foundation of the learning teaching process. The communication and cooperation between supervisors, trainers and SETs in the field I would say it become now much better than before, it is very good relationship especially in the last years I mean recently."
7-	Manar a senior supervisor describes their relationship with training in her region "Between us and training, although the training wasn't done with us in the learning communities, but in general the training is very cooperative, especially in English subject. We have not suffered any problems with them; in fact, if we are even wanting to delay any programmes, they would be very helpful in providing us with another timing. As far as I know, this is their 28th - 29th - year. Since I've worked in supervision about, well, 10 years now, I haven't got any problems with the training".
8-	Elham describes the kind of relationship between supervisors, SETs and trainers in their region "In my region, trainers and supervisors make one team and they always work together to decide what teachers need to be trained on and who needs training.... The supervision department, training department and senior teachers discuss together the training plan of teachers' professional development Supervision and trainers discuss together topics teachers need to develop in order to shed the light on them during training. They also discuss trainers' visits to the teachers that attend training programmes each semester and transportation issues regarding those visits. The supervision organizes a meeting for senior teachers each semester during which problems of senior teachers are discussed and sometimes they give professional developmental presentations during such meetings by both supervisors and senior teachers".
9-	Heba describes the relationship between supervisors and SETs in her region "The relationship between the supervisor, the SET and the teachers is very significant. The teachers appreciated and welcomed the new ideas from the supervisor because she is kind, helpful and supportive. The supervisor and the SET should do meetings for the teachers regularly to hear from them and to share ideas".
10-	Samar describes the relationship between trainers and supervisors "However, the relationship with supervision, I am not going to say that the relationship with supervision is so easy, it is not because there are individual issues, but I think that supervision is not handling properly, and this is what I have noticed since 2016 till now. Since 2016 what I have seen there were three senior supervisors, 2016/2017 there was one and she moved and then another one came and she moved again to the ministry and then last year 2018/2019 a new senior supervisor handled the English supervision last year, so because of this three different supervisors three different mentalities that were managing the team the supervision team, another reason or secondly, because of the shortage, the short number they suffer from shortage they are not enough supervisors these issues created such you know, it's kind of I mean to easy to work with, err the relationship is not that much we tried our best to contact them and on the other hand they contact us but things are not clear, it is easy to talk to them but its not easy to deal with them in a way they work with you in the same line".
11-	Samar adds "I guess you noticed that I am not happy about the relationship between these three groups as they are supposed to work in more professional environment than personal effort, so gather all these three groups together not done professionally at all this creates confusion and of course not achieving objectives properly".

Themes	Themes
<p>WhatsApp for communication</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Misool describes trainees' WhatsApp groups (for them as trainees) "trainees created about 3 WhatsApp groups, one big group accommodating all trainees (males and females), the second group for males and a third group for females. We should acknowledge the traditional and principles of our society. The main big WhatsApp group is used for sharing the learning experiences, knowledge, works, announcements and anything relate to the official work. However, the small groups are used to share personal things to comfort each other and sympathies with each other which of course helps to build strong relationship". <li>2- Aind says there is a WhatsApp group for communication including the 3 parties SETs, supervisors and trainers "There is WhatsApp female group for the three-groups headed by the senior supervisors to share the updates. There is WhatsApp male group for the three-groups headed by the senior supervisors to share the updates". <li>3- Riham describes the WhatsApp facilitates communication between supervisors, SETs and trainers "Of course, I would also say that this was facilitated by the social media applications as we have now a WhatsApp groups, twitter and also Instagram. I would say that these applications facilitated the communications, we easily can contact trainers, or SETs in the field and our colleagues' supervisors". <li>4- Riham continues about forming PLC or CoP between those parties "And the current situation we have is like this or I can describe as a similar start, as they started better communication, thank God through the social media and creating the WhatsApp group". <li>5- Qabe gives an example of a WhatsApp group "For example, you could find WhatsApp groups for jolly phonics which involves teachers, parents and supervisors from all the Subtantes. Not sophisticated but learning and sharing is happening". <li>6- Jana describes a WhatsApp group for trainers "Also, when there is an issue because we have WhatsApp group, if a person in the region have an issue in his practice or in his work base, they are just throwing it in that group, and they start to invite people to think about and make suggestions, this is I think in some ways it is like a professional learning community". <li>7- Hashim says "nowadays, trainers, supervisors and senior teachers do have private WhatsApp Facebook groups to discuss issues related to coaching and mentoring, teaching and learning and sharing best practices of teaching. However, we need them to make a good use of the Ministry of Education online platforms like "Yammer" or the OneDrive programme to share documents or to do online debate via Yammer platform. Recently the MOE in Oman start online video conferences where trainers, supervisors, and senior teachers can conduct online training, debate regarding teaching and learning aspects". 	<p>Professional Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Samar describes the professional development: "Regarding the professional development between these three, as I told you we do push to have after collecting all the training needs I mean after every academic year, we do invite teachers, SETs, supervisors and senior supervisors we discuss with them the needs and what training programmes we need to have, however, this was done only last year, however before, as far as I know it was not done professionally at all, we don't have regular meetings or once a semester meeting in a way that we do share like different current strategies used or current discussions or issues in teaching and learning. We don't have such things, MESTP was done before but not anymore it stopped, three years or four years have stopped, however again when MESTP was going on trainers was not involved as far as I noticed, only supervisors giving papers". <li>2- Hashim describes "one important point I would like to mention is the forum. A Regional English Forum for trainers, supervisors, senior English teachers and teachers is organised annually to establish all concerns to exchange best practices, innovations, and initiatives regarding professional development, teaching and learning aspects where trainers, supervisors, senior teachers work collaboratively in organising, proof-reading all papers in order to achieve the aims of the forum. By the end of this educational gathering, certificates of appreciation are given to all organisers, presenters as recognition regarding their efforts". <li>3- Heba describes a problem-solving (supervisor, SET and teachers) "For instance, I had a problem with two of my team. The problem is that two of the teachers are weak in the language, so they made mistakes inside the classroom. I as a SET, suggested to give teachers chance to read articles and then talked about the topics they read in the meeting time every week. The supervisor welcomed the idea also the teachers. The supervisor did a competition. The teacher who talked most of the time in English inside and outside the classroom should be awarded. At the end, she did award one of the ambitious teachers who spoke English most of her time in the school. Thus, such cooperation made changes and better improvements". <li>4- Another example by Heba "Another problem with one of the teachers who was over absent at school. The SET and the supervisor met her and tried to talk and gave her some advice. we listened to her and solved her problem. The supervisor also attended the events that the English group did, so they appreciated her attendance and they become motivated and happy".

