

**Exploring the factors that influence students'  
participation in English classrooms at Ibri  
College of Applied Sciences in Oman**

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## **Dedication**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the entire world.

The work is also dedicated to my late father who passed away before I finished the journey of my study.

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### **Abstract**

This study is concerned with the process of how teachers and students manage classroom participation in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Student participation is often associated with their verbal and non-verbal interaction in class, and how they respond to teachers' questions. The main aim of the study, then, is to explore the factors that influence students' participation in the English classroom at Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman. The sample of the study includes two gender-mixed classes (Level A and Level C) from the Foundation Year program, as well as six foreign teachers who taught these classes, and were voluntarily chosen.

Since many previous studies focus on analysing the verbal and non-verbal participation of students in the classroom, this study tries to explore deeper to discover the implicit and unseen causes of participation in an attempt to shed some light on the factors that may contribute to what happens in the class, rather than the actions themselves. This requires an understanding of the relationships between teachers and students and how they create the classroom context, as well as understanding the classroom as a unique social context. Three research methods (classroom observation, interviews and students' diaries) were used to provide the study with comprehensive qualitative data where each of these methods complemented the other. This study adapts some principles of ethnographic approach and grounded theory in dealing with data collection and analysis. The findings of the study emphasize the roles of teachers and students in shaping classroom participation, and confirm that classroom context is a unique social place where many interrelated factors contribute to how and why things happen in class. Furthermore, the findings point out several socio-cultural factors, such as shyness, religion, gender and culture, that influence much of what happens in the class. An interesting finding of this study is expressed by the learners' positive perception of 'shyness', because it is seen as a positive natural feeling that shows a mutual respect of all this study's participants, both male and female. It indicates that shyness is related to different causes, such as the unfamiliarity of the class context, and the expected social and Islamic practices. Finally, the study concludes that the classroom is a small complex world which has its unique culture and context. Therefore, EF teachers need to understand the complexity of the classroom and involve their learners in understanding and constructing this mini-society context for a better learning environment.

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**Abbreviations**

<b>CAS</b>	<b>College of Applied Sciences</b>
<b>MOE</b>	<b>Ministry of Education</b>
<b>FY</b>	<b>Foundation Year</b>
<b>CI</b>	<b>Classroom Interaction</b>
<b>L1</b>	<b>First Language</b>
<b>L2</b>	<b>Second Language</b>
<b>EFL</b>	<b>English as a Foreign Language</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of Chapter One is to set the scene for the study by providing a general background to the educational system and the developmental phases of education from 1970 to the mid-1990s, as well as presenting the aims of the study. Thus, this introductory chapter consists of two parts. The first part describes the nature of English language teaching and learning in Oman in general. More specifically, this section places an emphasis on describing the classroom environment, both in schools and at college level, keeping in mind the nature of classroom participation. It describes the context of the study by defining the Foundation Year program, objectives of the Foundation program, and the placement test. The second part then begins by explaining the rationale of the study and the author's motivation in researching the area of classroom participation, where the focus is on exploring what participation takes place in English classrooms as well as exploring and understanding the factors that influence students' participation in English classes in the way participation happens. The section then moves on to stating the aims of the study and ends up by mapping out the outline of the thesis.

#### **Introduction**

Participating in classroom discussion and responding to teacher's questions seem to be an indication of learning for many teachers. In fact, teachers feel happy when they observe positive student-teacher interaction in the classroom. Both teachers and students interact in the classroom using different types of actions and activities. Among these types of interaction is classroom participation which is organized by teachers and students. Furthermore, it is a way, as previously mentioned, for the students to show their involvement in the classroom. With regard to student involvement, or their participation, we need to understand or define what is meant by involvement and participation. Some students prefer to overtly speak and participate orally in the class, while others may just sit and follow what is happening in the class, without being particularly active in the session. Yet, we cannot claim that those passive students who do not speak are not participating in the class. My argument here is why some students participate and other students do not.

The study aims at exploring the factors that influence student participation in the English classroom at Ibri College of Applied Sciences (CAS, henceforth) in Oman. It tries to unfold some of the factors that could have an impact on the kind of participation students employ in their classroom, as well as understanding the underlying beliefs or reasons behind their behaviour of participation in the classroom. Classroom interaction or participation has been studied by many researchers and linguists, focusing on the relationship between the teacher and

students (Seedhouse, 1996; Walsh, 2002). Walsh (2002) examined the teacher's choice of language in constructing or obstructing learner participation in face to face classroom communication. He discovered that the choice of their language and the use of appropriate methodologies were important in constructing learner's participation. Other studies looked at students' oral participation in the classroom. For example, Warayet (2011) in his study investigated classroom participation by looking at the types of participation that students employed in their classroom, and how participation was organized by both the teacher and his learners.

This study then tries to understand classroom participation from a socio-cultural perspective, trying to understand the different forces that shape students' participation by following ethnographical and grounded theory principles in collecting the data. I argue throughout the study that classroom participation is socially and culturally constructed in the classroom (Kramsch, 1995; Conteh and Kawashima, 2008) in reference to the classroom context of this study.

This introductory chapter sets the context of the study. It begins by giving a background of the Omani educational system, as well as the changes that took place in Oman between 1970 and the mid-1990s. It provides an historical background of education in Oman describing two different contexts: schools and colleges. Although the study does not intend to make a comparison between the two contexts, a discussion on how they differ is a good start to highlight the background of the participants of the study and how participation is perceived in schools and CAS. The study looks at classroom participation in English language lessons at Ibri CAS.

English language is taught as a foreign language in Oman at all stages of the educational systems: in schools, colleges and universities both in government and private institutions. Therefore, teaching English language gained popularity from the beginning of the mid-1990s in Oman due to the fast development of education, economy and technology (Al-Hammami, 1999). Before 1970, education in Oman was very limited and the only schools that provided education were Quran schools, which normally took place in mosques. Since then, education has spread throughout the whole sultanate. Providing education to all was one of goals of the government policy (Issan 2011). The following section provides some historical background of education in Oman.

### **1.1 The education system in Oman: (Historical Background)**

Education in Oman has recently gone through two fundamental changes and development stages. The first stage began in 1970 when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos ruled the country and it was

called ‘General Education’, (GE, henceforth). The second phase took place in the mid-1990s, and was known as the Basic Education system (BE, henceforth).

### **1.1.1 General Education System (1970-1990s)**

*“We will teach our children even under the shade of a tree”* His Majesty Sultan Qaboos’ words in his first speech to the people of Oman (MOE, 2001)

This period of education was described as a crucial turning point, as well as a milestone for the educational system in Oman, as it succeeded in providing universal education in most parts of the country (Al-Hammami, 1999). It was regarded as a stage of challenges and sacrifices. With its primary goal of providing education to all, the government began providing education to all regions of Oman with a clear awareness of the challenges. There was no Omani qualified cadre to run the Ministry itself, nor were there any school buildings to offer such education. Teachers were recruited from various Arab countries as well as India. Houses and tents were initially used as school premises, and textbooks were brought in from other Arab countries, such as Qatar and Kuwait (Issan, 2011)

Before 1970, there were only three government schools in the Sultanate (Al-Hammami, 1999; Wyatt, 2013). However, there were many traditional schools in most regions of Oman where informal teachings of the Quran, Arabic, and basic arithmetic were conducted in mosques. I personally attended these schools before moving on formal schooling in 1974. This stage of education encountered many challenges, including limited learning resources, a lack of Omani teachers, and the misconception of women’s education by society. I personally experienced such challenges during my own path of education at that time, and I have found it helpful to reflect on these issues from personal experience. The following account describes the situation of both the school and class where I studied in Ibri at Mohammed bin Suleiman Elementary School during the establishment of education in Oman in the 1970s.

I joined the elementary school at the age of seven. We began learning in a rented house. The house had only seven classrooms, including the headmaster’s room. The teachers were all from Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Sudan. We did not have Omani teachers because there were no teachers from Oman at that time in our region. We studied Arabic, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Mathematics, English, and Physical Education. The classroom was small in size and we had wooden chairs with tables. There were about 45 pupils in each classroom. Each bench accommodated three pupils. There were no computers or any tape recorders. The teacher was the only source of information besides the textbooks that were brought from Qatar. Teachers were very authoritarian and very hard, though fair. They used to beat us for every single mistake. We were scared and we feared them more than we feared our parents. If anyone committed a mistake, the teacher would punish him and call his father who would come and punish him at school, too. Teaching depended on rote memorization and repetition. Everything was learned through memorization. We

memorized the Holy Quran, all poems in Arabic books, and all Mathematic multiplications. There was no group work or pair work. All students participated in reading. For example, in a reading lesson, all students in the class had to read. The teacher asked each student to read in turn. We were never asked to write something on the board. We listened to what the teacher said and never asked question. Even if we did not understand, we didn't dare ask because we were afraid that the teacher would become angry or think that we did not understand. There was no playing yard in the school. During Physical Education, we played outside the school where there was some empty land. Everything was traditional but we learned how to read and write.

From the above personal account, I can summarize that school premises were rented, or newly built, with limited resources. Teachers were expatriates whose teaching was influenced by various traditional teaching methods, such as grammar translation methods and direct methods. Teachers were the centre of the teaching and learning process, and the learners were recipients of what was being taught or delivered. Learning depended on rote memorization, and repetition and drilling, and participation was very much guided by the teacher.

Another challenge relates to the social and cultural issues regarding women's education. Very few parents allowed their daughters to attend government schools, possibly for two reasons. Firstly, the number of schools in each region was limited, for example, in my village there was only one school which was for boys' only, and some parents allowed their daughters to join the boys' schools. There were very few girls in the class and they sat at the back of the classroom. Other people believed that girls should stay at home, help their mothers, get married, and start families. They did not want their daughters to mix with boys in the school for religious, cultural, or social reasons. Culturally, women do not sit with men at social gatherings, thus the segregation of men and women is one of the features, or common norms, in Omani society, and in most parts of Oman.

The challenges and constraints met by the MOE were numerous, but this study is not concerned with discussing all of these challenges. However, as time passed, education in Oman went on several continuous improvement paths in most aspects of educational development. Thus, the situations and the learning and teaching processes in schools have changed dramatically due to the rapid changes and cross-cultures brought about by education, media and technology. This has reflected on the quality of education, school administration and the delivery of curriculum and assessment.

GE had three stages of schooling: elementary (six years), preparatory (three years) and secondary (three years). This classification of three stages in the GE system phased out and gradually was replaced by the Basic Education system (BE henceforth). All GE schools were single-sex schools with exceptional cases in some rural villages, where there were fewer students and fewer schools. Both male and female students went to the same school, which was because

of geographical and practical constraints, making it impossible for the government to provide single-sex schools for males and females as previously mentioned, due to the low number of students in those areas. It was also not financially or economically wise, especially during the start of the general development of the country. This situation continued until the beginning of 1980s, when more schools were built. (c) Consequently, girls then had their own schools in all regions of Oman.

Regardless of all the challenges faced during this period, GE has been very successful in spreading education almost to all citizens. Development was witnessed in all political, social, economic and educational environments, but talking about these developments is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, I talk in the coming section about the introduction, and the features of, the second stage of educational development as it is relevant to the context of the study in terms of classroom context and the system of co-education which was introduced as one of the features of the new Basic Educational system (BE).

### **1.1.2 Basic Education system (BE)**

The second stage began in the mid-1990s in response to the international and local demands of the country. The Ministry Of Education (MOE, henceforth) realised that the educational system had to be reformed in order to meet the changes and developments that were taking place in all domains of life in Oman. This was important as the sultanate needed to prepare its citizens for life and work in response to the challenges created by the modern global economy. In response to these demands and aims, the government introduced the (BE) system in 1998. The BE system, cited in Al-Lamki (2009), has been defined as:

*A unified ten year education plan provided by the Sultanate for all children of school age. It meets their basic education needs in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, enabling them to continue their education or training based on their interests, aptitudes, and dispositions, and enabling them to face the challenges of their present circumstances and future developments, in the context of comprehensive social development. (MOE, 2001:7)*

The BE system consists of two cycles: Cycle One which covers Grade 1 to Grade 4; and Cycle Two which covers Grade 5 to Grade 10. This is also followed by two years of secondary education. BE brought about many dramatic improvements and changes in all aspects of education including national education goals, the curriculum, teaching and learning processes, assessment systems, supervision, building schools equipped with laboratories, and rich learning resource centres. Some of the key features of the BE educational system, which are relevant to the study, are:

- Implementation of co-education system in Cycle One of BE grades (1-4)

- Introduction of teaching English language in Grade 1
- Emphasis of the learner's autonomy and learner's centre in the learning and teaching processes. (Al-Farsi, 2002; Al-Hammami, 1999):

### **1.1.3. The implementation of the co-educational system in Cycle One of BE grades (1-4)**

There was concern by the Ministry of Education that the issue of implementing coeducation in schools could be met with resistance from some, as it was not part of the Omani culture and norms, considering the social and Islamic factors. Therefore, prior to the introduction of the BE system, the Ministry conducted some campaigns to educate people about the philosophy of the BE system, and raise their awareness of its aims and developmental changes that were vital and needed to cope with the international demands of the educational development. Many interviews and discussions in the media were conducted with officers from the MOE in order to talk about BE and explain some of its issues to the people. It is fair to say that the decision was made after careful consideration and thought from different perceptions, and the Ministry has good reasons for the change. Here, I do not intend to expand on this issue in this study but I want to make reference to it in relation to the nature of the classroom in GE and BE and the CAS, which is described below in this section.

One of the reasons that I discuss more about Stage Two is that the students involved in this study are the product of this system. This will be elaborated on further when I discuss the context and nature of the classroom in schools and the College of Applied Sciences, in the following section.

## **1.2 Nature of the classroom in schools and the College of Applied Sciences**

### **1.2.1 Classrooms in schools**

In this study, my aim is not to describe the two educational systems in Oman, but to highlight some of the features of classroom context in GE and BE. Later, I talk about the classroom context at the College of Applied Sciences in order to highlight some of the differences between schools and the college. The participants (students) of the study, being one of the outcome graduates of the BE system, are a good way of showing the backgrounds of the different classroom contexts that they go through before joining college. The proceeding paragraphs describe these contexts.

### **1.2.2 Features of GE classrooms**

Schools in GE are single-sex at all levels (1-12). Male students study in male only schools and are taught by male teachers. Similarly, female students study in female only schools, by female teachers. The school administration and academic staff are also single-sex in all schools.

Regarding classroom layout and seating, students sit in rows and the teacher's table is located in the front corner of the class. All students face the board, which is located in the centre of the wall. Teachers rarely use group work in their teaching but sometime use pair work when conducting some role-play tasks. From my own experience as a student, and as a teacher who taught in GE schools, I think this could be attributed to the nature of the classroom seating, and also to the fact that teachers use traditional ways of teaching as they are the centre of the teaching and learning process.

Finally, education began with the GE system in 1970, and in 1998 the new educational system (BE) began. The plan of the MOE was that the BE system would replace the GE system gradually. For quite some time the two systems ran together, and each year new BE schools were built, with new schools being converted to the BE system. The replacement took place gradually, but BE completely replaced GE by 2014, according to a statement from the General Director of the curricula at the MOE.

I now move on to discuss briefly the classroom in BE.

### **1.2.3 Features of the classroom in BE**

#### **A) Cycle One (Grades 1-4)**

In Cycle One schools (Grades 1- 4), students are taught in mixed-gender classes. Both male and female students sit in groups, and each group consists of five to six students. Female teachers only teach in Cycle One schools, which are managed by female personnel. It was decided by the Ministry of Education that female teachers instruct in Cycle One during the early stages of the students' education (age group six to ten years old). Ministry personnel expressed that during this period of a student's life, they require motherly care, in which female teachers may complement this role.

Another feature of this system was the writing and production of BE textbooks and teaching materials. All subjects of BE were produced locally, and the new BE curriculum focused on the learners as the core of the learning process. For example, the English curriculum, which was locally produced, is called 'English for Me'.

The government realized the importance of English as an international language, and as the language of economy, science, and technology. The learning of English was reviewed and the Ministry of Education, in response to these demands, introduced the teaching of English from the early stages of student education. Therefore, English as a subject was taught from Grade One. However, English was only taught from Grade 4 in the GE schools. English was only

taught for five lessons per week, which was much less compared to the BE curriculum, where English was allocated for ten lessons a week (Al-Hammami, 1999).

The new curriculum of the BE is based on a communicative approach where the learners are the centre of the learning process. Involving learners in the learning process is one of the features of the BE teaching methods. Therefore, experiential learning activities and methods such as ‘Total Physical Response’ which were developed by Asher in the 1960s, are encouraged to be used by teachers. The quote, *"What I hear I forget, what I see I remember, what I do I understand"*, is displayed on posters in most BE schools in Oman.

Teachers received training and attended workshops on how to implement the new curriculum. They were trained to use new teaching approaches and the new assessment criteria. In schools, teachers worked with students and encouraged them to work together. They were facilitators and they tried to provide the learners with supportive learning environments.