Themes	
CoP's Challenges anticipated by participants	
1-	Masoud lists these challenges "I think anything you start from the scratch needs a lot of effort to success. I think the first challenge would be to install the culture of collaborative learning, professional learning communities, shared vision, values, and goals, and willingness to share experiences and support . Another challenge is the time and the pace learning to happen. With the overload of work , people in the three groups barely find time to finish their work. Also, it won't be easy to build the dynamic of the group including the 3 groups especially with the nature of the relationship between supervisors and senior teachers. Senior teachers might feel the power influence and might be reluctant . All these 3 groups have different job responsibilities and tasks , the difficulty would arise from identifying the shared vision, values, and goals. Also, are all members of these groups willing to collaborate and support each other. The subdivision among the groups is very challenging to mingle them and let them focus on learning from each other ".
2-	Jamal lists the challenges by retrieving the challenges he faced through his experience of building professional learning community for 'supervision expert' training programme "By retrieving what I faced, er I had difficulties managing proper time to achieve my normal duties supervising one hundred and twenty teachers. This with extra administrative roles and supporting the PLCs schools. The main discussions and support were almost carried online or through WhatsApp. Another difficulty was in convincing teachers in each school to work together as a PLC where we suffer as a team to help schools. Changing teachers attitudes to accept change and development also was one of the difficulties".
3-	Ahmed also retrieve the challenges he faced through his experience of building professional learning community for 'supervision expert' training programme "teachers complained that they were overloaded with many tasks in their schools and joining this community would make their work even more complicated. Moreover, the load of teachers' periods who took part in our PLC was high. They supposed to be minimized as teachers usually face difficulties in finishing the syllabus of their classes because they are too long. Providing them with additional activities made their task more complicated".
4-	Fatma describes the challenges "The challenges I think the time, the time in our schools that we have heavy load before six or three years we have teachers who have 14 periods a week and who are free to do other things but now all the teachers have 21 periods with three classes full classes, really like 35 pupils and they are busy all the time correcting books, doing activities helping in other duties in the school lots of things. These things can er also stop these kinds of professional development".
5-	Shahad describes the challenges "However, there are some challenges like lack of time for actual practice . Also, lack of following up could be one of the challenges. Supervisors might complain from loaded schedules . These could be some of the obstacles that are needed to be overcome in order to create effective professional communities of practice and learning".
6-	Hashim describes the challenges "concerning the challenges. I think sometimes the school crowd timetable hinders the implementation of creating professional communities. The teachers believe is time-consuming to convince some teachers to practise a new challenge. Lack of effective coordination between the team members, families, the school, parents council and local institutions . Also, the lack of incentive or resources to attract the local community to be active participants in the professional learning community".
7-	Jana describes her point of view here: "I think I can't see a big challenge in building a good relation between these parties if we want to or if we think of challenges we might facing in building such community. I don't think we need a lot of effort, we just need the ball rolling we need to starting it, once we start it, establish the practices, share understanding, spread the culture we need to establish. I think maybe at the beginning there might be some challenges in terms of getting the habit, getting those three parties to communicate smoothly maybe at the beginning, and people need to support his people need to provide you know a lot of monitoring of this relationship at the beginning, and maybe we need to clarify the procedure".
8-	Laila describes the challenges "Regarding the challenges, there are many aspects that may effect on building such community as knowledge about program, program timing, qualifications of the group, selection of group members, coherence of group members, skills of research, research result, analysis skills, identify the shortages accurately ".
9-	Amal lists the challenges "There might be a challenge in gathering the three groups at same place, time (males, females). The crowded schedule of supervisors who are involved in different works such as: (schools' supervision, training, assessment, and other commitments)".
10-	Karina lists the challenges she anticipates "Management of change is the main issue in our local context. Many of them are in their comfort zone. The challenge here is how to get them move out of it to a more successful and comfortable one? Balance of the responsibilities and tasks given to them is another challenge . Many would have excuses in link of the overwhelming task and shortage of time . Err professionalism is another challenge . Some would only take advice from their supervisor who is going to write their end year report but not anyone else. So, a change should be introduced when it comes to the overall well of the teaching and learning away from formal teacher evaluation and grades. This also applies to some supervisors who would refuse to be involved in such voluntary practices because they are not part of their duty, old poor mentality ".
11-	Juma explains the challenges "supervisors usually wear the hat of the trainers; designing and conducting training for the teachers which might be conflict of interest and make teachers frustrated as they do not understand the role of both parties . Having this kind of community, as I said, will make the role of each one clear, so supervisors might not be willing not to do training for their teachers. Also, trainers might be asked not to visit teachers at schools as supervisors might argue this is their role. Furthermore, males, supervisors and senior teachers have loads of work and usually very busy to take part in any professional community , so they might reject the idea. Also, the goals and vision should be very clear and encouraging for all. Otherwise, they might push back the call for the change".
12-	Samar describes the challenges "Regarding the challenges of course a hundred percent sure the challenges going to be there why? Because we need to have a healthy learning community culture because we don't have that culture of working with a team not a group. So, it's totally two different concepts. It can not be linked together so working with a team is a culture that has to be spread among these three groups. We work together, we don't work for ourselves to shine. No, that's not what we are really here for. We shine together or we don't shine. That is the thing that I have noticed among these three groups. Ahmadhishah regarding training I am going to say again that we don't have such culture where somebody wants to work for themselves without sharing or spreading knowledge , the opposite is true, it is very healthy, training is really healthy. I am talking about English trainers, I am not talking about other trainers. So, regarding our trainers' team, its very healthy. I hope that one day

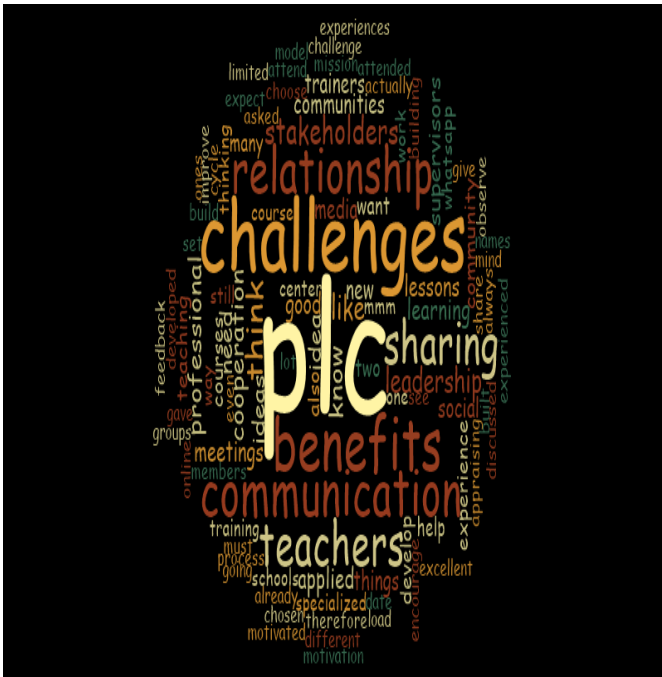
Themes
Meetings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Masoud describes the group of trainers' meetings (trainers only as a group) "I feel their meetings are always effective and fruitful. The work is divided among them, and there are opportunities to mingle and co-train with each other." 2- Amal describes the meetings between supervisors, trainers and SETs "These three groups never meet together to share their needs, experiences, and challenges". In supervision's annual meeting to set the CPD plan, supervisors and trainers sometimes meet to decide on programs built on teachers' needs. Supervisors and SETs haven't met for a long time to discuss the training needs of their teachers and the implementation of the CPD programs. They just contact each other by emails and WhatsApp". 3- Elham describes some meetings happen in her region "The supervision organizes a meeting for senior teachers each semester during which problems of senior teachers are discussed and sometimes they give professional developmental presentations during such meetings by both supervisors and senior teachers". 4- Jamal express his feelings about how the meetings of these groups (trainers, supervisors and SETs) should be "I think what was interesting through my reading about PLCs, was that when I came across a school which called their meetings "MOM" which stands for meeting of the mind. Now, I mean that in our meetings should be the same manner as they do, they are flexible, not fixed, and sometimes, one can call one meeting with others to discuss things". 5- Samar describes the situation with trainers meetings with supervisors "Regarding the meeting and discussions among training and supervision, in my region we always push to have meetings with them otherwise if we don't, we are never informed about anything that goes on in the supervision department at all..... just as I told you we know only by accident, however when it comes to training whatever is new we push all the time we send to the supervisors to be informed, regarding training programmes, new programs to be delivered soon and we discuss with them what happened what programmes what evaluation we have got we do have also the training needs before the start of every year we do send the senior supervisors to pass to all the supervisors and SETs".

Themes
Supportive leadership
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Masoud describes the stakeholders' role "regarding the stakeholders' role is negative and there is no supportive leadership structure that might encourages the collaboration among the groups. There are some workshops that advise and highlight the importance of cooperation between training and supervision. Yet, there seems to me no real cooperation apart from nominating teachers for the training programmes and identifying teachers' needs". 2- Masoud describes the stakeholders' role in facilitating formal and informal meetings between supervisors, trainers and SETs "stakeholders allow such meeting to happen and of course they are willing to support if they are asked. However, they don't take initiatives to encourage cooperation and learning from each other. The role is absent". 3- Elham describes the stakeholders' role in her region "stakeholders support the training plan of teachers' professional development by organising annual meetings for a committee from both departments as well as senior teachers to decide what to include in this plan and fund those programmes and supervise them". Stakeholders also support the professional developmental presentations during, and meetings organised by supervisors and Sets that I mentioned and fund them". 4- Nibras describes the role of the stakeholders in supporting and facilitate cooperation and collaboration between trainers, supervisors and SETs "Not clear, they are in between. The legislations are controlling them. There is a lot of Bureaucracy, which hinders the flow of the processes. They should find a platform where it is clear the role of each in developing or following up a task. There is random work and no fixed plans to follow through. But there are instantaneous plans appearing out of nowhere". 5- Samar describes the stakeholders role in facilitating meetings "How are the shareholders facilitate these meetings, err I have never seen initiative going around however they are well informed about how training is isolated from training and all of these issues, management know very well that this is happening but they haven't done anything yet as far as I know but they do always say we know that this is not right you have to work together but I have never seen or heard them talking to supervision in a way that training must be involved". 6- Samar adds "Regarding the meetings between these three parties and how stakeholders facilitate things, they do facilitate in terms of having a hall but nothing more than this there is no interference sometimes we do arrange everything ourselves, and we let the management know and they don't mind any formal or informal discussions its ok with them".

Themes	
Cooperation - Collaboration	
1-	Masoud describes the kind of cooperation between supervisors, trainers and SETs in his region "honestly as a matter of fact, don't think that there is a lot of cooperation between these three groups in my region, unfortunately. Each group is working independently. We, as trainers, have tried to include other groups in our planning and future work. However, we felt that the other two groups are disconnected. I can understand their excuses and challenges they face.....".
2-	Masoud continues describing the kind of cooperation between supervisors, trainers and SETs " Cooperation among these three groups yet happens when there are training programmes where supervisors are encouraged by trainers to nominate teachers based on their needs. In this case, supervisors communicate with senior teachers and trainers to finalise the name list of teachers for the programmes. I wouldn't call such corresponding as cooperation . I think cooperation entitles to take many things into consideration and it should aim at success of the organization".
3-	Another quotation from Masoud regarding the cooperation between them as trainers and supervisors " They cooperate with us in nominating teachers for workshop. Sometimes, if they need our help to conduct a training workshops for some teachers".
4-	Ilham describes the cooperation between SETs, trainers and supervisors in her region "there is some cooperation there between supervisors, senior teachers and trainers, er but this cooperation was really wonderful before about three years! But not now at all. Before three years there were Oman supervisors and trainers as you know X a supervisor and Y as a trainer. We were cooperating together a lot as we women. And we do programmes together, we ask them to come to our schools to do some programmes and we also invite them in English days! However, these two retired now as you know and now, we have Egyptian supervisors, and there is trainer who is also new just appointed last year and till now we still didn't see her! Er so it's really a limited cooperation . I am really not happy about this kind of cooperation because we experienced a real cooperation in the past so now there is only supervisors who come to the SETs talking about the teachers and then they go. We see them twice a semester maybe, there is a limited cooperation really ."
5-	Amal describes the cooperation between supervisors, trainers and SETs in her region "Through my experience in supervision, there is little cooperation between the three groups . These three groups never meet together to share their needs, experiences, and challenges In fact, I am not happy, not satisfied about such cooperation ."
6-	Jafar describes the cooperation between the three parties in his region "For example, when trainers plan a course or workshop, they always keep in touch with supervisors and SETs in order to nominate teachers who are really in need for the training. Supervisors and SETs, also, cooperate to prepare action plans for some weak teachers. From time to time, supervisors hold meetings with trainers to discuss issues related to training and agree on some workshops' topics for training".
7-	Munar describes cooperation of trainers in her region "if we are even wanting to delay any programmes, they would be very helpful in providing us with another timing. As far as I know, this is their 28th - 29th! - year. Since I've worked in supervision about, well, 10 years now, I haven't got any problems with the training. They are really cooperative, and the trainers that we have in our region - X and Y - they do part of the training with us".
8-	Qabus gives an example of the cooperation between supervisors, SETs and trainers "I could describe the cooperation is very good and the relationship between us is good. A good example I can mention also is that supervisors are now included in professional plan of each schools for every subject by the supervisors, STs and the head teacher of every school. So accordingly, the plan of professional development of each subject within the schools is set with the guidance/supervision of the supervisor and the comments and views of the STs and the head teachers. It is called the professional development plan. I would say that the process of this plan is a good example of the cooperation between supervisors, STs and the schools and we also pass this to the trainers".
9-	Nibras describes the kind of cooperation between training and supervision "we cooperate through WhatsApp in announcing the programmes. We cooperate in putting plans for mutual visits, where we can provide support to supervisors and teachers in some areas like Jolly Phonics program and English Insights."
10-	Samar describes the cooperation between the group of trainers "I am very lucky to work with a supportive group of trainers who are from different regions, but I have never felt that we are from different regions. We work together as if we are in the same place. They are very supportive, time and place were never an issue at all when it comes to communications and contacting them whenever it is possible, they reply very fast to whatever question I have to whatever readings I need whatever you know guidance I look for ".
11-	Laila says "I trust that work in collaboration provides us with support and assess the progress of learning. Teachers collaboratively research, plan, teach and observe a series of lessons, using ongoing discussion, reflection and expert input to track and refine their teaching strategies . In addition, SETs can get use of feedback that supervisors provide them in any challenge in case of a problematic teacher as well as the trainers could benefit as with their massive knowledge and experience regarding formative assessment or any other topic regarding education. This collaboration would result in many advantages for teachers especially in their teaching way and in following up their pupils' academic achievements as in remedial plan . In addition, it would track the professional development outcomes and updates teachers' skills through applying the twenty-first century skills in our schools that enhance the learning process and activates new learning projects".

Themes	
CoPs' benefits anticipated by participants	
1-	Masoud says "It would be wonderful if such communities are formed between the trainers, supervisors and SETs, however, unfortunately so far nothing. Unless this is written as one of the requirements for job specification. Their excuses that they have other duties they need to deal with.... As I said before I believe that the idea is great and there should be a professional learning community between these 3 groups. If such community is initiated, there would be a lot of benefits for the 3 groups. I think this community will promote learning about the teachers' needs, challenges, and skills which through it, the 3 groups will improve professionally. Overall, this will contribute to the success of Teaching English in Oman".
2-	Karina welcomes the idea by saying "It's a brilliant idea especially knowing that it's already practiced by some supervisors, not only, following the professional learning community as part of the expert supervisors' program. If it's widely and formally implemented as a common practice in the field, it will reap fruitful results".
3-	Shahad believes "I think it is good idea. It will support their cooperation and effective collaboration as they work closely together. There would be great chance for exchanging experience and learning from expertise".
4-	Ahmed says "I think professional learning Communities is one the most important strategy for improving students and teachers performance in schools. It involves continuous development in teachers' strategies and students learning. I would consider the implementation of our PLC is one of my greatest success as different teachers from different schools have a vision and sought collaboratively day to day to achieve it".
5-	Fatma says "I think if there will be a cooperation between supervisors, trainers and SETs that will be wonderful really".
6-	Munir believes "You know I think the idea of building professional learning community between these three groups is a must. Why, because of the teachers you know the current situation we have in Oman, the heavy load, so if they want to develop themselves, it depends on the teachers' personalities. I think these kinds of communities, once it is built between these groups of professional, I think it is good idea for the teachers for many reasons, it will provide the teachers to meet teachers from other schools and share experiences between them even if have different type of stages or levels".
7-	Heba says "I totally agree on building a PLC between the three groups because of many reason. First, err we can say one hand can't clap. This means when we work together under the community, we will achieve a lot and we will gain better improvements. Second, err it helps to organise the work due to dividing the roles between the members. Also, all the members work under the same criteria so the work will be coherent, and they will not work randomly".
8-	Hashim says "In fact, the best opportunities for professional development like the Lesson Study Strategy are most welcome, it develops self-professional development all members in the team, working collaboratively in groups, enabling the members of the community to do shared planning, data - collection , analysing students, performance and focuses on monitoring students learning and engagement in the lesson".
9-	Jafar said "err as far as there is support and approval from stakeholders and decision makers, the idea of building a professional learning community between these three groups will be great. It will really support teachers and help them develop themselves professionally. I believe when all these groups are involved, the work will be more professional because so many things will be considered from different perspectives".
10-	Laila says "I personally have confidence that it is a great idea in order to raise up our education sector through having mature individuals that rely on themselves in producing a huge amount of creativity in daily achievement of life requirements. What's more, it will give us a clear vision of developing our schools and it will enhance for teachers to function a never-ending journey of continuous assessment through building shared knowledge".
11-	Riham says "Regarding of the idea of building professional learning communities between these three groups of I call them elements supervisors, trainers and SETs, I would say it is very important issue".
12-	Jamal expresses his feelings by saying "I think it is a great idea. Professional learning communities are defined as ongoing process of learning in which educators work collaboratively to achieve better results for the students. For sure, PLC helps teachers to collaborate to seek the best teaching practice and provide support to their learners. Err I think what was interesting through my reading about PLCs, was that when I came across a school which called their meetings "MOM" which stands for meeting of the minds. Thus, I learnt that all our meetings should be like MOM where we share openly our desires, our fears, our frustrations, our joys with one another with stress-free school climate".
13-	Juma says "I think this going to be a brilliant idea as it is going to be the place where they all come together to share ideas and understand the role of each other in helping teachers to overcome their challenges and become better teachers. It will help them eliminate any conflict or misunderstanding and work toward one ultimate goal which is providing best learning experience for the students".
14-	Jana says "Yes, I think building a community of practice which involved SETs, trainers and supervisors is a great idea, very useful. I can achieve the aims of the Ministry in doing sustainable development because nowadays sustainable development is a concept where it is discussed and also people are all questioning it and considering it in all type of work. And how to achieve it is sometimes maybe a concern shared by stakeholders".
15-	Qabas says "I think building learning communities is accessible for all now and it's happening in a way or another in the social media. For example, you could find WhatsApp groups for jolly phonics which involves teachers, parents and supervisors from all the sultanate. Not sophisticated but learning and sharing is happening. I guess working in group with SETs, supervisors and training could bridge the gap in different areas such as the kind of training needed for teachers, exchange ideas from the field. I think building learning communities would help in better understanding the learning environment which will result in realistic solutions to the current problems. Also, it will help designing curriculum that based on reality".