Classrooms were equipped with new facilities such as computers, projectors, and the (I) internet, and were divided into groups. They were decorated with many learning posters that were used to consolidate the activities that the students performed in class. Traditional libraries were replaced with new learning resource centres, which contained audio and video, CD players, and computer clusters with (I) internet connectivity.

The students played an active role in their learning. Boys and girls sat in groups and worked together on small projects, such as making kites or models from mud, for example. Body language was used where students practised repeating songs, played games, or took part in drama sessions. The following photographs were taken in BE schools in Oman. Photograph (2) shows an example of a drama activity performed by students in a government school in Oman. Photographs 3 and 4 below show a typical BE classroom. (Note: the following photographs are taken from Getty Images Middle East FZ LLC through google search)



**Photograph 1 Example of a drama activity in BE school**



**Photograph 2 Classroom in BE school**

### **B) Cycle Two BE (Grades 5 to 10)**

Cycle Two is the second stage of the BE system and has six levels from Grades 5 to 10. It has all the features of BE Cycle One with the exception of co-education. Cycle Two schools are single-sex, like GE. Teachers are required to continue implementing the objectives of the BE philosophy. The Ministry continues to offer on-going courses and workshops for teachers to make sure that the system is being implemented according the specified vision and objectives.

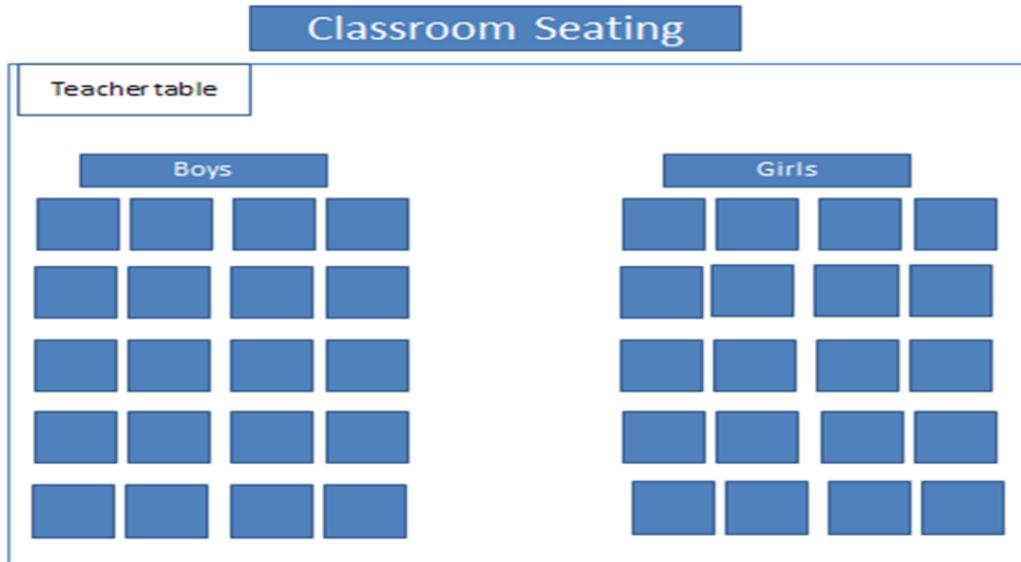
In the previous sections, I have provided a brief background about schools and classrooms in general, as well as the basic education system. I now move on to describe the classroom context in CAS in Oman.

#### **1.2.4 Nature of classrooms in the college**

Looking at the seating arrangements of classrooms at the college, there are about 25 male and female students in each class. Most often female students outnumber the male students to a ratio of 17 to 8. In some classes, the number of males is even less than the females in each class, and we see five boys and 19 girls in one of the classes observed in the study. Principally, students are in mixed-gender classes, but the actual seating could be seen as a single-sex class. In other words, female students sit on one side and male students sit on the other. They do not engage in any activities together. Photograph (4) and Diagram (1) below illustrate the structure and the organization of the classroom in the college. (Note: the photograph below is taken from Ibri CAS)



**Photograph 3: Classroom seating arrangement in the college**



**Diagram 1: Classroom showing boys and girls seating locations**

The college students come from different parts of Oman, which brings in social diversity and individual difference. By social diversity, I mean that the various regions of Oman do not share identical social and cultural views on many issues. It is generally thought that those students who come from the capital of Oman are more open to gender-mixed contexts, compared to other students who are from the interior, due to multicultural integration. This assumption is based on my personal knowledge and has not been proven by research. By individual differences, I mean that students have their own beliefs and ways of viewing various issues which can influence their behaviour in the classroom. These points are considered later in the discussion chapter.

The following table provides some general points regarding similarities and differences between basic education and college systems. The points mentioned here are not based on official documents, but rather on my own experience and knowledge of the two systems.

	<b>Basic Education</b>	<b>College CAS</b>
Classes	Cycle 1 (from Grade 1 to Grade 4) in mixed-gender classes Cycle 2 (from Grade 5 to Grade 12) in single-gender classes.	mixed-gender classes in all classes
Students	Students come from one area of Oman	Students come from all regions of Oman

Teachers	Mainly male and female Omani teachers and few teachers from Arab countries.	Male and female teachers from different countries (Oman, UK, USA, India, Middle East, Canada )
Teaching materials	Use of textbooks and curriculum materials	Different resources are available for teachers to use including lectures, hand-outs, workshops and internet
Classroom location	Students study in one classroom	Students study in different classes and computer laboratory
Assessment	Formal exams and continuous assessment	Quizzes, formal exams, presentation, essays and sometimes portfolios.

**Table 1 Summary of comparison between Basic Education and College educational systems**

Students who join college after finishing high school begin their Foundation Year program. Prior to their start of study, they sit for the placement test. In the following section I discuss the foundation year program and the placement test as part of the context of the study.

#### **1.2.4.1 What is the Foundation Year program?**

The Foundation Year program (henceforth FY) is a pre-requisite one to two year (four semesters) course program that prepares new students for the Bachelor degree in CAS. The course aims to prepare students to start a degree program and study through the medium of English language, and is designed to meet the Oman Accreditation Council's GFP Standards (MOHE, 2011). As stated in the new version of the FY document for the academic year 2011/2012, the program has been developed 'to reflect the Minister's recent decision to permit up to four semesters of Foundation study for those students who enter at the very lowest levels of proficiency' (MOHE, 2011: 6).

Each college of Applied Sciences is provided with an English course specifications document for all four levels (A, B, C and D, see Table (2) below). This document specifies the learning outcomes, materials and assessment procedures for the English and Study Skills components of the FY program. There are four levels in this program, with 20 teaching hours for 15 weeks (MOHE 2011). All courses use the New Headway Plus Series Pack and Headway Academic

Skills Reading, Writing, and Study Skills – Levels 1, 2 and 3, including Student's Book and CDs.

Level	IELTS equivalence	Course of study
A	4.0	Two courses ENGL 6001, 'General English Skills' and ENGL 6002, 'Academic English Skills'
B	3.5	Two courses , ENGL 5001 'General English Skills' and ENGL 5002, 'Academic English Skills'
C	3.0	Single course (ENGL 4001) 'General English Skills' and 'Academic English Skills'
D	2.5 or less	Single course (ENGL 3001)

**Table 1 Language level used by the college and IELTS equivalence and the course students take**

Note: (ENGL stands for English course. The number (3001) is a number code that refers to the lowest language level, and (6001) is the number code for the highest language level).

A general objective is listed in all levels - "By the end of the course, students should be able to use English, receptively and productively" (MOHE 2011). This presumes that students will be able to interact in the class verbally, and also communicate their ideas in writing. It is difficult to talk about the objectives of each level in this introductory chapter but generally, all levels aim to develop students' English proficiency to a reasonable level by which they can pass the FY program and be able to study their degree program in English. This does not mean that students will be linguistically fully prepared after they finish the FY program, but some of them might struggle and need to exert more effort where they can continue learning English themselves. Besides, a General English for Specific Purposes course is offered to all students in Years Two and Three, along with their degree program courses to help those who need to study English as an elective.

The FY program consists of English, Mathematics and Computer Skills courses. However, this study focuses only on the English program, and therefore I will observe English classes to explore students' participation. As previously mentioned, that the FY program has four levels, therefore, students are streamed according to their level of English proficiency. All new students sit for the placement test and are then situated in the appropriate language level according to their test scores.

### 1.2.4.2 Placement Test

The placement Test is an English language test designed and written locally by some expert teachers in the field of assessment in CAS (see Appendix D for more details on the format and questions of the Placement Test 2011). The aim of the test is to place students at the appropriate level of English proficiency in terms of vocabulary, grammar and writing. According to their scores, students will be placed into one of five levels, as shown in the table below:

English level	Course name
Beginner (equivalent of IELTS 2.5 or below)	ENGL 3001
Elementary (equivalent of IELTS 3.0)	ENGL 4001
Pre-(I)intermediate (IELTS 3.5)	ENGL 5001 & 5002
Lower-(I)intermediate (IELTS 4.0)	ENGL 6001 & 6002
Intermediate (IELTS 4.5) *	Student sit for the English Challenge Test. *

**Table 3 Placement for English level and course names (MOHE, 2011:3)**

*\* Note: (If students pass the challenge test, they are exempt from the FY program and begin their program of study; but if they fail the challenge test, they study ENGL 6001 & 6002).*

In the earlier sections, I have presented some background about the physical atmosphere of classrooms in the schools, which shows the nature of the context of the classroom that the students have experienced. I also talked briefly about the differences between Cycle One and Cycle Two schools as well as the College of Applied Sciences, the Foundation Program and the Placement Test.

One of the differences between schools and colleges is classroom context. While co-education is implemented in Cycle One, students return to single-sex schools in Cycle Two, and in the general education system. However, when they join college they go back to study in the co-education system again. Most students have experienced being in mixed classes from their time studying at basic education schools. Despite the fact that some studies have looked at gender as the main influential factor that affects classroom interaction (Fassinger, 1995; Wilkinson and Marrett, 1985), I am taking a rather holistic approach to explore the factors that influence classroom participation. The influential factors to classroom participation is data-driven. I do not speculate any prepositions of any factors, nor do I have any hypothesis, but will wait for the data to produce the emergent factors to be analysed.

In the proceeding section, I gave an overview of the objectives of the study, the rationale, and the motivation for conducting the research.

### **1.3 Part Two: Aims of the study:**

#### **1.3.1 Statement of the problem:**

English is used as a foreign language in Oman and is the language of instruction in higher education institutions, including the Colleges of Applied Sciences. English is, therefore, an important tool for students to succeed in their studies. The only place where students can practice and use English is in the classroom. Students need to interact with their English teachers, most of whom are native English speakers. Also, they need to show an understanding of their learning by participating in English in their classroom.

In school, English is taught as a foreign language, and not as the language of instructions. Arabic, the students' mother tongue, is used instead with English being taught as a subject. This is one of the changes and challenges that students encounter as soon as they start their classes. In principle, it is easier for students to communicate in their mother tongue in the class as the constraints of linguistic barriers are eliminated. Students' level of English was reported to be one of the contributors to students' participation and interaction in the classroom (Ahnert et al., 2012).

Furthermore, student participants in the study have been through different classroom settings. In school they studied in two different settings, being mixed-sex schools from Grade One to Four, and then moved to single-sex schools from Grade 5 to 12. In college they then go back to a mixed-sex setting. In this study, I do not intend to compare the different classroom contexts and their influence on students' participation or learning in general. However, describing this change in their study route might show the students' backgrounds and the different learning environments that they have experienced.

Along the same lines as human influence on the classroom is the teacher who plays an important role on students' learning and classroom organization. Teachers also come to the classroom with their own identities and different social and cultural backgrounds, as well as their own beliefs about teaching and learning. Both teachers and learners in the classroom organize what takes place in their class. The teacher who can be the commander, the dominator and the governor of the classroom might set rules for how the classroom should be. Students, on the other hand, also play an important role on how they want their participation to be presented in the classroom. That is to say, students can choose to participate verbally or non-verbally through gesture and body language, or they may even choose to be silent. What makes this the way it is in the

classroom is what I am trying to understand through investigating students' participation in the classroom. The study attempts to understand and explore the factors that contribute to student participation, bearing in mind the teachers' and students' educational and social backgrounds.

The study, then, is not initiated to solve a specific problem but rather looks at studying a specific classroom context as a small case study in order to understand human relations associated with the classroom on the principle that classroom participation or interaction is socially constructed.

### **1.3.2 Rationale for the research**

Classroom participation is perceived by most teachers and students as an indication of good learning and teaching. This opinion is supported by studies such as (Biggs, 1999; Littlewood, 2001; Warayet, 2011). Understanding participation varies according to individual perceptions and meanings of participation. Participation can be identified by verbal and non-verbal reactions and responses of the learners to the teachers' questions or stimuli. However, influences on students' participation are numerous. In this study, I define students' participation as the students' actual verbal and non-verbal participation in the classroom. In other words, the actions that students produce or do in the class that indicate their participation or involvement in the class.

I was motivated by different motives to explore the issue of students' participation in Oman focusing on what participation takes place in English classroom in the college and what influences students to participate or not. There are many reasons for the choice of studying this phenomenon in the Omani context in the college classroom. First, to the best of my knowledge, classroom participation has not been researched in Oman and therefore this study can be considered as one of the most recent studies to explore students' participation.

Having said that, the whole idea of the research came about from three different sources or positions that hold different views on students' participation. Two of these sources are related to the views of teachers' and my colleagues' definitions and expectations of students' participation; and the students' views and definitions on students' participation. The third view is my exploration of the nature of participation that actually occurs in classroom and the factors that influence what does or does not happen. These views are discussed below.

First, I begin with teachers' expectations of students' participation. As mentioned before that teachers have prior knowledge and expectation of how students interact and participate in the classroom. I often hear my colleagues complain about the lack of students' participation in their English classes in Oman. They complain that some students do not talk in class and seem to be very passive, rarely contributing to classroom discussion. My colleagues mentioned that they were uncomfortable because they do not get enough participation from their students, and they feel that students ought to participate according to their prior teaching experience in ELT in

different contexts. Moreover, teachers feel that students need to participate according to foundation year curriculum goals and attainment objectives. The curriculum recommends teaching approaches and materials that assume classroom participation. The foundation program learning objectives implemented in the college emphasizes the role of students' participation and discussion in the classroom, MOHE (2011). According to the learning outcomes for the general foundation program as stated in the foundation programme handbook (January 2011) students are expected to:

- actively participate in a discussion on topic relevant to their studies by asking questions, agreeing /disagreeing, asking for clarification, sharing information, expressing and asking for opinions. MOHE, (2011:10)
- work in pairs or groups and participate accordingly i.e., take turns, initiate a discussion, interrupt appropriately, express an opinion. ( P11)
- show respect for their teachers and others and their rights to have a different opinion. (P11)

Based on what the college expects from students and on what teachers were told about the importance of participation in the class when they join the college, teachers feel that students do not participate as expected from them. My colleagues often attributed this to several causes, considering students' level of English as one of the constraints to students' participation. Others, on the other hand, related this to student motivation and student adaptation to the new learning environment with which they are not familiar. Their assumptions of causes of the lack of participation from the students are still personal analysis and need to be researched and justified.

Thus, from the stated teachers' views and observation above on students' participation, it could be summarized that there is a gap between what teachers expect from students and what the foundation year program suggests about students' participation and what actually happens in class and how participation is shown. This gap contributes to the rationale of the study in order to explore this issue and hopes to reach a better understanding of what causes such mismatch.

Secondly, students are uncomfortable too. They feel that they are expected to participate in the classroom which is different from the classes they were used to in their schools. The new classroom context is a total new experience for them. Also, the expected participation that the new context requires is not natural to them too. The students express their anxiety of being in the new learning experience where they were expected to participate in a gender-mixed class. Students are not familiar with this atmosphere of the classroom. Students are used to work with the same gender and talk freely in the class without having to worry about the other gender. Besides, students came from a culture that considers gender-mixing is not socially encouraged and therefore students feel reluctant to participate.

Finally, my own observation as a teacher in the college for more than six years supports some of my colleagues' concerns about student participation and understand why they are not comfortable with how students participate in the classroom. On the same token, as an insider to the students' culture, I am also aware of the Omani students' concept of classroom in learning and what it means and how it is different from the curriculum and the teachers as mentioned above. Moreover, I understand some of the students' concerns and the feelings of discomfort and uneasiness in the new classroom context. The students came to the class with their own ideologies and expectations of participation and now they are faced with a different and new classroom context that expects them to participate in ways that are not natural to them.

Therefore, the study is worth doing because it tries to understand these relations and what participation takes place or not in the classroom. It aims to unfold some of the above issues expressed by both teachers and students. Similarly, it helps colleges understand how to support teaching and learning of English language and how to understand the gap of those different expectations mentioned above.

Chapter Two of the literature review shows that classroom interaction is made up of a range of integrated factors which can shape classroom participation and contribute to the ways in which students perceive their participation in the class (Fassinger, 1995; Cummins, 2009). Nevertheless, assumptions and perception factors influencing student participation can be made based on personal experiences, but need to be validated and tested by research.

The above discussion of my own and my colleagues' personal feeling about student participation in the college has motivated me to explore the factors that influence this by looking at what participation takes place and what does not in the classroom. Also, the existing body of research on student participation shows that many factors can impact directly or indirectly on how and why students participate or not.

Throughout the research, I argue that classrooms are multi-contexts and that as such those interrelated multi-contexts need to be unfolded, analysed, and explored individually (Kramsch, 1995; Seedhouse, 1996; Conteh and Kawashima, 2008; Walsh, 2002). There were many small scale action research projects conducted by senior teachers and supervisors of English in Oman. This work has been the product of a BA TESOL program, edited by Simon Borg (2007). Most of these studies concerned the teaching and investigation of different skills of English (see Borg, 2000). To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any thorough investigation of this topic in Oman. Therefore, I set out the study to explore the factors that contribute to students' participation in Oman without any pre-conceived assumptions but rather allowing the factors to emerge naturally from the data, by looking at what participation takes place in the English classroom at Ibri CAS.

The study builds on the previous studies in the area of classroom participation in many ways. Firstly, it looks at the relationship of the participants of the classroom, i.e., teachers and students, and tries to understand the structure and influence on student participation. Secondly, the study also looks at classroom participation in a context where the mixing of males and females is socially and culturally controversial. Teachers and students, having no choice on the arrangement and organization of the classroom, are limited in their participation to certain acceptable patterns. This feature of the classroom context might give the study an originality as it has not been previously studied in Oman. Furthermore, this study, which also considers social context as an important factor in the teaching and learning process, may add to the existing body of literature of the understanding of classroom participation from an Islamic perspective. It would also provide the educational policy in Oman with some new insights into the role of society in the educational environment. Finally, I would like to stress that this study is a specific-context and does not intend to generalize its findings, but rather the findings can only be considered if applied to a similar social context.

The following section states the aims of the study.

### **1.3.3 Aims and research questions**

The study aims to explore the factors that influence students' classroom participation at the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman. It primarily aims to:

- 1- Explore the effect of classroom context (environment) on student participation
- 2- Explore students' perception of classroom participation
- 3- Explore the role of the teacher on students' classroom participation
  - Explore what participation takes place in English classrooms
  - Understand what factors influence why it takes place or does not take place as it does
  - Understand the relationship of teachers and students in mediating classroom participation.

#### **A) Research questions**

Thus, in order to achieve an understanding of the above objectives, the study will try to seek answers for the following research questions:

1.1 What types of participation takes place in English classes of Foundation Year students in the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman?

1.2 What is the nature of student participation in English classes of Foundation Year students in the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman?

1.2 In what ways does the classroom environment facilitate classroom participation?

1.3 In what ways does teacher behaviour affect classroom participation?

2.1 How do Omani students in the college perceive classroom participation in a mixed class context?

2.2 Are there any differences between male and female student participation?

3. What factors influence student classroom participation positively or negatively in English classes?

By answering the research questions, the study presents a description of what occurs in the classroom by describing the behaviours of the students. It implies that student participation is influenced by different factors which the study is set to explore. The context of the classroom is an important factor in which participation occurs. Thus, the findings to questions (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) might indicate if this context of classroom has any impact on student participation. The answer to these questions might provide an insight into the complexities of classroom participation in an environment where participation is, to some extent, influenced by society and/or students' identity to how they want to participate. It could also provide data on students' gender and if their participation would differ if they were in a single-sex classroom context. The analysis of the students' diaries might present students' personal views on the issue of gender in the classroom.

The role of the teacher has been investigated in other studies and was given a priority in influencing classroom organization (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Sakui and Cowie, 2012). In this study, teachers were also considered crucial to the analysis of students' participation and the answer to question 1.3 will provide sufficient data about the role of the teacher, and their diverse cultural and educational background to classroom organization and teaching strategies. The role of the teacher is discussed more in Chapter Three, Section 2.3.1. The study could be original in that the role of the teacher is studied in this particular context where teachers of the study were used to teach both male and female students in context where the mixing of gender is considered normal, socially speaking. This new context might be a challenge to teachers as well as to the students. A detailed analysis of this issue might provide a new insight on what shapes classroom participation in such a context.

These questions were investigated qualitatively through the use of classroom observation and interviews. Students' journals or diaries, which is the third research method of this study, provides the learners, or the participants, with opportunities to speak for themselves and present a personal perspective or account of their learning and participation in the classroom.

Having mentioned the aims of the research, I now move on to describe the case of the study and the targeted population.

#### **1.4 The case study**

The study is conducted at Ibri CAS and I have chosen two classes (Level B and Level C) from the Foundation Year as a case study for exploring the factors that influence students' participation in English classrooms. Below I discuss the targeted population (students and teachers) and a description of the college.

##### **1.4.1 Targeted population**

A targeted population is a group of respondents from which the researchers will collect information and draw conclusions (Cohen et al., 2007). The following points define Ibri CAS (the place of the study), and the participants (students and teachers).

###### **1.4.1.1 Ibri College of Applied Sciences:**

Ibri CAS is one of six government CASs and is located in the northern part of Oman, in the Al-Dhahira district. It offers four programs, namely Information Technology (IT), Design, Communication Studies, and Business Administration. Students who are enrolled in these colleges are registered through the unified admission centre. It is a condition that students should score no less than 65 per cent in their high score certificate. Upon the start of the academic program, the new students need to pass the foundation program (see section 1.3 of this chapter above).

I have chosen Ibri CAS as a government higher education institution as the place of my study for two reasons. First, I live and work as an English teacher in Ibri CAS, which makes it easy for me to gain access to the place of the study. It will also help me to gain access to all arrangements needed for the study. Second, there are six CASs in Oman, all of which follow one unified educational and academic system. Students from all over Oman are enrolled in these colleges, which means that each college has students from different parts of Oman. For this reason I feel that the students who study at Ibri will represent the whole sample of students who are in such colleges, making it suitable as a sample of all colleges.

### 1.4.1.2 Participants

#### A) Students

The participating students in the study, at the time of the recordings, were a group of male and female Omani students who were studying on the Foundation Year program at Ibri CAS, in the academic year 2012- 2013. Some information about the participating students and the classes is shown below in Table (4).

<b>Class</b>	Class B (20)	Class C (10)
<b>Number of students</b>	25	17
<b>Number of male students</b>	9	5
<b>Number of female students</b>	16	12
<b>Level of English</b>	Level (B)	Level (C)
<b>Nationality</b>	Omani	Omani
<b>Regions in Oman</b>	They came from all regions of Oman	They came from all the regions of Oman

**Table 2 Students Demographic Information**

I observed two classes (C and B) from the FY, of Students who have now finished their high school (secondary stage) and have joined the college to undertake a four year Bachelor degree, excluding FY. Their English language competences are limited according to their scores in the Placement Test. Most of the students entering the Foundation Year program scored less than Band 4 in the English Language International Testing System (ELITS) according to a study conducted by (Al Kilabi and Al-Salmi, 2006; MOHE, 2011).

#### B) Teachers

Teachers were selected voluntarily after a meeting with the Head of Department and the teacher prior to the commencement of the study. Six teachers expressed a willingness to take part in the study. All teachers had experiences in teaching English in different educational systems. Table (5) below shows further details about the participating teachers in the study. The names of the teachers are pseudonym for the purposes of participant confidentiality.

<b>Teacher (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>Years of teaching experience in Oman</b>
Shanti	Female	Indian	MA in Education	Many	Her 2 <sup>nd</sup> year in Ibri
Debra	Female	American	BA	7 years	One year in a different college in Oman and this year as her first year at Ibri.
Nicole	Female	UK	MA	More than 20 years	Her first year
Tany	Female	American	BA in Modern Languages and Literature - MA in International Education	5 years	Her first year
Susan	Female	American	MA in English literature	15 years	Her first year
Rashid	Male	American	Bachelor of Art	Many years	He taught previously in Saudi Arabia, but this is his first year in Oman.

Table 3 Teachers Demographic Information

## **1.5 Timeline of the study**

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first initial chapters describe the layout of the study which includes the context and the research design of the study. The subsequent chapters show the process of data collection and analysis, while the last two chapters discuss the findings and suggest some recommendations for further research, and the implication and contribution of this study to existing literature in the area of classroom participation from a socio-cultural perspective.

This introductory chapter, which is divided into two parts, sets the scene of the study. It gives a brief background about the educational system of Oman by describing two different classroom contexts: government schools and higher education colleges. It also discusses the rationale for conducting the research and states the aims of the study.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature where I present the theoretical background of the study. I start by giving a brief summary about language and culture where I argue that learning is culturally constructed. The chapter then moves on to define classroom participation, and explain how it has been studied by different researchers. I also discuss briefly some of the learning theories, and how learning is viewed in the light of those theories. The study concludes by discussing the role of three factors: teachers, learners, and the context of the classroom in relation to student participation.

Chapter Three, which consists of three parts, describes the methodological part of the study and the process of data collection. In part one, I give a detailed description of the research paradigm, and talk about the rationale for the choice of the instruments of the study, which are used in the data collection. The second part presents an account of the piloting stage and the benefits gained for the development of the research tools and its implementation. The final part concludes by describing the process of the data collection. Data collection is collected in three stages. The aim is to observe the participants of the study over three different times during their Foundation Year program 2012-2013.

Chapter Four presents the data analysis and the findings. It begins by presenting a summary of the emergent factors. After providing a detailed account of the analysis, the chapter then presents a summary of the findings from each stage, and draws a conclusion of the finding.

Chapter Five is devoted to the discussion of the findings of the study. It discusses the major key issues suggested by the findings. It also elaborates more on some of the issues related to the emergent factors, such as the influence of culture, as well as the role of the teachers and learners in relation to student participation in the classroom. In this chapter, I discuss the findings in light of the research questions and make reference, when possible, to the literature.

Chapter Six is the conclusion where I discuss the possible contributions of the research to the area of investigating classroom participation in general, and in similar cultural contexts. Although the study is not set to evaluate in any way the existing classroom context in CASs, the findings of the study may shed some light on the importance of culture and society that the teachers need to consider, in that new teachers need to be oriented to the educational system and how the classroom is organized, as explained in Chapter Five. This study is context-oriented and specific to the classroom context in Oman. Exploring the factors that contribute to student participation is an area that needs further exploration. Thus, in this chapter, I suggest areas for further work. Finally, I describe my own PhD journey by reflecting on the process of the research.

### **Conclusion**

In this part, I have discussed the educational background that shows the nature of classrooms in schools and colleges. I have described the Foundation Year program and the Placement Test relevant to the students' enrolment in the college, and the targeted population of the study. The second part is the literature review where I review some of the available bodies of research relating to classroom contexts and interaction. It also provides definitions of classroom interaction.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of student participation that takes place in English foreign language classes at college level in Oman. It aims specifically at exploring the factors that contribute to students' participation in the classroom by observing what types of classroom participation that happens in the English classroom.

Understanding what happens in the classroom and trying to explain the causes of behaviours or how the learners interact or react are complex tasks. There are many interrelated implicit and explicit factors that collectively or individually may contribute in shaping all interactions in the classroom (Seedhouse, 1996; Rocca, 2010). On the basis of this complexity of classroom context, this chapter begins with defining student participation and moving onto explaining the relationship of culture and society, and their impact on student participation and language learning. To present the arguments and the relationship associated with classroom context, this chapter is divided into three parts, with each part being interlinked.

In part one, the chapter defines classroom participation as a part of the social interaction that takes place in the classroom, specifically in the context of learning English. It provides the theoretical background that underpins English learning, and classroom interaction and participation. At first, it describes some important models of classroom interaction as discussed by academics and researchers such as the SPEAKING's model (Kramsch, 1985); the ecology of human interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1993); the four layers of interrelated spheres of interaction proposed by Conteh (2000), and the model of the four layers (Breen 2001). According to these scholars, classroom participation is seen as a product which undergoes several integrated processes where all participants of the classroom interact and contribute in one way or another. These processes involve a wide range of different factors such as teachers, learners, classroom atmosphere, society, culture, and also the outside world (Conteh and Meier, 2014).

Part two reviews the literature where I talk about socio-cultural influences and relations to classroom participation and classroom culture. I also talk about the language learning theories as well as the rationale underpinning those theories, while I make special reference to theories of socio-culture. The social-cultural interaction which takes place in classrooms is one type of everyday interaction that occurs between people in the outside world and as part of routine social communication. However, my discussion of classroom participation is based on the assumption that the classroom is a mini social exchange environment that shares all the features of social interaction outside (Hall and Walsh, 2002a; Kumpulainen et al., 2009). I also think that

classroom interaction cannot be isolated from the wider cultural context (Gee, 2008; Seedhouse, 1996), and therefore it is important to begin the discussion by talking about some of the cultural considerations and social contexts which are related to my study, but from a general perspective. It is considered pertinent to emphasize here that this study is not intended to explore interaction in its broader context, but rather classroom participation will be investigated to explore what participation takes place in the class and how students and teachers perceive their roles in that social context.

The last part presents some background about the status of teaching English language in Oman, the role of EFL teacher, and the challenges that they face in order to strike a balance of incorporating multilingualism in the classroom. It also talks about the role of the learners, explaining their attitudes to English language learning and what motivates them to learn.

## **Part One: Overview of the Literature Background**

### **2.1.1 Classroom Context**

Understanding classroom context is quite challenging as the processes involved could be rather complex. Classroom context refers to the learning and teaching process in a specific and defined classroom setting. It refers to the interaction between the participants of the learning and teaching process, such as the teachers, learners, and classroom atmosphere. Walsh (2002) points out that any classroom lesson can be viewed as a dynamic and complex series of interrelated contexts, while interaction is the centre to teaching and learning. In the author's opinion, a classroom cannot be seen within a single context, but rather as a combination of multiple contexts. This is because it involves many interrelated, as well as implicit and explicit, factors that make up the social context and need to be explored in detail (Fassinger, 1995).

For developing a better understanding of the classroom context, one must argue that the multiple interrelated contexts need to be unfolded, analysed and explored individually (Kramsch, 1985; Conteh, 2000). In other words, the classroom interaction is made up of a range of interrelated factors which then shape up the CI and contribute to the way researchers and teachers perceive it. However, unfolding and understanding these contexts is another huge problem that researchers encounter. One of the challenges in this context is the researchers' own perceptions and expectations of CI. An argument can be highlighted here that teachers and researchers have their own identities that influence their perceptions and understandings of the CI. By saying so, I am not suggesting that understanding CI should be based on what is only available and observable to the researchers at the time of classroom study and inquiry. Instead, researchers need to recognize and be aware of their own social and professional identities within the

classroom context, and of the other implicit and explicit factors which should not be neglected when analysing CI (Breen, 1985; Conteh and Meier, 2014).

Context is important in understanding language learning because language is part of a bigger system and is one of the many ways of making sense of the world (Gee, 2008). Gee asserts that it is how we as individuals and different members of social and cultural groups, find our way through it. Several models of CI have been discussed in the literature and they all have a common stand point - that CI is not a single-led effect of one factor.

Bronfenbrenner (1993) developed such a model which he called 'The Ecology of Human Interaction'. In this interaction model, the learner is placed in the centre of many nested networks of interaction that create an individual's ecology (1993). Bronfenbrenner believes that any classroom based learning needs to be studied in relation to other frameworks (including organizational, social, and political) that surround the learner. All these factors influence, and are in turn influenced by, other factors.

Similarly, Breen's (2001) model of the four layers of interaction can also be studied along with Bronfenbrenner's ecology model. Breen (2001) has identified four layers, where the first layer refers to the learner qualities; and the second layer refers to the learners' engagement with the discourse practices, such as the activities and tasks performed in class. The third and the fourth layers refer to community and the wider community that surrounds the learner, respectively. Breen's model also refers to the socio-historical background to the learners' experience which has influenced the learners in layer one.

Along similar lines to Breen, Conteh (2000) in her thesis, proposed four layers of interrelated spheres of interaction. These four layers were child, teacher, school and community. She asserted that all these factors affected, and were affected by, other factors in the sphere. The model was also open and was not confined only to the four layers. All these layers operate and affect each other and influence the whole. Other rings in the sphere can also be added to include 'national and international' elements when considering issues related to politics and economics that influence the core of the sphere. Conteh emphasized that to understand "*how children succeed as learners, we need to unpeel the layers without destroying the core*" (2000:84).

From the discussion above, I tend to agree with other researchers that what occurs in class is quite complex, hence it is difficult to understand what causes classroom participation. Being in the centre of the learning process, the learner's behaviour is influenced by many factors which surround the whole classroom context as described by Breen and Bronfenbrenner's models, and also in Conteh's proposal. The learners within themselves are also influenced by their own culture and identity. This understanding of the complexity of classroom context is my starting

point for exploring classroom participation using the principles of ethnographical approach and grounded theory in collecting and analysing the data.

Below, I have provided a summary of different definitions of CI, followed by the definition of classroom participation in relation to the aim of the study.