Appendix (9) Codes and Themes emerging during data analysis – NVivo.



Appendix (10) Examples of Data-Analysis – Themes' organisation

Step 1 →	Step 2 →	Step 3 →	Step 4
Quotations/extracts/data sources	Sub-subthemes	Subthemes	Themes
<p>"Another difficulty was in convincing teachers in each school to work together as a PLC, we suffered as a team to help schools. Changing teachers' attitudes to accept change and development also was one of the difficulties" (Jamal, pg. 10). Semi-structured interviews data</p> <p>"So, they didn't just start like this and built the PLCs; they needed first to convince the schools, changing convictions and negative beliefs and attitudes towards the idea; and it was a hard job I believe. So, they first choose the schools, then they choose a person or a team from the school to work with... these people to help them transfer the idea to the schools and teachers; convince them with the idea and help them changing the negative attitudes of the schoolteachers" (Siham, pg. 4). Semi-structured interviews data.</p> <p>"Because this is a new idea this PLCs, and to make it succeed in the field, we thought it needs changing attitudes and beliefs to convince the field about it, so we thought we need to read about the models of changing, or changing beliefs and attitudes, we studied about 4 models of changing, one of them ADKAR, Kertivreen, Evanswith, Anderson and Anderson. We took them we read them, but we only used one model ADKAR, because it was used in business. So, we built PLCs with ADKAR model. We started to train the supervisors" Dalal, pg.2). Semi-structured interviews data.</p> <p>"The unforgettable difficulty that I personally faced in this PLC project is dealing with difficult teachers... those teachers who have negative attitudes and always complain about anything. These teachers can really create an unpleasant environment for their colleagues. Therefore, I think for any future learning or professional communities or whatever you call I think before starting we need to be trained how to deal with these negative attitudes teachers and explore strategies for teachers and their peers to change these attitudes" (Dima, pg. 4). Semi-structured interviews data.</p> <p>- the supervisor was discussing a task sheet that include reading text with questions for students to develop their reading skill – the task sheet to be distributed for teachers to copy for their students – there was a discussion during this meeting around a teacher who would complain again about doing this job (the copying and using the photocopier machine) by herself and it was agreed to better hand her the copies she needs to avoid any problems. Notes from non-participants' observation 1.</p> <p>"...To some extent, as the idea of forming professional learning communities in our schools in the Sultanate may be difficult because the prevailing style in our schools is the traditional leadership style. In which the school principal is the leader and dominant over the decision-making authority, and there is no actual participation of supervisors, teachers or administrators in decision-making. Although the idea may be difficult to implement because there are samples of school principals and teachers who are difficult to change..." a translated extract from a unpublished paper about Omani PLCs provided for documentary analysis</p>	<p>Changing beliefs and attitudes</p>	<p>Challenges</p>	<p>Omani Professional Learning Communities/ PLCs</p>

Step 1 →	Step 2 →	Step 3 →	Step 4
Quotations/extracts/data sources	Sub-subthemes	Subthemes	Themes
“Through my experience in supervision, there is little cooperation between the three groups. These three groups never <u>meet together</u> to share their needs, experiences, and challenges..... In fact, I am not happy, not satisfied about such cooperation” (Amal, pg.1). Semi-structured interviews data	Cooperation	Healthy work environment	Workplace and professional Relationships
“ <u>as</u> I told you I believe that cooperation and this topic is of a high important to me, having a healthy work environment between supervisors, trainers and senior teachers is really important topic and we should all together focus on” (Samar, pg. 9). Semi-structured interviews data.	Cooperation		
“I am very disappointed with this kind of relationship between us. We tried to create a homogeneous cooperative group; however, we are faced with their challenges and overload of work.” (Masoud, pg. 6). Semi-structured interviews data.	Cooperation		
“I guess you noticed that I am not happy about the relationship between these three groups as they are supposed to work in a more professional environment than personal effort... as we three of us must work together, supervision, training and SETs must work together to achieve one thing which is students’ learning and students’ improvements” (Samar, pg. 8). Semi-structured interviews data.	Cooperation		
Extract from my research diary “ Day 1 in X governorate – when I first reached the building I was welcomed by two ladies one of them was a trainer and the second one was a supervision coordinator who is mainly doing admin work in supervision department – it seems to me it was actually obvious to sight that she shares a very good relationship with the trainers from their speech and friendly relationship-according to the trainer she supported her in everything. She helped in arranging interviews with supervisors, brought materials and she even arranged coffee and stuff”. Research diary notes.	Cooperation	Healthy work environment	
“ <u>the</u> meeting was conducted in the school, included the school supervisor, the SETs and the schoolteachers. To me the meeting was closer to be an informal friendly meeting rather than a formal structure meeting. During the meeting, all members had time to speak and say something and dialogue was handled smoothly; I like the atmosphere <u>doesn’t</u> seem to there is any stress around between the meeting members. Issues related to teachers needs and CPD were discussed”. Extract from my no-participants-observation.	Cooperation		
End of Year Report on Regional Supervisors 5. Level of initiative/cooperation/professionalism/responsibility. Documentary analysis			

Appendix (11) Examples of activities used by some of this study participants for their PLCs

Structure (1) introducing

Lesson 1: Talk and write about yourself

I	Am		Ahmed
		a	Boy
		a	Girl
		a	Student
		-	In Class 3
		-	In (Sur) School
		-	9 years old

Write sentences about the pictures

Structure (1) introducing

Lesson 2: Talk and write about oneself

He	is	A	Doctor
			In a hospital
She	is	A	Girl
			Teacher
			In a School
			Lives
			In Sur

Lesson (1) (Lesson object)

This / he	is	A	Cup
They	are	-	Cats

Write sentences about the pictures

Lesson 4 actions in schools (2)

I	Can	read	my lesson
She		Write	the homework
He		Draw	the class
She		Draw	the teacher
They		Draw	flowers
He		Draw	the white board
		Draw	the door
		Draw	the window

- 1- My (read) (lesson) (can)
- 2- She (homework) (can) (write)
- 3- She (draw) (can) (flowers) (the)
- 4- He (teacher) (the) (can) (draw)
- 5- They (draw) (pictures) (can)

Lesson 5 actions in schools (2)

Lesson (6)

Lesson (7)

Lesson 5 actions in schools (2)

I	Can	Open	The white board
She		Open	The door
He		Close	The window
She		Run	Fast
They		Jump	High
She		Sing	Long

Use the table to write sentences.

- 1- _____
- 2- _____
- 3- _____
- 4- _____
- 5- _____

Lesson (6)

I	Have	apples
I	don't have	bananas

1- I have apples, I don't have bananas.