### **2.1.2 Definition of CI**

Based on the diverse understanding of CI by many scholars, there have been many different approaches to define CI; but the central idea of CI remains the same. Classroom interaction has always been defined by the relationship between the parties involved in a specific context. Walsh (2000) define interaction as the process referring to face-to-face interaction. It can be either verbal, challenged through written or spoken words, or non-verbal, challenged through touch, proximity, eye-contact, facial expressions, and gesturing, etc. With the same notion of interaction, (Richard & Platt, 1992 as cited in Teshome, 2009), accord significance to the social relationships that occur in the classroom, and look at the patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication between teachers and students. CI is thus viewed as one of several procedures for measuring and describing the behaviour of students and teachers in a classroom.

Interaction involves not only the expression of one's own ideas but also a comprehension of those of others. As argued by Kumpulainen et al. (2009) the participants work out interaction, which is always understood in a context, such as physical or experimental with non-verbal cues adding aspects of meaning beyond the verbal communication. Classroom interaction therefore involves listening and responding with comprehension. Furthermore, (Brown, 1994) takes this perspective further by defining interaction as a collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effort upon each other. It also encourages them to make sense of using learning in social-like contexts, for example, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, or group discussion (O'Connor, 2013)

In line with the above, (Stevick, 1980 as cited in Allwright, 1981) argues "...we may expect learning to be more effective the more deeply it involves the learners". His view focuses on the idea of "bringing activities that get learners deeply involved in the activities" (1981:157). On a similar note, (Van Lier, 1984; Nunan, 1991; Brown, 2001, as cited in Kalantari, 2009) consider interaction as the heart of communicative competence. They consider communication in classroom as a sign and also a product of the student's interaction. Nunan (1991) states that language is acquired when learners are actively engaged and interact with each other to communicate in the target language.

Many recent studies have also looked at CI from a socio-cultural perspective of language and learning, for example (Conteh, 2000; Weaver and Qi, 2005). Based on this perspective, studies

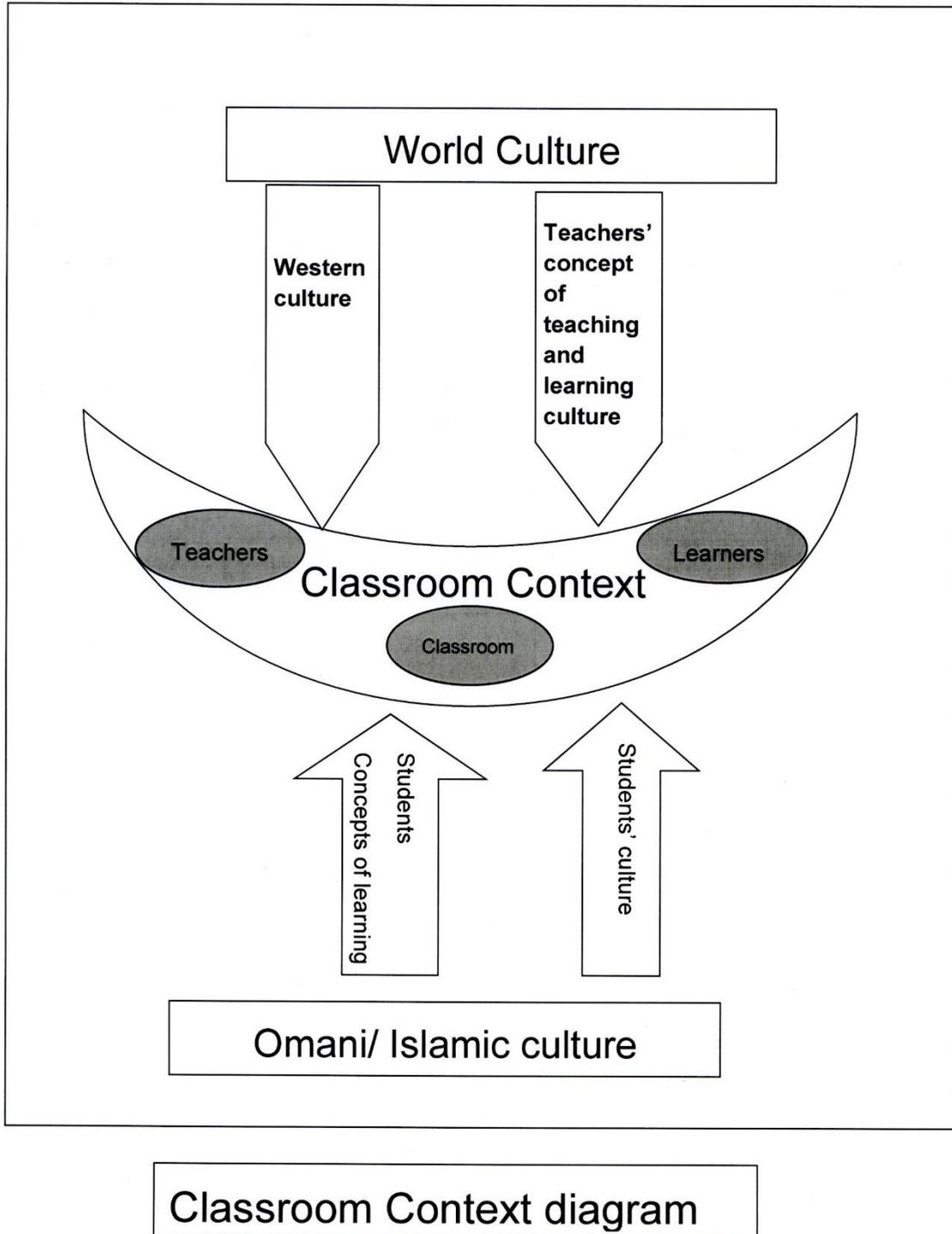
of CI tend to suggest that the classroom is a world of its own, with its own rules and conventions. Furthermore, the classroom cannot be isolated from the outside social world which is brought in by the teachers, students, materials, culture, and all other related factors that enhance and influence the learning and teaching process.

The above again, can be viewed in line with what Breen (2002) explained in his four layers of interaction. Bearing this in mind, Kumpulainen et al. (2009) argue that examining and understanding the diversity and the complexity of all these factors are difficult for the researchers. Kumpulainen et al. (2009) also argue that to understand CI, research should be based upon the logic and purpose of inquiry which produces different approaches, and analyses interpretations of social interactions and discourses in contemporary classroom settings.

The assumption behind what I have to say about the nature of CI stems from different learning theories and approaches to CI, definitions and analyses. The fact that CI is a social exchange in a specific context and that is part of the wider context (Walsh, 2002), underpins that many factors could be true contributors to this interaction, either implicitly and/or explicitly.

Based on the discussion above, I have proposed my own initiative and suggested a diagram by the help of which I will try to illustrate how I have conceptualized the classroom context in which classroom participation takes place; while showing how all of these different factors are interrelated and contribute to the nature of participation in the classroom.

I represent this complex interference and influences in the diagram below (***Diagram 2: Classroom Interaction Umbrella***). This diagram shows the micro and macro levels of influences as well as the inter- and intra-relationships of these factors at different levels of interaction.



**Diagram 2: Classroom Interaction Umbrella**

### 2.1.3 CI Umbrella Diagram

Through this diagram, I try to conceptualise teachers and learners in the Ibri College Classrooms (classroom context) as at 'the interface' between one culture (western culture) reflecting the English curriculum and 'western' teacher concepts of teaching and learning and the role of

different types of 'participation' within it and another culture reflecting Omani/Islamic equivalent.

The diagram shows how different factors are related to the classroom context, as located in the middle of the diagram. In the centre of the diagram, there is the classroom context which is made of many integrated factors where each has their own distinctive features and influences. These factors (teachers, learners and classroom), as I called in this study are components of the classroom are located in the middle of the diagram. The diagram shows that what happens in the classroom is only a product of many processes created by those components. The diagram, as shown above has three circles: classroom context, western culture and Islamic/social culture. Firstly, the bottom circle represents the Islamic and social culture. This circle represents the culture of the students and their social tradition. It represents their values and beliefs in life including their understanding of learning and teaching. It, to a great extent, shapes their identities and influences their behaviour in their daily lives including their behaviour and actions in the classroom. In other words, the arrows direction pointing up under the crescent are the implicit forcing powers or factors that influence CI and participation, either negatively or positively. At the same time, students' perceptions and attitudes to learning and classroom interaction are also determined by these factors, in addition to their own learning abilities and potentials as suggested by the socio-cultural theories of learning.

Secondly, the upper circle in the diagram shows the outside world of the classroom context. I refer to it as macro-level factors (big culture) that represent the western culture which includes the culture of the teachers and English curriculum. It means that the above arrows pointing down to the classroom context are the driving forces (the wider world, the culture of the teachers and their concepts of learning and teaching and the English curriculum. However, within each factor there are many other embedded and implicit factors which cannot be ignored. These factors include community, educational policies, organizations, and expectations. Each of those factors has a direct or indirect impact on the learners' CI.

Talking about the wider culture in the upper circle, it is difficult to talk about the impact of each factor as they are enormous and implicit. What we conceptualize or observe are the clear top of the "iceberg" of some factors. For simplicity, I used two terms: The English curriculum and the culture of the teachers related to teaching and learning. First, the English curriculum in this study refers to the general goals of the foundation year program which also includes the textbook and the educational regulations that determine the structure of classroom seating and other decisions. Moreover, the English curriculum is also informed by the general policy determined by the higher organization such as the policy of the ministry of higher education which follows the general educational plan prepared by the government. As we can see there are different factors

and layers of authorities included in setting up the goals of the curriculum. However, these factors could have different impacts on the classroom context and sometimes this difference can cause disagreement in society, especially if the educational policies and community have different interests and expectations. For example, the educational policies (such as policies devised by the Ministry of Education, or the educational body in charge of writing the educational objectives and curriculum) may think that English should be taught right from Grade One at primary school. Some people from the community, however, may consider that this policy as a threat to the learning of the mother-tongue (see 3.1). This conflict may affect the way the community perceives the teaching of English in primary schools. The consequence of this may affect the children of those parents who disagree with the policy. Therefore, children, influenced by their parents' view may not show any interest in learning English, which ultimately influences the way they interact in the classroom. Similarly, this might also influence the way that teachers teach English in the school, especially if the teachers are amongst those who think that this policy is not right. Therefore, they may not exert an effort to make this policy successful. Similarly, different organizations have different expectations of the learning and teaching processes. As for the positive side, learning and teaching could be supported by all factors related to curriculum design, policy making, teaching, and assessment when they all work in cooperation and are directed towards one educational goal.

Second, the upper circle also includes the culture of the teachers and their concepts of teaching and learning. Foreign teachers come with their own culture, identities, and concepts of teaching, teaching experiences and so on. In other words, they go to class with their bag of experience which they try to use appropriately. However, although their experiences are useful, they need to adapt themselves to the new culture of the new classroom as well as the culture in general. This needs learning about the culture from their daily life interaction with the community they live with including students and local colleagues. Besides, in the case of the Ibri College, new foreign teachers are given a booklet which gives some instructions and advice about living in Ibri and teaching in the college. It also tells them about the educational system and some regulation about teaching and learning in general. Many teachers find this booklet useful. I still argue here that foreign teachers have a lot to learn from the students and the behaviours that happen in the course of the classroom. As mentioned earlier that many interrelated factors contribute to what happens in the classroom context and sometimes it can be unexpected as I showed the example of the female student in (chapter 4 incident 1). As an observer and part of the culture of the students, I did not expect a female student to go out to the whiteboard and not be careful to cover her arm when the sleeves of her "abiya" went down, (see section 4.1.4.1)

This above examples and other issues related to the Islamic culture and challenges that teachers and students may face in understanding the context of the classroom and manipulating what happens in the class are discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

The above discussion talks about the local factors which contribute to the goal of the English curriculum used in teaching. However, English curriculum is not only confined to the local needs of any society especially when the language to be taught is not the mother tongue of the students. In other words, English curriculum is also concerned about teaching a foreign language (English). Therefore, the English curriculum also represents some aspects of the culture of the English language where it is used. The textbook used are designed to have general knowledge about the western culture. It includes topics related to every day communication that shows what language and how it is used.

Finally, I argue here that these classifications and the many other types of diagrams that show the relationship between the factors influencing interaction in the class are still not clear-cut and there are other intra factors within each category as mentioned by Conteh (2000).

In the section above, I discussed classroom context in general in order to show the complexity of understanding what takes place in the process of activities or events that occur in the classroom. Below, I move on to place student participation within the complexity frame of interaction as one of many forms of classroom interaction. As mentioned earlier, the core of the study explores the factors that influence students' participation and to observe what types of participation take place in the English classroom. The following section defines classroom participation and how classroom participation is perceived in this study.

#### **2.1.4 Definition of Classroom Participation**

Many teachers associate classroom participation with students' involvement in the classroom, and mainly limit it to oral participation in the class. They think that this is a sign of the students' understanding and responding to their questions, and their teaching in general. Oral participation is a good assessment of achievement for both teachers and students. Some students feel happy when they speak in class and show their understanding as they develop their learning (Ellis, 2004).

However, participation is not all about speaking in class and it is difficult to measure what participation in the class amounts to (Peterson, 2001). As explained earlier, participation is a part of the interaction, that can be both verbal and non-verbal, and therefore students can be involved in the class without actively speaking. As a teacher, my previous experience tends to support this, although I was not aware of the fact that students can be involved without the teachers being cognisant of it.

*When I was teaching English in secondary school, I had a boy in Grade 11 who was always quiet in the class and rarely raised his hand to answer. He did not respond to the questions or read aloud in the class. One day, I was handing in the exam papers and calling the names of the students. I was surprised to see that he got the highest mark (s) in the class and he continued to be amongst those who scored high marks in the English exams (from my teaching experience 1997).*

Classroom participation, therefore, can be looked at from different angles depending upon the focus of the study. It can be defined as an oral interaction between the teacher and the students if the researcher aims at analysing students' and teachers' conversations or verbal interactions.

Teachers and learners also determine the form of participation. Teachers play an important role in defining classroom participation through what they accept as participation, and how they want students to react to their teaching. This is because normally classrooms are dominated and structurally controlled by the teachers. Therefore, they decide on the manner in which they run their class. Teachers often adopt certain interaction patterns. Sinclair & Coulhard (1975) conducted some research on classrooms in the UK and found that most classroom practices follow three steps of interaction, these being initiation, response, and feedback/evaluation (IRF/E). Also, Flander (1974) conducted some research on CI and was able to develop a system for analysing teacher-student verbal interactions. He emphasized the role of teachers' direct or indirect talk in the classroom. Thus, the role of the teacher is crucial to the mechanism of CI, and consequently guides student participation.

Furthermore, understanding the context of the classroom is helpful for the teachers to manage their class and adapt appropriate teaching methodology. Borg (2003), in his definition of teachers' cognition in language teaching, talked about four components that create teacher cognition: schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors, and classroom practice including teaching practice (Borg 1997, cited in Borg, 2003:82). Borg argues that teachers use their teaching knowledge based on their cognition in the classroom, and when they work in new contexts they develop new experiences to cope with the new context. This again contributes in shaping their new understanding or beliefs about new contexts. Thus, teachers, based on this new understanding create a better learning environment.

To some extent, learners also define their roles according to the classroom context and the way they represent their identities in the classroom. Lave & Wenger (1991) argue that:

*We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. To the extent that we can come in contact with other ways of being, what we are not can even become a large part of how we define ourselves. (1991: 164)*

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learners contribute in shaping the context of classroom and how they represent themselves by their identities. In other words, and in reflection to the culture of the context of the study, learners may not accept certain behaviours in the classroom, and this rejection also presents what they are and how they interact in the classroom accordingly. This notion of learners' identity is discussed further in this chapter.

Moreover, learners also choose whether or not to participate in the classroom. Some learners voluntarily participate by responding verbally in the class; they might raise their hands to answer. Others might be participating without being involved in oral production; they prefer to be silent.

Kumpulainen et al., (2009) argue that culture and the education system of context or country influence how students show their participation. He stated that,

*Classroom participation is formatted by the culture of the classroom and their family education Kumpulainen et al., (2009:7)*

Monteil (1990) argues that learners differ in how they show their participation, depending on their performance and their self-image in the classroom. He discovered that high achievers normally like to display their good performance which encourages them and also reflects their good image among their teachers and classmates. On the contrary, low achievers or poor learners tend to be passive and have a fear of displaying their performance in public which holds back their progress in the classroom (Monteil, 1990 cited in Kumpulainen et al., 2009).

As researchers or teachers, this kind of participation is not apparent to the observer. There is much to learn about different forms of participation and what influences it. My study is not only directed at the exploration of the verbal participation of learners, but is also aimed at understanding the micro-interactional processes that drive students' participation, and examine the factors that might emerge from the data as possible contributions to student participation.

### **2.1.5 The Concept of Participation in the Study**

As noted earlier, participation is managed by teachers and learners in a specific classroom context as supported by previous studies (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Weaver and Qi, 2005). Oral or verbal participation was the most significant indicator of student involvement in class. From my experience as a teacher, both in college and high school, I saw students participate verbally in class, and also use many other non-verbal signals such as body language. I noticed that students normally responded as a group when giving answers, or sometimes nodded their heads and whispered to their classmate. All of these are non-verbal components of communication and participation in the classroom. Some students also remained silent, especially in college where they were in a mixed-gender atmosphere, and again we cannot say that they were not

participating in the class. Non-verbal communication and the use of embedded language conveys meaning as much as verbal communication does (Warayet, 2011)

As mentioned earlier, this study attempts to go beyond analysing verbal participation because CI or participation is culturally and socially constructed in the classroom. The study also aims to explore the unseen motives of participation, from the view of the participants through interviews and learners' journal or diaries, as well as classroom observation. I argue that what happens in the class is a result of many implicit and explicit factors that make up or determine student participation in class. It is immature to predict the causes at this stage but considering the components of classroom context, I can say that the study emphasizes on exploring the role of teachers, students and the classroom culture, and how these factors are presented in relation to student participation. The analysis of the data is expected to add some contribution to the existing body of research on the effect of culture and society on classroom participation in a similar classroom context.

Part two reviews the literature where I discuss socio-cultural influences and relations to classroom participation and classroom culture. I also talk about the language learning theories as well as the rationale underpinning those theories, while making special reference to theories of socio-culture.

## **Part Two: learning theories, culture and language**

### **2.2.1 Culture and Language:**

Language and culture are very much related in a sense that language cannot be used in isolation from the culture that it belongs to. The relationship between culture and language is very crucial to the process of learning the language, and can be interpreted through Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of language games, according to which: "language games are established, conventionalised patterns of communicative action. These patterns, which are agreed upon and shared by members of a culture group, embody particular definitions of the situation and meanings of possible actions and, more generally, particular ways of knowing, valuing and experiencing the world." (Knapp et al., 2013:8)

Meaning is not only conveyed through the form of the language but is rather the cultural context that creates the meaning of the linguistic utterances of the language. In this context, it would be pertinent to quote Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of dialogue and trans-linguistics, according to which:

Meaning is located neither solely in our linguistic resources nor in each individual's mind. Rather, it resides in between these two interdependent spheres, in the interaction, the dialogue, that is realised in our lived moments of social action. (Hall, 2013:10)

Learning a language thus means learning about the function and context of the culture where that language is used for communication, and learners' need to understand the context of the culture within which certain language can be used. Both the learners' culture and the culture of the target language influence the way that the learners communicate.

The situation becomes even more dramatic where there is a cultural gap between the two cultures. For example, when an English speaker says: "Would you like to close the door, please?", an Arabic speaker, failing to understand that the speaker is not asking a question but is politely requesting the listener to close the door, may infer this request as a direct question to which he could give a simple answer in terms of a yes or no. Therefore, learners need to develop an awareness of the culture and also realize the differences between the two cultures. This also brings forth the argument that teaching a foreign language should not simply rely upon teaching the form of the language, but rather the content as well as cultural context or contexts. There has been an argument on how to incorporate culture into foreign language teaching in classrooms. The culture can be understood as a body of knowledge or different knowledge(s) that people develop about a particular society (Ganga and Scott, 2006). In this respect, it involves learning about places, events, ways of living, cultural heritage and customs, etc., that have to be taught to learners. In this study, I refer to culture as a framework according to which people live their lives and communicate with each other based on shared values and beliefs. Herby, I refer to the Islamic culture as a way of life that governs people's lives in society. Culture, in its specific meaning intended, is defined in the coming section.

In this context (Kramsch, 1995) asserts that language is learnt as a social practice in which learners need to be engaged in more social contexts. However, the author also argues that language is still taught according to fixed formal structures, while culture is only referred to in order to reinforce certain aspects of language. Language, however, should be taught as a culture that features all social and cultural practices. It is through this approach that learners can develop some kind of awareness of the cultural context within the confines of which a language can be used appropriately in both a social and cultural sense. However, this section does not directly address the issue of how to teach culture in language teaching. Furthermore, I argue here that how the culture of the foreign language can be represented and taught where there is very limited exposure to its usage in the target native environment, for example, teaching English in an Arabic environment. The following section defines culture in relation to the context of the study.

### **2.2.2 Definition of Culture:**

Culture is not a clear-cut term or a word that can be easily defined. In order to understand culture, I have read some Arabic books on the subject and have also looked up the word 'culture'

in some Arabic to English dictionaries, such as (Al-Mojam Al-Waseet, Qamoos Al-Maani). المعجم الوسيط وقاموس المعاني. The most common definitions of culture as identified from these sources follow below:

- Knowledge, science and arts that require people to be able to be good at.
- A group of common values that are shared among people which include expected and accepted behaviours from people, beliefs, thoughts and practices. Culture is associated with the religion, Islam.
- Culture is a way of life in general. It is the social system, its values and norms which are fluid and changing and govern the conduct of people (Aqeel Aydan).

The above definitions are of my own interpretation/translation and understanding of the word 'culture' from my own reading as well as discussions with friends.

It is interesting to note that culture, in English, has almost similar notions shared by many researchers. For example, (William, 1976 cited in Conteh, 2000) suggests that the word 'culture' is very complicated to define in the English language. He explains it as a "collective subjectivity and as a way of life or outlook adopted by a community or a social class". Culture has also been linked to political and social factors, as for instance by (Seelye, 1984). A similar definition to the Arabic definition of culture was mentioned by Richard Brislin as quoted by Kramersch. Richard Brislin (1990) in his book "Applied Cross-Cultural Psychology" cited in Kramersch (1995:84) defines culture:

*Culture', he writes, 'refers to widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or subconsciously accepted as "right" and "correct" by people who identify themselves as members of a society. (Brislin, 1990:11)*

Furthermore, according to (Nieto, 1999 as cited in Conteh, (2000), there are about seven attributes of culture, that are "dynamic; multifaceted; embedded in context; influenced by social, economic and political factors; created and socially constructed; learned; and dialectical" (Conteh 2000:85). To the above attributes, I would like to add an additional attribute which I think contributes towards shaping the culture in Oman the most, that being religion, which has greatly influenced the formation of culture in Oman and probably in many other Muslim countries. From the very early stage of children's lives, they are taught the Islamic principles in life, including how they have to behave in certain situations and so on. Besides, children also copy many behaviours and ideologies they observe on a daily basis in their routine lives either at home or in their other surroundings. All of these factors shape the learners' identities in

accordance with their Islamic heritage. The influence of this attribute will be discussed thoroughly in the discussion chapter, but it is pertinent to mention at this point that during the course of this study, I have attempted to build a holistic image of culture which is both dialectical and spherical. The holistic image includes some factors that attribute towards the classroom context which was discussed earlier in this chapter (see 2.1.1). These factors have been found both closely linked and also mutually influencing (see 3.2 and 3.4).

In a nutshell, from the view of culture as explained above, the culture of the context generally plays an important role in shaping most of the learners' identities, and thus could contribute to how they behave and perceive occurrences in the class. However, it is worth mentioning that in expressing my personal view here, I am not suggesting that all learners are always influenced by the culture as pointed out earlier, that classroom context is very complex to pinpoint one cause or another for what takes place in class.

In the succeeding paragraphs, the study will present a review of some of the learning theories that could be conducive towards understanding classroom participation in foreign language classrooms. The following section on the discussion of learning and language theories will act as a platform from where the study develops a perspective on learning theories and interaction, and will thereafter move on gradually to the subjects of classroom context and classroom participation.

### **2.2.3 Review of Learning Theories**

#### **2.2.3.1 Rational for Learning Theories**

Understanding the relationship between language and culture affects what happens in the classroom. It affects the roles of the teacher, the learners, and also the teaching approaches and methodologies. If the teachers are more concerned about teaching the form and the code of the language, the learners then need to learn how to replace those codes and forms by simply converting the words from the first language into the second language (Lightbown et al., 2006). However, when the focus of learning is to go beyond just literal translation or word replacement, then different theories of learning have to be considered for the sake of comprehension. This includes theories of learning that are based more upon intellectual thinking, meaning interpretation and communication.

Before moving onto to discuss learning theories, it is pertinent to highlight that learning is an ongoing process that requires continuous updates of the learning theories and teaching strategies. Also, the surrounding environment of the learners as well as some aspects of the culture may change due to what happens around them. This change also affects the learners and they try to

cope with these changes. For example, it can be argued that the modern and fast development of technology has necessitated updates on the teaching and learning processes, learning environment, learners' learning styles and thinking.

The mention of technology makes it relevant to indicate that students today are born in a new technological era, the demands of which have to be accommodated in the teaching and learning process and environment, as well as the learning theories. However, older learning theories are also equally important as they have been developed over the years and been used successfully by many teachers and educators. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of contemporary learning theories so that they can benefit from the new learning theories and teaching approaches that could facilitate their teaching.

### **2.2.3.2 Learning Theories**

Many different learning theories have been developed since the 1940s. It is difficult to keep account of all such learning theories in this research but I have attempted to highlight those most related to the purpose of the study, while focusing more upon the socio-cultural theory.

Under the auspices of the Behaviourism theories introduced initially in the period 1940-1950 , learning was based upon the stimulus-response association (Mitchell et al., 2013). Thus, the concept of learning was dependent upon observable behaviour and association rather than thinking, while it was thought to occur step by step, in a hierarchically sequence. This meant that learners could not move to the next stage without mastering the first stage. Learning was also understood as taking place only within the immediate context that students could manage in the classrooms, thereby making it a combination of task and context related activities.

The cognitive theories challenged the behaviourism theories by focusing more upon the thinking mind (Kraiger et al., 1993). Learning according to these theories, involves construction of new information and relating it to an existing framework of previous knowledge, meaning thereby that the learners try to make sense of the new information and map it onto their existing tacit knowledge and understanding. Therefore, according to the cognitive theories, the process of learning involves making meaningful connections of the new experiences and relating it to what learners already know, making new patterns and meanings that are expressed through language. This type of learning is therefore characterized by the strong connection of language, meaning and thinking. In this context, it can also be said that learning occurs in the mind of the individual who manipulates their own learning.

The third move in learning theories established the importance of the society and culture towards learning. The socio-cultural learning theories emphasize the role of society and culture, and highlight that learning and development are culturally embedded and socially supported (Brown

and Duguid, 2001). Learning, from the perspective of socio-cultural theories, is developed through social interaction between learners and other people in society. Learners develop frameworks for making sense of and developing an understanding of the outside world where they are located. The learners' ability to socialize and communicate culturally and appropriately with others is also considered important towards developing their own social membership and identity that is congruent with the cultural system in which they live.

Overall, the socio-cultural theories emphasize the following points:

- That language is a means of social interaction as learners share meanings with themselves and also with others, and negotiate social roles with different people in society. It is through language (verbal and non-verbal communication) that people interact and make sense of the world around them. Therefore, language can be seen as a central means for sharing experiences and social exchange and make learning possible and socially meaningful (Kumpulainen et al., 2009).
- Socio-cultural theories have also been found to be concerned with the development of the individual over time, as learners develop socially through interaction and exposure to the world around them.
- Learning is seen as dynamic and developmental as seen by Vygotsky (1978). It is the learners' potential and ability that depends on mediation which make the learners develop concepts of the social world and culture. Mediation means that learning is provided with requisite support and scaffolding so that learners are able to move forward and acquire new knowledge and meanings.

The implication of learning theories towards understanding interaction in class involves recognizing learners' needs and abilities so that they can be made to progress in their learning. It is also important to note that culture brought in by the students must also be valued towards developing an understanding of the students' behaviours in the classroom.

As mentioned earlier, during the course of this research I have focused more upon the socio-cultural theories in understanding the process of CI, thus, the discussion about different learning theories will lead to an exploration of some of the social cultural issues related to the subject of classroom participation.

### **2.2.3.3 The Socio-Cultural Consideration toward Students' Participation**

The term 'culture' is quite broad and general and includes many different aspects. For the purpose of this study, I would strive to look at culture, bearing in mind both the students' and teachers' understanding of each other's culture as well as their expectations in the classroom.

Furthermore, it is considered pertinent to clarify that culture goes beyond the classroom context and is also brought to the classroom by both the learners and the teachers. In other words, learners' expectations and beliefs were born outside the classroom and only become present and visible in their behaviours and interaction within the classroom. Therefore, what we observe or interpret from learners' behaviours are just raw signs that require deeper thinking and exploration. By raw signs I mean that the causes of the observed behaviour can stem from the invisible culture of learners and teachers, and therefore can influence their behaviours in one way or another as mentioned earlier in part one of this chapter.

As a starting point, it is considered relevant to mention Stebbins (1995) who supports the view that students from diverse backgrounds join the class with different expectations about the classroom culture and assert, for instance, "the alien atmosphere and unexpected teaching approaches hinder learning" (1995:109). Similarly, it can be seen that the foreign teachers teaching English in TESOL and EFL institutions, where English is not the mother tongue of the learners, have their own diverse cultures. Therefore, one might argue that a classroom might have a cacophony of so many different cultures that are not comprehensively shared between the teachers and learners. This entails different expectations and some behavioural differences that have to be understood among the classroom participants. This notion of different cultures present in the Foreign Language (FL, henceforth) classroom entails that both teachers and learners mediate the context and develop a mutual readiness to appreciate each other's culture, (Conteh and Meier, 2014). See Chapter Six for more elaboration on bilingualism and multilingualism in the (FL) classroom.

There is a tendency or assumption that all students coming from one culture may share the same culture and therefore have similar expectations, challenges, and also the desires to adapt to the classroom. I argue here that this assumption is questionable as there are certain variations within the individuals of the same culture. As a researcher in this study where I am part of the classroom culture, I need to recognize my own judgment and interpretation of what I see and question. However, it is important that I let the data speak for itself rather than relying upon my own knowledge about the culture, but at the same time make use of the knowledge for a deeper analysis of the data, as I explained the notion of my role in Chapter Three, Section (3.3.4.3)

This augments a question about the degree to "which individuals are represented in the identities marked out for them by the dominant culture" (Maher & Tetreault, 1994:43 cited in Shaw, 2000). This variation could be seen as more specific to each learner's close environment such as his or her family and society. Society and parents, for example, play important roles in shaping a learner's identity and beliefs (Breen, 1985; Conteh, 2003; Allwright, 1984). A society has its own prescribed conventions, norms, and expectations of what is expected from individuals in

terms of behaviours and way of life, regardless of where those individuals are located. Learners are not an exception. The way learners behave in class is somehow influenced and pre-determined by society to some extent. It is part of their social roles, religion and individual's beliefs and position in the society. In short, culture and society are important factors to be considered in the small classroom context (Allwright, 1984; Ellis, 2004).

#### **2.2.3.4 Culture and Students' English Language Learning:**

##### **2.2.3.4.1 Educational background**

It is vital to refer to educational history and in particular to the teaching of English as a foreign language in Oman. This brief introduction about the teaching of English shows the status of English in Oman, and also shows some background of the English learning experiences of the participants, meaning it shows briefly what leaning knowledge and attitudes were brought about by the participants of the study in the classroom.

As mentioned previously in Chapter One, 45 years ago formal education was very limited in Oman, with only a few traditional schools in some areas of the country. There were no school buildings, and only limited teaching of the Quran and Arabic in some masjids (mosques) see section 1.1. However, the introduction of formal education began with the government of Sultan Qaboos in 1970 (Al-Hammami, 1999, Al-Issa, 2006). There were only three schools in the whole Sultanate, (Al-Lamki, 2009). Providing education to all was prioritised by his Majesty Sultan Qaboos as he asserted in his early speech to the people:

*“We will teach our children even under the shade of a tree”* His Majesty Sultan Qaboos words in his first speech to the people of Oman (MOE, 2001)

Since 1970, Oman has countersigned rapid development in all sectors of life, emphasising the role of the Omani cadre especially qualifying Omani teachers and educators to take the lead for the change and development of the country. There were no qualified Omani cadre to run the country or to teach in the schools; the government recruited expatriate teachers and administrators from South Asia and North Africa (Atkins and Griffiths, 2009, Wyatt, 2013). Hence, teaching and learning became a very vibrant motivation and need among the citizens of Oman, and education began spreading gradually all over the country according to the policy of the government (Al-Issa, 2006).

The teaching of the English language has gone through many different developmental stages since 1970. The government realised the importance of English as a foreign language for economic and political reasons. Therefore and in response to this demand, teaching in Oman was given more emphasis in the second phase of the education system, which began with the

introduction of the BE system in the mid-1990s (Al-Lamki, 2009), see 1.1.2 for definition and goals of the BE system.

English was taught from Grade 1, unlike the previous GE where it was taught in Grade 4. As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, the implementation of the BE system in Oman did not only initiate the early teaching of English, but also brought about many improvements and changes to the structure and delivery of education, structures of school building, curriculum, methods of teaching, and learning resources (MOE, 2001; Alkaaf et al., 2011). In this section, this study does not intend to give account of the benefits of BE system in Oman, but rather tries to show the context of teaching English in schools and how such methodology of teaching used might contribute to the experience of learning English to the learners of the study. The researcher believes that all participants of the study were the product of the BE system, see Chapter One, Sections 1.2.