Now write sentences about the pictures

- 2- _____
- 3- _____
- 4- _____
- 5- _____

Lesson (7)

They	have/ don't have	Books/ cars
We	have/ don't have	Shops/ dolls
She	has/ doesn't have	Fish/ bike
He	has/ doesn't have	Water/ coffee
It	Has	Long tail

Use the table to write about the pictures

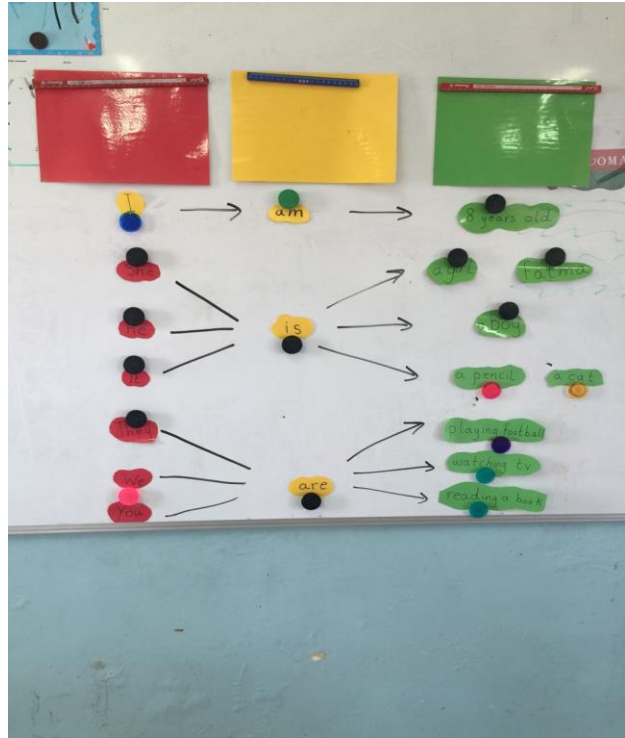
- 1- They have books. They don't have cars.
- 2- _____
- 3- _____
- 4- She _____
- 5- _____

Paragraph Styles

Colour code Scheme of Work

Week	Day	Structure	examples
Week one	Tuesday	I, <u>it</u> am He, she, <u>it</u> is	I am 8 years old She is Fatma.
	Wednesday	They, we, you + are	They are playing football.
	Thursday	Revision+ homework	
Week two	Sunday	I, They, we, you + like/live in	I like watching TV.
	Monday	She, he, it + lives in	He lives in Oman
	Tuesday	Pronoun+ can	I can jump. They can swim.
	Wednesday	She, he, it + has got I, we, they, you + have got	She has got long hair.
Week three	Thursday	Revision + homework	
	Sunday	write about yourself	
	Monday	write about someone else	
	Tuesday	test	
	Wednesday	Articles: a, an, some	
Week four	Thursday	This is/There is/ there are	There are some cups. There is an apple.
	Sunday	adjectives	He is big. She is short.
	Monday	adjectives	They have got blue shirt.
	Tuesday	negative	I don't have a pen. I don't like <u>reading</u> .
	Wednesday	Revision	
Thursday	test		





Appendix (12) Extract from Subject supervisors' job description

رمز الوظيفة:	مصرف مادة/ مجال	مسمى الوظيفة:
	الخدمات التعليمية	المجموعة الوظيفية للوظائف:
الدرجة	التاسعة الثامنة	فئة وظائف:
التدريب		الوصف العام:
المديريات/ الإدارة التعليمية بالمحافظات.		تقع هذه الوظيفة:
الإشراف على المعلمين الأوائل/معلمي مجال/مادة بالمدارس.		تختص هذه الوظيفة بـ:
الإشراف المباشر من الرئيس المختص		يخضع شاغل هذه الوظيفة:
* الواجبات والمسؤوليات:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - يلتزم بأخلاقيات المهنة والقوانين واللوائح والقرارات المنظمة للعمل سلوكاً وعملاً، ويتبع التزام الفئات التي يشرف عليها بتنفيذها. - يضع برنامجاً زمنياً لتنفيذ واجباته الوظيفية، ومسؤولياته بإشراف المسؤول المختص. - يساهم في نشر الثقافة المهنية لدى المعلمين الأوائل/معلمي مجال/مادة. - يضع خطة سنوية لعمله وينفذها ويتابعها. - يقوم بمراجعة خطط وبرامج واليات عمل المعلمين الأوائل/معلمي مادة/ مجال ويتابع تنفيذها وتقييمها وتطويرها. - يشارك في تحديد واعداد وتنفيذ البرامج التدريبية للمعلمين الأوائل/معلمي مادة/ مجال ويتابع أثرها. - يقوم بزيارات إشرافية لمعالجة أداء المعلمين الأوائل/معلمي المجال/ المادة، وتحديد احتياجاتهم ووضع تقارير حول مستويات أدائهم وتقديم الدعم اللازم لهم. - يتابع تنفيذ خطط البرامج التدريبية والتعليمية المطبقة للمجال/ المادة على مستوى المدارس . - يقوم بالتنسيق مع مدير المدرسة والمعلم الأول لمساعدة المعلمين في مختلف الجوانب المتعلقة بالمجال/المادة. - يوظف أساليب إشرافية متنوعة بناء على احتياجات المعلمين الأوائل/المعلمين بالمدارس التي يشرف عليها. - ينفذ برامج تبادل الزيارات الصفية بين المعلمين الأوائل/ المعلمين . - ينفذ دروساً تطبيقية بناءً على احتياجات المعلمين على مستوى المدارس التي يشرف عليها. - يدرس الصعوبات التي تواجه تدريس المادة/المجال، ويقترح الحلول الملائمة لها ويرفعها للمشرف الأول. 		

Appendix (13) The non-participants' observation proforma

Observation Form – Professional Learning Community – Members meeting

Supervisor: [Redacted]
 Governorate: [Redacted] (Tavernate)
 School: [Redacted]
 Date: 1/13/2020 6 Rajab

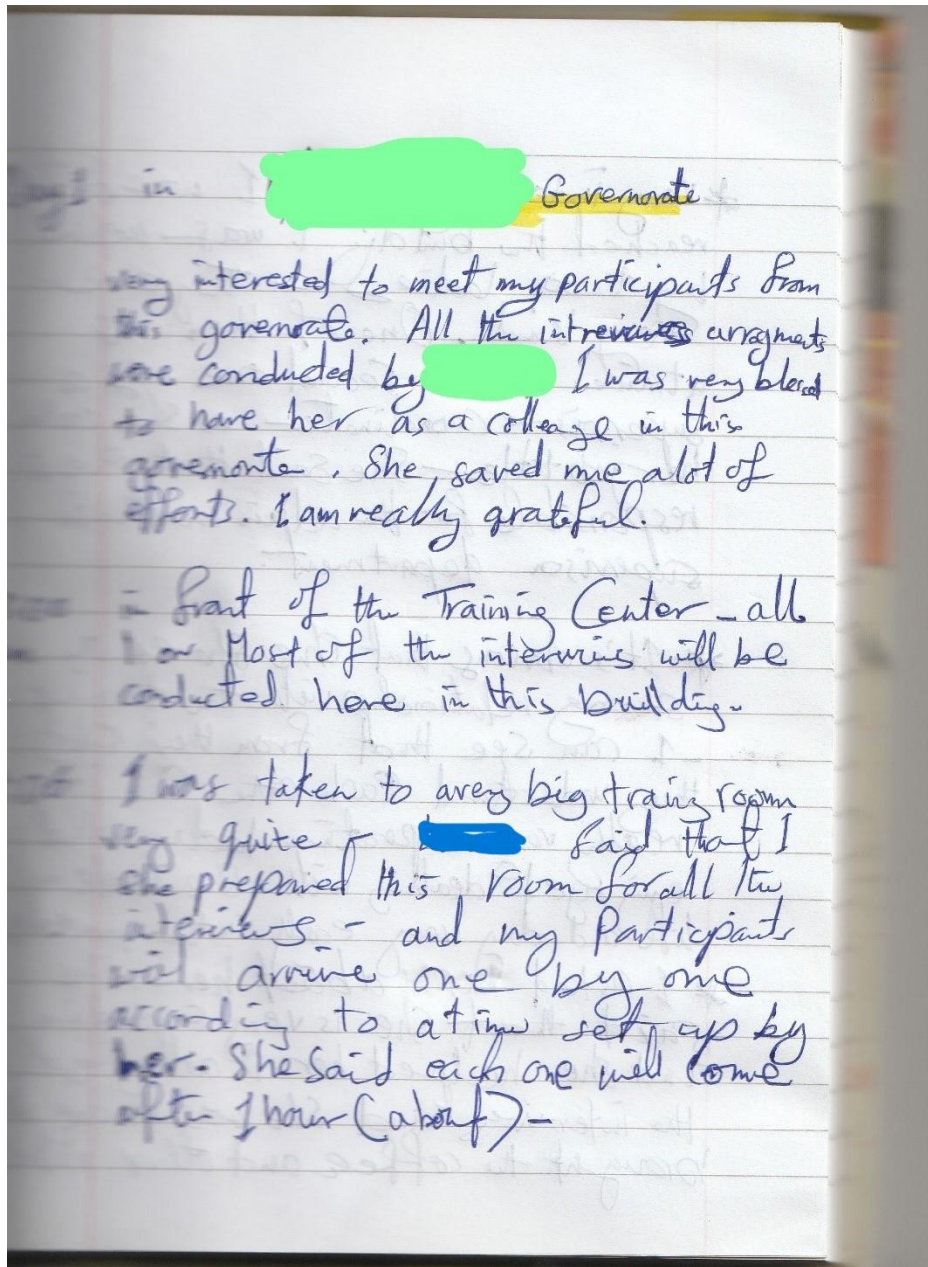
Comments	
General Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * few members attending - 5 members only - ^{sup + 3} SET + 3 TS * The meeting is chaired by my participant. * supervisor seems controlling the meeting * More focused meeting * learning/teaching atmosphere
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The supervisor deals professionally with the teachers + SETs. very co-operative * Discussing some issues related to noncooperative teacher - with photocopy the sheets for her to avoid problems -
Promoting teaching/learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The meeting till now focusing on discussing reading tasks to develop sts reading skills. * Discussing more reading activities and reading strategies. * Remedial plan for weak students
Sharing responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Work is divided between the members - * even - dialoging in the meeting - enough chance for everyone to speak and chat and suggest.
Reflective professional inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * ideas regarding developing students reading skills - remedial plan is discussed. Action plans. * feedback of lesson observation was shared.
Shared Values and Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seems understand each other and know why they do