#### **2.2.3.4.2 Arab and English Culture and the Teaching of the English Language**

Due to the advancement in information technology and globalization, the English language has spread dramatically to all parts of the world, as noted earlier above. Nunan (2003:591) mentions that English has become a global language due to political, economic, and business needs. He argues that many educational policies and the government began introducing English in the early stages of their curriculum. Oman is not different in this regard as English has become a compulsory subject to be taught right from Grade One as mentioned previously in this section. The Ministry of Education in Oman has spent time and money making this educational shift a success through improving classrooms, teaching materials, teacher training, and teaching methods that view the learners as the centre of the teaching and learning process (MOE, 2001; Wyatt, 2013; Al-Jardani, 2012).

Having said that, English was introduced early in Oman, and this has facilitated the learning of English and also signalled the importance of English as a foreign language in Oman. Furthermore, English has also become the primary language of international business enterprises and technology worldwide. One can also confidently claim that English can be heard almost every day via different means of telecommunication and media sources. For this reason and many others, learners of English can benefit from this vast exposure to learn about the English language as well as the culture of the West. This, in turn, influences the learning of English in Oman and also encourages learners to learn as they can see the importance of English in their daily life.

This study does not intend to talk about the policy of teaching English and its importance in Oman, but it is important to indicate the link between teaching English in schools and in CAS classrooms.

In the above discussion I mention the need for the teaching of English in Oman and probably in many other developing countries for many different political and economic reasons. In the proceeding section, I argue that there might be some tension between the Arabic and English cultures, and how it has been understood by different participants in ELT in Oman. I also included some findings from different studies conducted in some Gulf countries in which they have some similar characteristics of the Omani culture of the study.

Students' attitudes of learning English are consistent with students' needs to learning English and the overall outcomes of acquiring English as a foreign language. Moreover, it depends more upon the students' perceptions of the importance of English to their personal benefits and future or in other words, the motivation to learn a foreign language determines the level of learners' positive, active and personal engagement in the process of target language (Javid et al., 2012). Many researchers, such as (Jang, 2008; Oxford, 1997; Williams, 1994; Lamb, 2012) have stressed upon the importance of initiated self-motivation and positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Lamb (2012) found that learners with a positive view of learning English have motivated learning behaviour and FL proficiency.

However, (Williams, 1994) tackles a deeper dimension by looking at the broader concept of learning and acquiring a foreign language by incorporating the social effect on the learner brought about by the foreign language. Williams (1994) as cited in Javid, 2012) postulated that "...the learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being" (Javid 2012:77). Learning a foreign language also gives the learner a new image and a social identity (Kramsch, 1985, Ashforth and Mael, 1989) which could be seen not only by the learners themselves, but also by the community in the host country and also the outside world.

The argument raised above indicates the relationship of language and culture in which it could inform us that the learners of a foreign language learn about the culture of that language. Although this sounds beneficial for understanding some socio-cultural elements of the culture of FL, it could also change some of the learners' identities. However, below I looked at some studies that explored learners' attitudes about learning English and what impact this learning might have on the culture of the learners.

Various studies have also been carried out in the Middle East, (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) on Saudi Arabia; (Malallah, 2000) on Kuwait; (Randall, 2006, Quashoa, 2006) on the United Arab Emirates; and on Oman (R. et al., Fahmy and Bilton, 1992), investigating the importance of the English language which I think are relevant to report here. Shaaban & Ghaith (2000) assessed the attitudes of students, parents and teachers towards learning English as a foreign language. The author discovered that most teachers, parents and students have positive attitudes towards English language learning as they considered English very important for their higher education, business and communication. Furthermore, they did not see learning English as a threat to their Islamic culture or mother tongue.

Similarly, (Malallah, 2000) investigated Kuwaiti university students' motivation and attitudes towards studying English, the results of which showed that the majority enjoyed learning English as it helped them “to be educated and to get a higher degree” (2000:12).

In another study, (Quashoa, 2006) investigated the secondary students' attitudes towards learning English in the United Arab Emirates. The author provided a questionnaire to 357 secondary school students as part of an elaborate survey. 75 per cent of the students considered learning English as very important, and liked it because it helped them in their postgraduate studies. They also viewed English as a high-status language and were happy to learn a foreign culture.

In Oman, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (1990) conducted a study on the teaching of EFL in the country. The study stressed upon the importance of the English language for the Omani students who intended to enter the business market after graduation. The study concluded that students needed English as a language when they wanted to secure a job in both the government and private sectors (Fahmy and Bilton, 1992).

As a teacher myself, I asked some of my graduate students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences (Oman) about their views of learning English, (undocumented). Their responses seemed to correspond with other students' views expressed in the studies mentioned above. Some students saw the need to learn English for two main reasons. Firstly and most importantly, they had to learn English to pass the English Foundation Year Program. This is one of the requirements of the Ministry so that students can pursue their degree program at college (MOHE, 2011) (see Chapter One, Section 1.3). Secondly, English is the primary language of instruction in the degree program. Therefore, students need to learn English so that they can continue their studies. The question, however, is “*do students enjoy learning English? Or are they forced to study English regardless of their wish?*”

The answers to such questions are crucial towards understanding the way learners interact and participate in class. It has been argued by many researchers, for instance (Dörnyei, 1998;

Randall, 2006; Lamb, 2004) that student motivation and positive attitude towards learning a foreign language increases their level of participation and classroom interaction and in turn, their FL proficiency.

It is also pertinent to mention that some of my students from the Ibri College of Applied Sciences expressed different views as they did not see the learning of English as useful because they did not need it when they graduated and got a job. They added that, “English is used in many companies and places in Oman but still a quite large number of jobs do not require the English language at all”. However, these views need to be examined statistically as I am expressing some of the students’ views which I do not personally agree with, as I witnessed that many companies consider English as one of their requirements to secure a good job.

In the discussion above, I have mentioned motivation as a factor for promoting learning but I do not intend to postulate an intention of focusing on motivation, or initially consider it as a factor, to be discussed unless it emerges as one of the principle factors in the study.

The studies which were carried out in the Gulf States mentioned above, agreed upon the importance of English for learners, as learning English gives students a high status and also enables them to secure potential careers where they could make use of their English language skills. However, some of the above studies also lead us to the issue of the relationship between language and culture. For example, the following questions cited in (Malallah, 2000), raise some concerns about the relationship between language and culture:

*“Does learning a foreign language cause culture change?”*

*“Will English be a threat to one's identity and culture?”*

(Brown et al., 1989) point out that language and culture cannot be separated as they are both part of the language learning process, that is, learning a language means learning something about the culture of that language, too. This brings forth the argument that language is one of the many representations of culture. In this respect, Lafayette (1988) believes that language is the first and most important representation of culture. (David Corson (1989) cited in Malallah, 2000) states that ‘all language learning has much in common to the extent that it provides and requires a window on some other culture’ (1989: 323). Many other researchers also support this point, for instance (Kramsch, 1985; Hall and Walsh, 2002b; Ellis et al., 1994).

This intimate relationship between language and culture raises a question as to how society and community members view learning English and its’ associated Western culture. As mentioned earlier, learning English and the exposure to a foreign culture were not a major concern to most Arab parents as this learning was not viewed as a threat to the Arabic language or Arab cultural

values, as argued by (Malallah, 2000). In her study, she shows that Kuwaiti learners have a positive attitude to learning English, concluding that learning English does not have a negative impact or is harmful on the Islamic religion or the Arabic language. Her research also points out that learning English does not mean gaining Western habits that are not required by Arabs. (Malallah 2002:39)

Still, this view sheds light only on the attitudes of people who are open to other cultures and like to learn other languages. I would thus argue that some other people might have different views and think that English is given more emphasis than Arabic, especially in the higher educational institutions of Arab countries.

However, as argued earlier, one cannot be so certain that all learners and parents will have this positive attitude and will be motivated to learn English for the reasons discussed above. Some parents and students may regard this as an extreme exposure that could influence their life and threaten the Arabic culture. This, in turn, may influence the way students view learning. In the same study, Malallah (2002) points out that learners who majored in "Sharyia" (or Islamic Studies) expressed a negative attitude to learning English, and also thought that:

Learning English leads to Westernization, and they did not like English speakers for some of their Western habits that Islam forbids, such as drinking alcohol (Malallah 2002:36).

In light of the discussion above, and on the assumptions or beliefs that foreign language and culture are inseparable (Brown, 2006), an urgent question led itself in the inquiry, regarding the different attitudes that can be held by Arab learners of the English language and thus its culture. The study does not attempt to discuss this issue thoroughly but urges a concern about the implication of how EFL teachers can take this into consideration when teaching Arab learners. Teachers need to understand the challenges that can be caused by some of the socio-cultural underpinning beliefs that learners bring to the class. This is elaborated further in Chapters Five and Six where I discuss issues related to bilingualism and multilingualism in EFL classrooms.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have talked about some of the social-cultural aspects that could relate to the learning of English and culture. Part Three follows, which talks about the role of the teachers and learners on the belief that their interrelated role is part of the whole socio-cultural context.

### **Part Three: teachers, learners and classroom**

In this section, my aim of describing the roles of teachers and learners stems from the conclusions of many researches, that classroom context is best created by teachers and learners (Ellis, 2004; Frisby and Martin, 2010; Kramsch, 1995). As argued in Parts One and Two earlier,

the classroom is a unique social context where the interpersonal relationships of teachers and students, and many other interrelated factors, contribute to the construction of student participation and interaction, or a social community in the classroom (Mitchell et al., 2013; Conteh and Meier, 2014).

### **2.3.1 The Role of Teachers in the Classroom**

Teachers are an important key factor for creating opportunities that facilitate students' learning in many areas of instruction. They provide learners with good teaching and learning processes. Teachers also influence student participation in different ways: they can enable students to enjoy their teaching, and like the subject or otherwise, can hinder students from enjoying the class.

In the literature, some factors related to the teachers which can contribute to creating rooms for student participation have been identified as teacher's traits and personality, including teachers' behaviour, teachers' education, interpersonal relationships (Frisby and Martin, 2010), leadership, helping or supportive attitude, authority, use of reinforcement and motivation (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009), and also teachers' awareness of students' culture and social background (Kumpulainen et al., 2009).

Teachers need to understand the philosophy of the curriculum and the intended outcomes which are set by the initiations or the educational policy makers in which they work for. Literature has shown that there was a mismatch between the intended outcomes of the educational curriculum and the beliefs of the teachers, as argued by many researchers (Orafi and Borg, 2009; Nunan, 2003). Therefore, this necessitates the value of teachers' knowledge about the curriculum, and in this sense by curriculum, I do not refer only to textbooks. I refer to the bigger picture of the curriculum that includes an understanding of the culture and classroom context and the learners, which I elaborate on further in the discussion and conclusion chapters.

### **2.3.2 Teacher's Traits and Personality**

Teachers' traits and personality are important qualities that contribute towards shaping CI and also student participation. Teachers who are more open and promote the use of communicative approaches in their teaching, are found to be more understanding and friendly, acting as facilitators (Nunan, 1992). In contrast, Wright (2000) shows that authoritative teachers are seen to be more dominant and associated with the characteristics of initiators, correctors, judges, and leaders. As a learner, I have always felt more secure about participating and getting involved in the lesson with teachers who are friendly and encourage me to talk in class.

For example, I liked the English language and became an English teacher because of the encouragement of my own English teacher when I was a student at high school. Therefore, the

role of the teacher is to motivate their learners and guide them to learn and succeed in their studies. The study of Frymier and Houser (2000) on teacher-student relationships reveals that students show “effective learning outcomes and improve their communicative skills” (Frymier and Houser, 2000:207). Furthermore, teachers not only instruct and guide students towards learning but also organize tasks and activities that are suitable for their learners, and try to cater for individual differences so that they gain the interest of all students, and encourage them to respond positively in the lesson. Hall (2002) indicates that, teachers not only allocate most of their time to academic activities, but also organize their classroom as an effective learning environment, using group management approaches that maximize the students’ engagement in those activities.

However, different teachers see the importance of students’ interaction differently. Students also perceive their teachers in the same way that teachers present themselves in class. Terry (2006) indicates that the personality of the teacher does much to create the atmosphere of the class. Teachers who lead pupils the wrong way, who do not like adolescents, who are not considerate, are unhappy and lack a sense of humour are likely to have more disturbances in their classes. In general, Anderson and Oh (2012) conclude that interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, which they can sense in their exchanges, boost their motivation to learn. This is to say that if the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and student is friendly, the desire of the students to learn is enhanced.

### **2.3.3 Teachers' Culture and Awareness of Student Culture and Social Background**

Learners always come to class with their own personal and cultural expectations about learning and teaching. They internally retain those experiences which can influence the way they understand the classroom context and learning. Therefore, it is important that teachers have some knowledge about the students' culture, personal interests, and needs in order to incorporate a consideration towards these cultural and personal experiences in their teaching and while dealing with the students.

Teaching and learning styles also reflect cultural backgrounds. Culturally speaking, it is always an advantage to have teachers and students that share the same or similar cultural background, as students then have little problem understanding the cues provided by the teacher (Robinson, 2003), as they are already familiar with the appropriate interactional behaviours expected in the classroom. (Ogbu, 1988) explains that cultural differences of teachers are often at odds with students from other cultures and sometimes clash with the students' cultural beliefs, thus preventing effective learning (Pajares, 1992). However, I do not totally agree with (Pajares, 1992) and argue that many teachers, in general, are aware of some basic cultural sensitivity before joining any new institutions. Furthermore, they learn new aspects of the culture as they

interact with the students and surrounding cultural environment (Kramsch, 1985, Quashoa, 2006, Walsh, 2002). Nevertheless, conflicts can occur because the 'way of life' of the students is discordant with the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of mainstream schools. Thus, teachers need to observe students' learning styles and notice what works better for their styles. They also need to sense some of the cultural issues and enquire about some of the behaviours that are culturally expected and accepted. For example, in an informal discussion with one of my students about cultural differences, she commented that:

My teacher who was a male teacher from other culture was looking straight into my eyes when he was talking to me in the class. The teacher came close to me and I felt embarrassed and not at ease (Informal anecdote involving a female student).

Whereas in some cultures eye contact is seen as a preferred behaviour that shows interest and respect to the person you are talking to. This same behaviour could be seen differently in another culture and chances are that it could be misinterpreted. (Ogbu, 1988) indicates that teachers and students may misinterpret inappropriate or awkward classroom interactions as every culture has individual norms that dictate proper classroom behaviour and define the limits of student-teacher interaction.

In short, foreign teachers need to understand and learn more about the important cultural and behavioural expectations so that they can avoid or minimize cultural differences that could lead to misunderstandings. Understanding the students' culture does not only help teachers to avoid conflicts but also helps them make use of that knowledge in their teaching and communicating with the students. For example, when teachers know that male students do not want to mix with female students, then they can design tasks for each gender and later may compare the production of the two groups. Also such tasks encourage students to work freely with the same gender, boosting students' encouragement and involvement in the classroom. I will now move on to describe briefly some of the factors that are associated with the students themselves and can, hence, influence the way interaction is shaped in the classroom.

#### **2.3.4 Role of Learners in CI**

Students are the main target of the learning and teaching process. Although they receive instruction from the teachers, they are also responsible for their own learning. Studies have shown that there are many factors related to the students which contribute to CI, such as the students' culture, motivation, learning styles and strategies, and attitudes towards learning. In this research, I will talk about motivation and attitudes towards learning the English language along with learning habits.

### **A) Motivation**

I will discuss motivation here in relation to the context of classroom in the colleges where male and female students study together in one class. Motivation is one of the factors that make the students enjoy learning. Harmer (2001) places more emphasis upon the internal motives that encourage learners to do something in order to achieve something. External motivation is also important as it supports students to achieve success. Teachers can motivate students to learn by the teaching methods they use or by encouraging them to achieve their goals. As I have personal experience with many teachers in both schools and universities, I am of the opinion that students learn better when they feel that teachers care about their personal interest and cater for their individual differences.

When the external motives such as good teacher-student relationships are high, they work as strong drivers for the students to learn more effectively, along with the intrinsic motives. I also argue here that some of the challenges that students encounter could lead to motivate them to do better in their studies. For instance, in this particular study, the big challenge that the participants of my research have is passing the Foundation Year. The challenge here is that if students do not do well in English and pass the Foundation Year program, they will have to leave college. This means that they will lose the chance to continue their degree program, therefore, they should ensure that they work hard. This challenge could have negative consequences for the students but at the same time it works as a strong motivational factor for students to exert more effort and try to pass the Foundation Year program. In line with this, Babae (2012) refers to this kind of motivation as instrumental motivation, which highlights the need to fulfil a practical objective such as obtaining employment, or passing the Foundation Year program, in the case of my study.

Moreover, Deci & Ryan (1991) describe the reasons for studying in higher education institutions or programmes as being self-initiated and therefore intrinsic, or initiated externally and therefore extrinsic. Both external and internal motivation encourages students to participate and interact in the classroom. (Hanrahan, 1998) found that learning is best acquired when both teachers and students are involved in the learning process. He also indicated that students are motivated when they are encouraged by the teacher and their personal interests are met. Similarly, (Tobin and McRobbie, 1997) advocated the pleasant atmosphere of the classroom to be an important external motivator that teachers and schools should provide.

In brief, (Oxford & Shearin, 1994:21, as cited in Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000), considered students' desires and their perceptions of their goals to achieve good performance are key factors in learning a foreign language. They expressed this idea in the following statement:

According to the expectancy value theories, learners' motivation to acquire a second language is determined by their effort, perception of the degree of

attractiveness of the goals (valence), perception of the probability of attaining the goals (expectancy), and appraisal of their ability to achieve the goals (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000).

While looking at the gender-based differences in motivation and as cited in (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000), Coleman (1995) maintains that the gender-based differences in motivation are rather marginal; however, Suleiman (1993) reported negative motivational attitudes to studying English as a foreign language among female Arab students. Furthermore, Sung & Padilla (1998) concluded that there is a need for further research to determine gender differences in motivation. However, I argue here that female students in Oman are more motivated to learn than boys. This can be inferred from the high number of girls enrolled in the higher educational institutions, colleges and universities. An unpublished study by the Ministry of Education in Oman (2006) concluded that female students are more motivated to gain better chances in securing places in higher education organizations.

I acknowledge that I cannot claim that female students are more motivated simply because the number of female girls enrolled in higher education institutions outnumbered boys according to the study MOE (2006). I think there are other reasons for encouraging female students to pursue their higher education in Oman. Among these reasons is cultural considerations. For instance, the places where female students can join after their secondary schools are limited. Therefore, they joined higher education institutions such as universities, colleges and health institutions to secure jobs in schools or hospitals. Another reason might be that female students are socially expected to work in certain careers such as teachers, nurses, doctors or in any work place that is suitable for here feminine nature. Boys, on the other hand, can work at different places due to their physical nature and society expectations. Some join army forces and industrial companies; while others pursue their higher education depending on their economic circumstances.

The motivation to success is also supported by the cultural pressures on female students in high schools in that they cannot seek to gain employment at any place of their own choice. Most parents limit the choices for their daughters to the teaching and nursing professions. Therefore, it is highly competitive for male students to get accepted in health institutions and teacher training colleges due to the high number of female students wishing to join these colleges and institutions. The consequence of this dilemma is that if female students do not do well in school, they will mostly remain restricted to the house, not being allowed to go out to do any other work because of the parental and cultural reasons mentioned above.

Moreover and in support to the issue I discussed previously regarding the cultural forces to students' motivation in the Omani context, Lamb (2012) argues that motivation varies according to some socio-cultural contexts. He views academic motivation as an integral factor that

“develops and is embedded within a complex web of environmental and social influences” (Fan, 2011, p. 159 cited in Lamb, 2012:117).

Early theories of L2 motivation has talked about the role of society and culture in supporting L2 learning. The community and, in particular, parents have been found to be of vital importance in increasing L2 learning motivation (Lamb, 2012:999). The role of the parent is one of motivational factors that influence learners to learn L2 (Gardner et al., 1999). Gardner (1999) also asserts the positive relationship between parental support and L2 motivation. He argues that parents use different ways of motivation such as continuous support, encouragement and monitoring of learners while learning L2. I believe that external support or motivation which learners receive while learning might help in encouraging them to study and learn.

Another factor that is related to the students’ motivation to learning in general, and learning English in particular, is the students’ attitudes towards learning English, which is discussed below.

### **B) Students’ Attitudes about Learning English**

It is not too elaborate to claim that the person who speaks a foreign language becomes another person and has a dual and distinctive identity. In other words, as a good speaker of English, I discovered that in some places where English is spoken in Oman, such as hospitals, universities and business enterprises, people look at me differently. This is because they develop an image that the English speaker is somewhat distinguished and therefore deserves a special or different welcome. This image of mixed identity has many times made me merit special treatment by many people, such as gaining more respect or appreciation. This is my own interpretation of what I have experienced, and yet to be researched through a study looking at the effect of obtaining a second language on the speakers image, as perceived by others.

Some researches supported what I discussed above. For example. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) argue that learning L2 is not confined to learning the linguistic features and the verbal codes of the language only but it also involves multifaceted knowledge about that language. He includes interrelated functions of the language as he states that

“motivation to learn an L2 presents a particularly complex and unique situation even within motivational psychology, due to the multifaceted nature and roles of language itself” :117) Language is at the same time: (a) a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject; (b) an integral part of the individual's identity involved in almost all mental activities; and also (c) the most important channel of social organisation embedded in the culture of the community where it is used. (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009:117)

Nevertheless, the students' views on learning English at Ibri CAS remain controversial and ambiguous. This was mentioned earlier but I will briefly highlight the reasons again for the sake of context. Students see the need to learn English for two reasons namely: firstly their aim and desire to pass or qualify the English Foundation Year program, which is one of the requirements of the Oman Ministry of Higher Education for further pursuance of the college degree program (MOHE, 2011); and secondly, English is the language of instruction in the degree program. Therefore, the students need to learn English so that they can continue their studies. The question, however, remains in that do students enjoy learning English or are they forced to study English regardless of their wishes and preferences?

On the other hand, it can also be seen that the students who do not wish to pursue a college degree and want to get employed straight away after graduation, do not believe that learning English is useful. This is also because despite the English language being used in many companies and places in Oman, there are still a large number of local companies or organizations that do not require English language skills. I reiterate that these views have to be examined statistically as I am expressing my own views based on my contact with students and my own experience.

Finally, having talked briefly about the role of the teachers and students in CI, the following section talks about the classroom atmosphere and its impact on student participation.

### **2.3.5 Factors Related to Classroom Condition**

Classroom context is an integral component of a good teaching and learning process, therefore its effectiveness cannot be ignored. It does not only involve the physical context but also the overall atmosphere that makes the learners enjoy being in attendance. It should thus provide students with a secure feeling and a sense of belonging so that they feel they own the environment and are an important part of it. This feeling encourages students to demonstrate good behaviour in class which facilitates the process of learning. Many researchers, however, have placed more importance on the classroom's physical environment which is more observable being tangible and measurable. Some of the components of this environment include the seating arrangement (Byrne, 1987), the physical and spatial arrangement of the classroom (Christenson, 1994), and classroom size (Syuaztin & Graam, 1998), to name but a few.

I agree that these elements of the classroom have an important influence of their own in creating good physical conditions for learning and interaction. I take this discussion further by incorporating the outside context which surrounds the students and contributes to the classroom context. In another dimension and referring to the conditions of the college where the study is being carried out, I feel that the general condition outside the classroom needs to be explained as

it influences the students' attitudes and perceptions of learning English, as well as the way they interact in the classroom. I would like to concentrate on two issues - English use outside of the classroom, and social and cultural considerations.

### **2.3.6 English Use Outside of the Classroom**

Accommodating a foreign language in an environment where there are limited linguistic resources constitutes a formidable challenge for both the teachers and students. Teachers hope that the learners will apply the knowledge of language outside of the class so that they can improve and consolidate what they have learned, according to the proverb "Practice makes perfect". Also, the teachers believe that their students want to use their English language skills outside the class and share their knowledge with each other. However, this is not always possible for many reasons. There is always the fear that some students are encouraged not to talk in English outside the class as some people misunderstand the purpose of students using English with each other, or whenever they have an opportunity to use English to communicate. They might think negatively of those students, considering their behaviour as boastful because of their command over the English language. They also might think that the students want to distinguish themselves from others who do not speak English. Therefore, they look at them in a rather negative way which discourages them from speaking in English. Other students internally feel that English should be used only in the classroom and Arabic should be the medium of communication in other places.

Furthermore, the opportunity to use English is not always available for the students due to the vast number of Arabic speakers in the college, including teachers and other staff members working in the college. Besides, Arabic is the local language which is used in communication. English, however, is only used in class as a language of instruction.

Another problem also expressed by the students when interviewed during one of the sessions was that they said that, "we do not want to use English because we are not sure of the correct language and we do not want to be seen that we do not know English". This worry is also transferred to the classroom. Some students feel insecure about participating in class discussions because other students sometimes laugh at them when they make mistakes, as expressed by the students in the interviews. Teachers encourage students to use English when they talk to them in their offices. In the college, some senior students who are quite competent speak English with their teachers but new students lack both the self-confidence and requisite command over the language, therefore they communicate in Arabic instead, and sometimes ask other students to talk on their behalf interpreters when talking to their English teachers.

In short, these attitudes and opinions towards English, as mentioned above, might manifest into students' behaviours and also influence the way they perceive English learning and usage outside the classroom. This might hinder students trying to communicate outside in English, while the same feeling is extended to classroom situations where students interact in the classroom.

Having discussed about some of the problems that some students might face in relation to the use of English outside classroom, there is often a bright side in the issue. Thus, it is fair to mention that the English speakers and the use of English in Oman are increasing due to vast development of economic and technology that bring English language in play as a means of communication in business enterprises (Al-Jadidi, 2009; Al-Jardani, 2012). Learners, however, need to seek good opportunities to practice their English outside the classroom and try to reduce their tension by considering that their aim of using English is to practice what they have learnt.

As mentioned above that society plays an important role in contributing to learners' attitudes and knowledge of learning FL, Oman, like any other country, has different districts where each area has its own cultural identity and context in relation to accommodating foreign languages. That is to say, large industrial district such as Muscat (the capital of Oman) provides good opportunities for the growing of English use in companies and in some public places. Also, speaking English in Muscat is not culturally considered as a show-off situation as it has been expected by society that people can easily shift to English language when communicating with non-Arabic speakers who speak English. The socio-cultural structure in Muscat is different from that of a town in the interior part of Oman where the use of English language is limited. Again here, I emphasize the influence and the expectation of society and how people view the use of English in the society. Different districts have different attitudes depending on the social norms and expectation enforced by individual socio-context such as the example I mentioned about Muscat above. The study is not intended to talk about the different socio-cultural structures that the students of the study come from.

The above discussion leads us to consider the underlying roots from which these attitudes and opinions have ascended. I refer to these roots as 'the culture' that contributes to the perceptions of students and people in the community and their perceptions of learning English and its usage in their lives, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Further explanation of the effect of socio-cultural factors will be elaborated on in the discussion chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presents an overview of theoretical background underpinning classroom participation. Throughout the chapter, I argue that participation and interaction in the classroom

are culturally constructed in a given context. This was discussed through different models of interaction such as the SPEAKING's model by (Kramsch, 1985), the ecology of human interaction by (Bronfenbrenner, 1993), and the model of four layers by (Breen, 2001). According to these scholars, classroom interaction is seen as a product which undergoes several integrated processes, where all participants of the classroom interaction contribute in one way or another.

Different research and studies have been conducted to understand student participation. Some have focused on explicit oral production to understand students' participation and other studies have looked at non-verbal participation. Considering classroom participation as a social action, participation was also researched from a social-cultural perspective. The focus of this study also considers classroom participation as a social event by which participation is organized and manipulated by teachers, learners, and classroom context. Furthermore, the chapter talks about the different theories of learning in which language and culture were discussed. It shows different assumptions about learning as perceived by behaviourists, cognitivists and sociologists.

As previously mentioned, participation is not only understood through verbal or non-verbal production expressed by the interlocutors in the classroom, it is also important to define participation as used in this study. Therefore, the chapter then presents some definitions of classroom interaction and participation in which it shows that participation is best understood through understanding the relationship of classroom participants and the context to which they belong.

The last section of the chapter concludes by describing the roles of teachers and learners in the process of classroom participation, and how these roles are interrelated and shape social actions that take place in the classroom.

The proceeding chapter, Chapter Three describes the framework and research design of the study. It also describes the process of collecting and analysing the data.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter Three describes the overarching research design and methodological processes governing the study. It is divided into three parts: part one begins by covering the epistemology and theoretical perspectives of the research, which will be closely followed by rationalizing the choices of using a small scale case study to explore the factors that influence student participation in English language classrooms in Oman. The second part provides a detailed account of the pilot study and the lessons learned for the development of actual data collections, while the last part encompasses a discussion on the processes of data collection itself.

#### **Part I: Research Design and Methodological Processes**

##### **3.1.1 Epistemology, Theoretical Perspectives and Research Paradigm**

Theoretical perspectives mean understanding the philosophical positions underpinning the research paradigm, while epistemology refers to the beliefs and understanding that the educational researchers have about the nature and the reality of the phenomenon under investigation and how they can know the reality they wish to describe (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). According to this definition, the epistemology for this research encompasses my beliefs and understanding that classrooms are multi-contextual in nature and these interlinked contexts need to be simplified, evaluated, and examined individually (Fassinger, 1995). The concept of epistemology thus is expected to assist me towards an exploration of the factors that may impact student participation, with special reference to schools in Oman. On the other hand, a research paradigm is generally concerned with the design and theoretical framework of conducting the research. In this manner, it influences or directs researchers on what to study, how research should be carried out, how data should be collected and analysed, and so on (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Cohen et al., 2007; Hulstijn, 2005).

The qualitative ethnographic approach is another important research methodology which aims to understand the culture and context of the setting where the study is taking place. This provides the researcher with a rich context knowledge that is vital towards understanding the phenomenon under focus. As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter (see 2.1), every society or classroom is context-specific and hence the informants or participants create their own reality and respond according to their understanding of their own cultural or situational context (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983; Thomas, 1993; Mackenzie, 1994; and Baker 1997). Ethnographic studies have often been used to explore issues or phenomenon in its natural setting; however, it is pertinent to

mention that this study is not ethnographical but follows ethnographic principles, according to which, I have spent time observing the case under the study and collecting data throughout the period of the study in order to understand the relationships between teachers and students and how participation is manipulated, rather than highlighting the facts about the research subject (Cohen et al., 2007; Newby, 2010).

While following the principles of ethnography, researchers use different research methods or instruments in data collections. Some of these include observation or field records (writing theoretical memos, tape and video recording), interviews, and the examination of participants' diaries or journals (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). Researchers can also ask questions to elicit deeper responses, especially to questions that seek answers to 'why'; for instance, to find reasons why certain behaviours occur or specific actions take place under specific conditions.

The phenomenon of students' participation has been explored and studied by different researchers using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Some examples from the literature include (see 2.3): the qualitative investigation of the Asian and Non-Asian students' interaction in ESL classes using classroom observation and interviews by (Sato, 1984; Duff, 2002; Mustapha et al. 2010). Other studies have used a mixed approach where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. For instance, Day (1984) explored the relationship between students' participation and their proficiency in English language by using interviews, questionnaires, field notes, and a closed test for comprehensive data collection. My study, on the other hand, seeks to explore factors influencing classroom participation, with the main focus upon the observation of students' and teachers' interaction and behaviours in natural classroom settings towards exploring the phenomenon of classroom participation. Therefore, I explore the nature of the participation that actually occurs in the classrooms, and the factors that influence what does or does not happen.

This research is primarily based upon the case study approach (see 1.4) that generally follows the trends and principles of the ethnographic paradigms in literature which focus on the importance of the cultural context of the phenomenon being studied in its natural environment (Sanday, 1979; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Ary et al., 2010; Emerson et al., 2011). Ethnographic principles also place importance on the direct involvement of the researcher or the 'ethnographer' in the research. It should also be mentioned that there are three important issues or factors that can be summarized as closely related when we want to carry out studies based upon ethnographic principles, such as the natural settings, cultural contexts and the researcher (Emerson et al., 2011; Flick, 2014).

My study follows the principles of ethnographic studies in three areas. First, the study is carried out in natural classrooms while the teachers and students attending their normal classrooms in the college. Although the participants were aware of the study, nothing has been set out or made up for the purpose of the study in terms of changing the seating arrangement or choosing specific classrooms. As mentioned before that the choice of the classrooms is done voluntary. Secondly, my position both as a researcher and as a former teacher in the same college gave me the merits of being part of the context of study who is aware of the cultural and contextual features of the classroom under investigation and also a member of the community being researched, Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009). Although this intimacy of belonging to the context has positive potential of the contextual knowledge, it also has some shortcomings and restraints that I need to be aware of. I need to be as objective as possible and be aware of my personal involvement in the study. Finally, ethnographic researchers spend a lot of time with their participants to better depict a clear picture and explore what and why things are happening, depending on the purpose of the study. In this regard, my personal involvement in the study does not come from the length of time I spend with the participants, but rather from the fact that I belong to the institution and I have good knowledge of the context and access to all resources needed for the study.

I have talked briefly about these factors in relation to the context of the study and specific context of the college (see Section 1.2.4) while I talk more about my role as a researcher in this chapter, see 3.3.3.

In addition to the above mentioned I consider it pertinent to highlight that during the course of this study, I collected natural data to understand what factors influence student participation in college. Utilising the principles of ethnography, I also used two classes as case studies to reveal some kind of understanding of what factors contribute to student participation. I investigated this phenomenon for two semesters using repeated classroom observations, interviewing students and teachers, and asking students to maintain diaries. I also kept field notes on a regular basis throughout the study.