* The school headteacher interrupted the meeting for some time checking everything is alright

* Very nice school.

* I liked the hospitality of the school staff. Thanks

Appendix (14) Extracts from my research diary



* Very interesting - when I was first reached the building I was welcomed by two ladies - they are very kind. One of them was a trainer and the second one was a supervisor coordinator as she called her job title. - She said that she is responsible for the admin work in supervisor department.

* It's obvious that she shares a strong relationship with the trainers - I can see that from their chats they understand each other. She is really very cooperative lady who is easy to deal with. She made my life and day very easy in this government.

* I asked [redacted] about her, she said that she is very supportive and she helped her in arranging all the interviews and she was the one who brought the coffee and other materials.

Appendix (15) Comparison between PLCs and CoPs adapted tables

- A Theoretical comparison between communities of practice (CoPs) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) adapted from Blankenship and Ruona (2007:4)

	Theory Base	Membership	Leadership	Organisational culture	Knowledge sharing
Communities of practice (CoPs)	Situated, cognitive, social learning and knowledge management	<p>- Membership is voluntary; an informal group of workers doing the same job (Brown and Duguid, 1991)</p> <p>-Participation is voluntary; membership can either be self-selected or assigned by the organisation; based on expertise or passion for a topic (Wenger, et al, 2002)</p>	<p>-Distributed: leadership comes from both formal and informal leaders, both inside and outside the community (Wenger, et al, 2002)</p> <p>-Informal structure: the community is democratic in nature (Brown and Duguid, 1991)</p>	<p>-Culture is not necessarily supportive of informal structures (Brown and Duguid, 1991)</p> <p>-Organisation values innovation and knowledge sharing (Wenger, et al, 2002)</p>	<p>-Narrative; collaborative; socially constructed; occurs within community (Brown and Duguid, 1991)</p> <p>-Occurs mainly within the community; however, exchange across and at community boundaries occurs (Wenger, et al, 2002)</p>
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	Learning organization	<p>-Members are selected - by leaders/faculty-members (Hord, 2004).</p> <p>- Teachers are assigned to a collaborative team to work on substantive school issues. (Dufour and Eaker, 1998)</p>	<p>-Principal: shares decision-making; provides staff with information and training; model behaviors congruent with vision and values; results oriented (Dufour and Eaker, 1998)</p> <p>Provided by Principal: should provide supportive conditions within the school (Hord, 2004)</p>	<p>-Shared mission, vision and values drive the work; collaboration is key innovation, experimentation and a focus on results are vital aspects (Dufour and Eaker, 1998)</p> <p>-Shared vision and values drive the work; collaboration is achieved through shared practice; cultural shift is paramount to becoming a PLC (Hord, 2004).</p>	<p>-Discussion is limited; team members collaborate, but how teams create new knowledge and share it with the whole organization is not discussed at length (Dufour and Eaker, 1998)</p> <p>-Teachers participate in reflective dialogue; peer coaching and feedback are also ways knowledge is shared (Hord, 2004)</p>

A Comparison between communities of practice CoPs and professional learning communities PLCs. Adapted from Konig (2013: 349).

	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	Communities of practice (CoPs)
Members	Educators who are committed to high levels of learning for all students.	Practitioners who share concern or passion for something and they want to learn how to do it better.
Community	Members work together to achieve common goals and to enhance their classroom practice and benefit the student body as a whole.	Members do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. They build relationships that allow them to learn from each other to improve their practice.
Leadership	Provided by Principals or educational leaders.	Provided by members and managers.
Focus	An engagement in collective enquiry of best practices in teaching and learning with the goal of developing new skills	Members develop their practice through activities such as problem-solving, sharing information, discussing developments, documenting projects, and conducting site visits.
Culture	Critical to have a collaborative supportive school community in order to implement improved practices	CoPs nurture a level of trust and relationship building so collaboration and knowledge sharing can occur
Effectiveness	Effectiveness is based on the achievement results of students.	Can use quantitative and quantitative data to measure how members are changing their practice and improve their performance as a result.
Longevity	Start, evolve, and end organically	Start, evolve, and end organically – remain if topic relevance, value, and desire to learn communally remain.

Appendix (16) Examples of Materials Used in the Supervision Experts Training Course

Case study report (5000 words in total plus or minus 5%)

The final case study report will include reference to your work in all three units. It should be written to provide, with associated portfolio materials, a reference resource that can be used by other colleagues and, if selected, for inclusion in the Centre library.

As a guide, about one third of the report should describe what you have done and two thirds should be analysis, evaluation and reflection of the work.

The report should include:

- **Introduction 500 words** – Provide some brief contextual information about your learning community and the colleagues you worked with. This will include a brief background of the experience and commitment of the colleagues. It should also include the reasons for identifying the topics that the learning community developed and the people or groups selected to participate.
- **Consultation 750 words** – This will include the rationale for the selection of your consultation activities referenced against existing literature. It will explain how the consultation informed the design of your learning community. Only key information from the consultation should be included in the report. Other important information can be included in the portfolio and referenced in the report. You should explain how you reached decisions linking them to the local context informed by the research and professional dialogue from units 12 and 13. You should clearly state limitations of the consultation.
- **Design and establishment of the professional learning community 750 words** – This must explain the choices made about the design and establishment of the professional learning community. It should include:
 - How the key actions were identified and the way in which account was taken of local resources, opportunities, attitudes and relevant research in selecting them
 - The rationale for the timescale and the sequence of activities
 - The degree of flexibility that was planned to account for changing circumstances and emerging priorities or concerns
 - The rationale for the selection of the communication processes and methods with a particular focus on how they supported and encouraged collaboration and participation.
- **Maintenance, development and sustainability 750 words** – This section will explain the key actions taken to maintain, develop and sustain the learning community.

الفرق التعاونية في المجتمع المهني التعليمي

كان المدير Joe McDonald مختاراً . لقد علم أن بناء الثقافة التآزرية هو المفتاح لتحسين تحصيل الطلبة . يستطيع أن يستشهد بأي عدد من الأبحاث الدراسية لدعم موقفه . لقد عمل بلا كلل لتعزيز التآزر كما اتخذ عدداً من الخطوات لدعم عمل المعلمين معاً . لقد نظم كل مستوى صفي في المدرسة في فرق متعددة التخصصات مكونة من : معلمي رياضيات، علوم، دراسات اجتماعية، ولغة. وأنشأ جدولاً يوفر للمعلمين الوقت للاجتماع معاً كل يوم . كما درب الموظفين على مهارات التآزر، وبناء التوافق في الآراء، وحل النزاعات. ولقد أكد على أهمية التآزر تقريباً في كل اجتماع للهيئة التعليمية . و شعر أنه قام بكل الأشياء الصحيحة ، ولقد انتظر بصبر لمدة 3 سنوات ليحصل المكافآت على شكل مستويات أعلى لتعلم الطلاب . لكنه خاب أمه وأصيب بالحيرة من أن كل مؤشر أكاديمي لتحصيل الطلاب قد تم رصده من قبل المدرسة بقي نفس الشيء . قرر المدير أن يجري دراسة استقصائية للمعلمين ليرى إذا ما كان يستطيع أن يكتشف لماذا لم يحقق التآزر أية مكاسب فيما يتعلق بتحصيل الطلاب . لقد أظهرت استبانة الرضى التي أنشأها أن المعلمين شعروا بأن وقت التآزر قد قُوي الروابط بينهم وأنهم استمتعوا بالعمل معاً .

بعدها قرر المدير مرة أخرى أن يقوم بجهد مركز ليراقب أعمال الفرق . في أول اجتماع حضره، ركز فريق الصف السابع على سلوك طالب أصبح معطلاً للتعليم بشكل متزايد . لقد اتفق الفريق على جدول اجتماع لولي الأمر بحيث يستطيعون أن يعبروا عن مخاوفهم لأب كمجموعة . قام أعضاء فريق الصف الثامن باستدراك أفكارهم حول استراتيجيات لتحقيق هدف فريقهم المتمثل في تقليل إحالات الضبط الناتجة عن التأخر عن الحصة الصفية . وفي اجتماع لتفريق ثانٍ من معلمي الصف السابع لاحظ مدير المدرسة نقاشاً حيوياً فيما إذا كان على الأعضاء قبول العمل المتأخر للطلاب، وإذا تم ذلك، كم من النقاط ينبغي على المعلم أن ينقص لكل يوم تأخير الفريق الرابع الذي راقبه المدير ، عين دوراً ومسؤوليات على كل عضو لضمان أن كل المهام المرتبطة برحلة ميدانية قائمة تمت معالجتها . دعا المدير الى عقد اجتماع لهيئة التدريس وقام بتبادل استنتاجاته بأن الفرق تحتاج الى أن تنقل تركيزها في حواراتها الى المناهج وطرق التدريس والتقييم . لقد قوبل الاقتراح بحماسة فجأة ، إذ جادل المعلمون أنه بما أنهم لا يطمون نفس

رسالة واضحة ومقتعه

بعد أن حضر مدير المدرسة مشغلاً عن تكوين مجتمعات التعلم المهنية ، ازداد حماسه لتكوين مثل هذا المجتمع في مدرسته، و بعد أسبوع من عودته، اجتمع بجميع المعلمين مع الهيئة الإدارية بالمدرسة، و استهل الاجتماع بضرورة تكوين مجتمع تعلم مهني بالمدرسة و سرعان ما عرض عليهم نص رسالة المدرسة التي يرغب في تحفيها، وسألهم عن رأيهم فيها ، الا أن هذا النص قوبل بالأسئلة و الاستفسارات العديدة من المعلمين و التي تفاجأ المدير بعدم قدرته على الرد عليها ، و لذلك طلب منهم النظر في الرسالة و مناقشتها في اجتماع اخر .

لم يكثر المعلمون بالنظر في هذه الرسالة ، وان كان البعض فكر في إعادة صياغتها، و في الاجتماع التالي تكرر نفس الامتعاض من مجموعة من المعلمين الذين انزوا الانسحاب من الاجتماع ، في حين وافق البقية على نص الرسالة .

مع تقدم العام الدراسي أصيب المدير بخيبة أمل لرؤية المعلمين وقد عاود معظمهم ممارساته القديمة ، حتى أولئك من اظهر موافقته لرسالة المدير .

من خلال السيناريو

عدد ثلاثة أخطاء قام بها المدير تتعارض مع مرنكات مجتمعات التعلم

هل تعتبر هذه مجتمعات تعلم مهنية ولماذا؟

أعضاء هيئة تدريس مادة معينة في مدرسة ما يقومون بتطبيق برنامج تدريبي جديد في المدرسة مرة كل عام ،
ويقومون بعمل مجموعة عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ند تنفيذ هذا البرنامج وتعمل فقط أثناء عقد البرنامج.

تخصيص مدرسة معينة يوم الأربعاء من كل أسبوع من الساعة 9 – 11 للاجتماع ومناقشة قضية معينة تتعلق
بالمادة الدراسية.

يقوم معلمو مادة معينة في مدرسة ما بعمل مجموعة في الواتساب يتحاورون ويتبادلون من خلالها أطراف النقاش
والأفكار حول قراءات وأبحاث يقومون بالاطلاع عليها.

في محافظة تعليمية معينة يقوم مشرف المادة بعمل مجموعة على إحدى وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تشمل جميع
تحصيل الطلبة وفق خطة واضحة يتم متابعتها وقياس نتائجها من قبل أعضاء الفريق وكلما تحققت نتائج معينة
انتقلوا الى احتياج آخر في عملية مستمرة لرفع نتائج تعلم الطلبة.

Appendix (17) The first drafted interviews questions before the piloting stage

Proposed themes and interview questions for the first part of the semi-structured interviews. To collect data for SRQ 2: How do these three groups of professionals (Trainers, Supervisors and Senior teachers) work within and across groups?		
No	Themes	Examples of planned questions during the interview
1	Identifying gaps and Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you usually face problems at work? What are they? Can you give me a recent example of problem and what did you do to address it? With whom you cooperate to solve such problems (or teachers' problems)? Have you ever planned knowledge and identified gaps together?
2	Requests for information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of information you request from each other? Why? (supervisor, SETs or trainers)
3	Seeking experience, knowledge and Sharing pedagogical resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think you have enough experience in such profession? Have you ever struggled in something related to your work? What did you do? Have you ever shared resources? What kind of resources you request from (supervisor, SETs or trainers)? Why?
4	Coordination and synergy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of interaction occur between you and the other groups? Is there any kind of coordination between you and the other group?
5	Discussing developments and documenting projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you do regarding your own continues professional development CPD? With whom you discuss this? What about the teachers' CPD? Who is discussing it and with whom? Can you give me an example of a projects was shared between supervisors and trainers or SETs? Can you give an example of a workshop or a presentation or a training course was (or even meetings) shared between trainers, supervisors and SETs? In what ways trainers, SETs and Supervisors plan projects and write documents about their own profession or for supporting teachers together?
6	Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often do trainers, supervisors and SETs meet? For what purpose? Is it during work time or after work time? Did it happen that you meet after work time? Why? Are they formal or informal meetings?

Table 1 supervisors, trainers and senior teachers interview themes-the first part of the interviews

Proposed themes and interview questions for the second part of the interview- To collect data for RSQ 3: How do Trainers, Supervisors and Senior Teachers perceive the potential and drawbacks of adapting and further implementing CoP-approaches within and across their groups?		
No	Themes	Proposed interview questions
1	Suitability and cultural appropriateness of CoP in Oman (between trainers, supervisors and SETs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think this notion is appropriate and suitable for the Omani context? How? In what ways do you think that applying this concept between trainers, supervisors and SETs will be beneficial for teachers and for these professionals themselves?
2	Practicality and applicability of CoP in Oman.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How about forming a CoP between SETs, supervisors and trainers in Oman? What do you think? Do you think applying this idea will succeed or fail between these groups in Oman? Why?
3	Time and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think SETs, Ss and Ts will have a enough time to participate within the CoP if was created?
4	Additional comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there anything you would like to add that I may have forgotten in my questions? Is there any idea or strategy beyond CoP you would like to see implemented to enhance your practice or your colleagues' practice? Are there any additional factors that you may like to comment on that may be inhibiting the enhancement of your work and your colleagues' work? Are there any facilitating factors that you think help you or would help you and your colleagues enhance your practice?

Table 2 supervisors, trainers and senior teachers interview themes- second part of the interviews

No	Themes	Questions
1	Cooperation, collaboration and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any kind of coordination between training and supervision departments? Can you give me examples of such cooperation? • What is the role of the stakeholders in supporting such coordination? • What is the role of stakeholders in facilitating any collaboration between senior teachers, trainers and supervisors?
2	Discussing developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of developments the two departments discuss together? • What is the role of the stakeholders in supporting any discussions of professional developments between teacher trainers, supervisors and senior teachers?
3	Meeting and visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of meetings training and supervision departments conduct together? • What is the role of stakeholders in facilitating any formal or informal meetings between senior teachers, trainers and supervisors?
4	Implementation of CoPs within the Omani education context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of stakeholders in facilitating and supporting the implementing of communities of practice or such notions between trainers, supervisors and senior teachers?

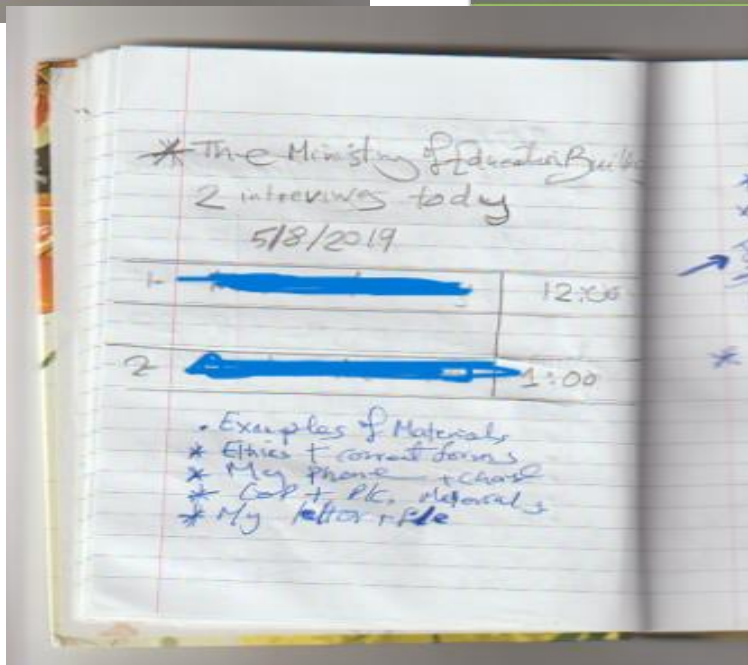
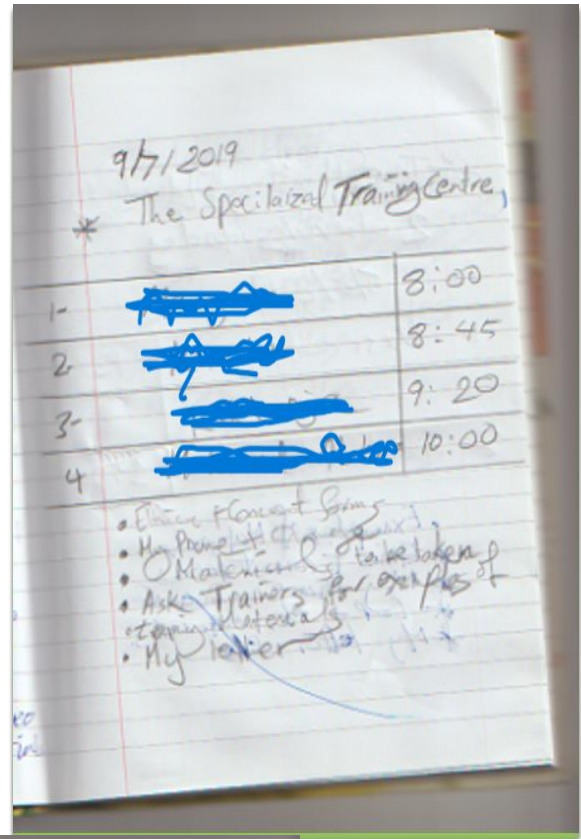
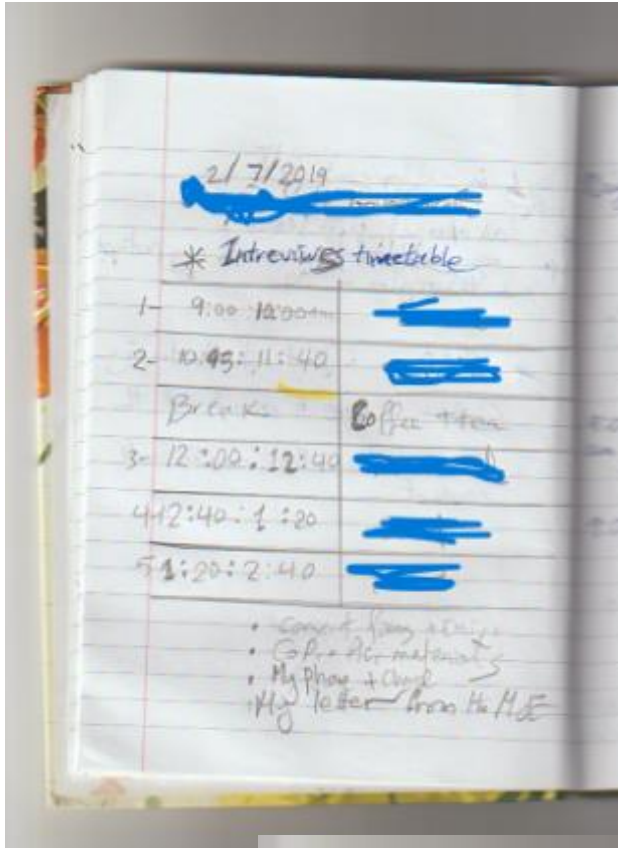
Table 3 Stakeholders interviews themes

Non-participant Observation Proforma

No	Themes	Comments
1	Identifying gaps and Problem solving	
2	Requests for information	
3	Seeking experience, knowledge and Sharing pedagogical resources	
4	Coordination and synergy	
5	Discussing developments and documenting projects	



Appendix (18) Examples of some interviews' schedules and plans



Appendix (19) An example of policies-data analysis process



Keys	Policies – names number of pages	Comments
Roles and Responsibilities-	<p>1- Regional supervisor appraisal form document: PAGE 2:</p> <p>1. Range of professional development skills that will empower self, SETS & teachers; e.g. the ability to conduct effective workshops, seminars, meetings, team teaching, peer observations, unseen observations, small scale classroom-based action research, etc.</p> <p>No. of Workshops/Seminars conducted by Regional Supervisor: </p> <p>2- Regional supervisor JOB DESCRIPTION: PAGE 1:</p> <p>18 - يشارك في تحديد وإعداد وتنفيذ البرامج التدريبية للفئات التي يشرف عليه ويتابع أثرها.</p> <p>3- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators:</p> <p>- Develops and conducts effective seminars/meetings/workshops;</p>	STATEMENTS that suggesting a contradiction with trainers' responsibilities
Communication	<p>1- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators: PAGE 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Activates various communications links/means. ❖ Has the ability to communicate with the educational learning process to all stakeholders. ❖ Employs different communication resources to monitor the English subject updates. 	Only standards with regard communication within supervision team and department -
Cooperation with colleagues	<p>Regional supervisor appraisal form document: PAGE 2 Level of initiative/cooperation/professionalism/responsibility.</p> <p>2- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators: PAGE 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ensures, in cooperation with all members of the English team, short, medium and long-term plans for the development and resourcing of English, based on a range of comparative information and evidence, including pupil attainment are established in all schools; 	Direction to cooperation within supervision department team
Relationship with colleagues	<p>1- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators: PAGE 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Builds on positive relationships with principals. ❖ Builds on positive relationships with his/her colleagues and other stakeholders. ❖ Builds on positive relationships with teachers and school administrations. ❖ Has the ability to communicate with the educational learning process to all stakeholders. 	Direction to building good relationship with school environment and link to local community
CPDs	<p>1- Regional supervisor appraisal form document: PAGE 1+2:</p> <p>1. Range of professional development skills that will empower self, SETS & teachers; e.g. the ability to conduct effective workshops, seminars, meetings, team teaching, peer observations, unseen observations, small scale classroom-based action research, etc.</p> <p><u>List all SETIMS coordinated (with dates) & all committees served on this academic year:</u></p> <p>2- English Supervisor Performance Standards and Indicators: PAGE 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Leads professional development of Senior English Teachers & English teachers through example and supports and co-ordinates the provision of high-quality professional development by methods, such as coaching, mentoring, etc. ❖ Inspires and Empowers SETS & Ts to overcome difficulties & achieve goals; 	Shared CPDs Work on their CPDs and SETs CPD