### **3.1.2 Importance of the Case Study as an Example of Small Scale Studies**

Small scale research is used when the researcher wants to study a particular case under the case study approach, which aims at looking at the *particular* rather than the *general* for developing a deeper understanding of a specific situation or context (Martyn, 2014). This approach also focuses on investigating a particular case to reach a deeper understanding of what takes place and why things happen in the way they occur in a specific situation, as well as looking at relationships amongst the participants. In my research, I found that the approach or strategy of the case study was more appropriate because I tried to explore the factors that influence student

participation in English classes at the Ibri College of Applied Sciences (see 1.3.3). The case study as part of this research comprises of two classes from the Foundation Year program. Another advantage of this strategy in my research was to allow me to study related phenomenon within the context of a single situation - in other words, I looked at the relationships between teachers and students within the overall classroom context. The case study approach also allowed me to study the situation in more detail using different research methods, and towards developing a better and deeper understanding (Martyn, 2014).

I opted to understand the influence of students' cultures and their perceptions about participation in class and also looked at the teachers' understanding of the students' culture, and their roles in the class, and how these two parts were linked in this particular classroom context. I aimed at discovering how these elements of the classroom work together to create the overall classroom context. I was also interested in answering the question of 'why', as in within its natural settings (the classroom), based upon a detailed explanation of the processes involved in that relationship (Cohen et al., 2007).

For obtaining an in-depth understanding and exploring details about the particular situation being studied, the case study approach allows the researchers to use different inquiry methods, that is, mostly qualitative methods such as observations, interviews, diary or journal keeping, and field notes amongst many others. During the course of my research, I found that collecting qualitative data was more appropriate under the dictates of the ethnographic principles and while using the three research methods - classroom observation, interviews, and students' diaries or journals. Also, to provide a better picture of the context of the study, I provided information about some related issues to the study such as the teaching of English in Oman and the nature of the classroom in the college and classroom culture, see 2.3.

### **3.1.3 Research Methods**

The study was based on three main research methods, these being classroom observation, interviews, and students diaries. The following section provides the justifications for the choice of such methods.

#### **3.1.3.1 Rationale for Using the Research Methods**

As previously mentioned as part of the academic literature review, many studies have investigated classroom interaction and student participation in classrooms, see for example, (Abu Rabia, 1995; Dörnyei, 1998; Javid et al., 2012; Malallah, 2000). Some of these studies majorly focused upon either a single or at best a few factors that could contribute towards classroom participation (see 2.1 & 2.2). However, this study adopted a somewhat different approach as I did not propose any single factor as the cause of classroom participation; rather, I chose to

collect data employing ethnographic principles in order to better understand what factors might emerge as contributors towards student participation in the classroom. I also used the guidelines suggested by the grounded theory and as highlighted by (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kvale, 2006; and Miles et al., 2013) towards the collection and analysis of the data.

The emerging concepts or factors were further developed and explored in the next stage of the data collection. Along with classroom observations, I also made use of interviews which were aimed at gaining a more elaborate insight into these factors, see the coming section on research methods, section 3.3. My style during the interviews prompted the participants of the study to elaborate more, which led to the emergence of other factors, thereby enriching the data. Furthermore, I also asked the participants to reflect more upon the factors they mentioned, trying to establish better and more pertinent causal relationships, from their individual perspectives.

Ellis (1990) argues that learners have rich data which researchers can explore by asking learners to talk about their own learning. Therefore, the third research method that I thought would enhance my awareness of what occurred in the classroom was making use of the students' diaries. I asked some students (on a voluntary basis) to maintain diaries and record not only what transpired in the classroom, but also their reflection upon their own learning and participation in the class. The students' self-reported data and reflections (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011) helped me in reading the thoughts of the participants recorded under the influence of their individual perspectives (Ellis et al., 1994).

### **3.1.3.2 Classroom Observation**

As briefly highlighted earlier, the first research method in my study was classroom observation and it was used because of its ability to explore all the possible subtleties of the overall context that is, the real classroom (Cohen et al., 2007). Observation in general can be classified into three types: structured observation, semi-structured observation, and unstructured observation or naturalistic observation, as is referred by ethnography (Cohen et al., 2007; Walford, 2001; Patton, 1990). Each of these types can be used for a particular purpose depending upon the nature of the data being collected. It is also pertinent to mention that the observation in studies based upon ethnographic principles focuses upon observing natural events (naturalistic observation) in order to explore a particular social phenomenon rather than to test a hypothesis (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Walford, 2001; Silverman, 2010). Keeping in view the absence of a hypothesis in this study, and also the numerous advantages of the observation technique, I found that naturalistic observation and taking field notes were more suitable for the purpose of my study. These advantages include the possibility of enhancing the quality of data as the data collected is much more genuine when it encompasses participants' true behaviours, feelings and reactions, free of monitoring or examination, as well as the possibility of the validation of results

from previous studies. Further advantages also include the possibility of establishing real world or a realistic perspective. Exploiting these advantages, I aimed at observing teachers' and students' behaviours in relation to student participation, in order to understand how they engaged in the classroom, rather than focussing on my own views on the subject.

The process of observing participation within the classroom context varies according to the purpose of the observation, and also the role of the observer. Based upon my personal experience as an inspector of English in Oman for six years, I realized that observing teachers and students in the classroom context is not an easy task for either the observer or the observed participants, including both the teachers and the students. Hence, it is a challenge for the observer to gain a good account of what actually takes place in the classroom. The observer tries to record what they observe but there is often the possibility of an unexpected incident that the observer has not thought of or has not included in his observation schedules, but which could be important in terms of its influence or impact. According to Rose & Grosvenor (2001), being part of the human nature, it is essential for the observer to recognize that some exceptions before and/or during observations cannot be avoided. Keeping this aspect in mind, below I will briefly talk about my role as a research observer in the study.

### **3.1.3.3 My Role as an Observer in the Research**

The role of the researcher in studies based upon ethnographic principles is very crucial and sensitive to the collection and interpretation of the data as most of researchers spend time with the people they observe and often become part of the group being studied, a phenomenon referred to as 'participant observation' (Cohen et al., 2007; Lee, 2005; Wind, 2008). This gives the researcher a sense of belonging to the context of their study, enabling them to understand the culture better. Traditionally, long residence of the researcher in the community where the study is taking place has also been seen as a key factor in conducting such studies (Millen, 2000; Wind, 2008).

I am fortunate in the regard that I belong to the cultural context in which I was studying. My involvement in the study stemmed from two areas: firstly, I am a teacher myself in a college where similar groups of the targeted participants of the study were being taught. This gave me the benefit of understanding the classroom context based on my own experience - 'being in the same shoes' as the participants (Gray, 2013; Patton, 2005)

My second involvement came from sharing the same cultural, educational and social background as that of the students. This, again, qualified me to better understand the culture, and also helped interpret some of the cultural issues that the participants talked about. However, as a researcher, I recognized the effect of this involvement and also the part being played by my preconceived

notions of the context of the study, which I tried to reduce to a minimum. As an outsider researcher, I tried to detach myself from the context and tried to understand what was taking place by relying upon the data I gathered and getting more objective views from the participants through interviews and student diaries. I therefore tried to build a balance between what I knew about the culture and the context and between what the data revealed (Ary et al., 2010). For example, some students stated during interview that it was part of their Islamic culture to be shy when they were in a mixed-gender situation. As an insider to the culture, I accepted that this belief or view could be true, but I also questioned the students about this, arguing that there could be a difference of meaning between being shy or modest. Furthermore, there were some occasions when I doubled checked some of the Arabic colloquial words spoken by some of the students who came from different regions of Oman. I asked some of my Omani colleagues about the meaning of those words when I had doubts about their connotation.

Considering my role as an observer, I had the opportunity to practice observing classrooms at secondary schools where I worked as an English inspector and supervisor for six years in Oman. The role of the inspector, as the name suggests, is to inspect whether teachers are doing what is required of them in their role, and to identify specific examples of teachers' practices in the classroom. The task was thus more of an evaluative nature and this experience of observation proved to be highly useful for my new role as a researcher in this study. This is because as a researcher, I recognized the effect of this involvement and also my preconceived notions of the context of the study. I, therefore, after realizing how my subjective experience was a good starting point for developing my role as a research observer with informed knowledge of the context, used this experience systematically. I also detached myself from the subjective aspects of the experience and tried to develop a different perspective to understand what takes place in the classroom from a research observer's point of view. Below, in section 3.3.4.2, I elaborated more on the role of the researcher, in relation to their insider and outsider position.

### **3.1.4 Interviews**

The second research method comprised of interviews. Interviews are a valuable source to explore the interviewees' beliefs, opinions and thinking about certain topics (Silverman, 2010). They are also used as a follow-up procedure to investigate certain issues for better understanding (Seidman, 2012). Some researchers use interviews when they are interested in the depth of the data rather than the breadth depending on the aims of their studies. They also play an active role in the data collection, especially when they are researching issues in the context in which they belong, such as teachers teaching in the same school (Cohen et al., 2007). Walford (2001) defines interviews as 'social encounters' between the interviewer and the interviewees. It is also a two-person conversation that has a pre-determined purpose (Cohen et al., 2007). (Hitchcock &

Hughes, 1995, cited in Conteh & Toyoshima, 2005) mention a range of interviewing techniques from “structured” to “survey”, and further to more “conversational” methodologies. Conversational interviews, as argued by Kvale (1996), can be conceived as a basic mode of knowledge where knowledge is viewed as a social practice.

Looking at previous literature, the most common typology of interviews, based upon their structure, classifies interviews into the unstructured, semi-structured and structured varieties (Hughes et al., 1994; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Along this continuum of different interviewing techniques, each type has its own strengths and weaknesses. For the purpose of my study, I used conversational interviews (Cohen, 2007) for many reasons. These reasons and the benefits of this type of interview are discussed below.

### **3.1.4.1 Benefits of Conversational Interview**

The conversational interviews in this study were used as a research tool for two main purposes. Firstly, these were used as self-dependant means of inquiry in order to obtain data from the participants; and secondly, in conjunction with the use of classroom observation and students’ diaries, conversational interviews were used as an exploratory tool to delve deeper in to the understanding of why the participants behaved in the way they did in the classroom (Wellington, 2015), and/or why they felt a particular way, as described in their diaries.

Using interviews in research has a number of advantages. My choice of using conversational interviews was informed by various important reasons. First, conversational interviews are not organized around a determined set of questions in which the researcher looks for specific answers; rather, the aim of the researcher is to provide a conversational environment to observe and identify certain aspects and examples from the experiences the participants share in dialogue form (Hammersley, 2006; Hughes et al., 1994). The researcher, while asking for a deeper understanding, builds upon an analytical development of what the participants’ state. Furthermore, interviews allow researchers to get into the minds of the respondents by querying them about their personal beliefs, attitudes, and feelings (Wellington, 2015). Thereafter, follow-up questions can be used to obtain more examples that support how participants see the world around them (Murphy et al., 2001). More specifically, the interviewer critically follows up the answers, asks for specifics and examples, and tests the strength of the interviewee’s beliefs by doubting it so as to obtain further knowledge (Kvale, 1996).

Like almost all other types of interviews, flexibility is another advantage of conversational interviews, as this allows both the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss issues that emerge during the dialogue and which are not observed in the classrooms. This openness and freedom offers opportunities for changing the sequence of the forms of questions in response to new

themes or topics that may arise during the discussion (Cohen et al., 2007). Finally, conversational interviews are more concerned with giving participants a voice where they share openly their perspectives with the interviewer. Through this informal conversation, the researcher tries to urge the participant to describe and explain the activities and actions that they are engaged in, from what and how they see it rather than from the researcher's own perspective (Hammersley, 2006).

In ethnographic studies, or studies based upon the ethnographic principles, the role of the interviewer is very important because of his relationship with the participant that grows between them during the research stage. This relationship is expected to make the conversational interview as friendly as possible, featured with a mutual confidence and trust between both parties of the conversational interlocutors. Kvale (2006:482) asserts that the researcher needs to create a level of trust with his participants, using his personal experiences as the "means to efficiently obtain a disclosure of the interview subjects' world" (Kvale, 2006). The author also believes that with such close personal trust, the participants are likely to voice their experiences of their worlds more openly.

The role of the interviewer is also considered to be very crucial in understanding the context of the study and the participants. Therefore, one of the important issues that the interviewer needs to be aware of when researching the context to which they belong is the position and identity of the researcher as an insider to the context of study. Keeping this in mind, below, I reflect upon my own position in the study.

#### **3.1.4.2 The Notion of Insider/Outsider Position of the Researcher**

The terminology of an 'insider researcher' refers to a researcher who belongs to the population of the study, or that they are a member of the community being researched or studied (Ganga & Scott, 2006; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007; and Kanuha, 2000). In this study, I have a better position as a researcher because of my 'intimate knowledge' of the social context and patterns of social interaction (Mercer, 2007), as explained earlier. Although this position gave me some credibility, I was also aware of the dangers associated with such a position. First, I was familiar with the organizational culture, routines and context setting, which helped me to identify the accepted and expected process of research in the context; how to get access to materials; and also how to organize observation and interview protocol in the college. This intimacy also facilitated the process of interviewing the students, as I was fully aware of how to conduct such interviews without affecting any culturally sensitive issues. Examples of such issues include interviewing a female student alone, having both male and female students together in the same interviews, or asking gender-sensitive questions (Mercer et al., 2004). Even particular facial expressions that could be misinterpreted such as direct eye contact, while talking

to the female students, were avoided. These issues could affect the way students welcomed me as a researcher and consequently influence the whole scenario and their conversations during the interviews. Being an insider and being part of the culture, the interviews also allowed me to uncover hidden meanings that were not immediately visible or accessible to outsiders (Conteh and Toyoshima, 2005).

The aspects of familiarity and intimacy with the context of the research also had some limitations. Firstly, based on their insider status, cultural knowledge, assumptions and perspective, a researcher might take things for granted. This may prevent the researcher from doubting certain answers, or going further to explore more (Kvale, 1996). In order to gain a deeper insight and understanding, the researcher needs to question some of the respondents' responses, sensitivity of the topics, shared prior knowledge, and also assumptions. These issues need to be challenged, negotiated and discussed with the participants of the research. Also, the 'insider' concept that gives the researcher the privilege of being part of the culture, does not always mean that the researcher and the participants share an identical understanding of their social context. Hammersley (1993) argues that individuals within the same cultural group will not all share exactly the same perceptions or understandings. That is why it is risky to always take knowledge for granted, and just build upon prior personal knowledge.

In a similar context, Foster (2004) argues that we cannot assume that data obtained from the interview, classroom observation and students' diary entries, constitutes an "authentic candid version" of the interviewee's experience, based upon a shared cultural background between the interviewer and the interviewees. Therefore, as an insider to the classroom, and being cognisant of the social context of the study, I maintained a 'vigilant awareness' of my role in the research (Foster, 2004). However, it is pertinent to mention that I did not assume a complete division between the insider and outsider identities as each has its own position. Corbin Dwyer & Buckle (2009: 54-61) explain thoroughly the issue of insider and outsider positions in their article, "The space between on being an insider-outsider in qualitative research". They argue that researchers should not lock themselves into one particular role or another. They concluded that there is no absolute position of one researcher than the other, but a "dialectical approach" which helps to define the differences and similarities between the insider/outsider positions (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that such intimacy and familiarity with the context being studied may influence the study but required careful awareness from the researchers. As mentioned above that I was aware of my personal involvement in the study but still there have been many cases where I was influenced by this relation and affected the research. First, a very crucial observation I noticed while collecting and analysing the data is that the participants of the

study knew that I belong to the college as a teacher and also as a former assistant dean in the college. For example, during the interview students talked about some issues related to their stay in students' dormitory in the college. They mentioned some of their needs and services that might make their stay more encouraging for learning. They asked me if I can talk to the dean about their concern or if I can do something as a former assistant dean in the college. I had to remind the students that I am a researcher and I am not involved in any way in this regard. I also ensured them that what they mentioned would be confidential and I would not mention it to anyone in the college administration. I emphasised this so that the students would not feel insecure to share anything that might benefit the study in the future when I interview them again in the next stages.

Another examples of the influence of my previous position in the college as assistant dean, one teacher agreed to participate in the study at the beginning but later when the head of department told him that i was the assistant dean and sometimes I represented the ministry in recruiting teachers, the teacher came to me and informed me that he did not want to participate because he was new in the college and not fully aware of the system. However, I felt that from the way he spoke that he was reluctant to participate due to the information communicated to him by the head of the department.

After describing the issue of the position of the researcher as an insider, I will discuss below the third research method that is the students' diaries.

### **3.1.5 Students' Diaries**

Diary keeping or the technique of using the students' journals as a 'research tool' (Carson & Longhini, 2002) or 'research technique' (Matsumoto, 1996) is extensively employed for obtaining retrospective data from learners. Diaries are written reflections of what happens in the minds of the diarists. These help the researchers to examine the process of the learning that cannot be observed directly using other research methods, such as observation or interviews (Faerch & Karper, 1987 cited in Carson and Longhini, 2002). The literature shows that diaries or journals are used for different purposes depending on the intended outcomes and benefits gained from these sources. Three main categories have been identified in the literature, and as such these sources can be used for pedagogical, evaluative and basic research purposes (Yi, 2008; Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988). In this study, diaries are used as a basic research tool for getting some date from students about their participation as explained below in this section.

Towards a learning and pedagogical use, diaries are used to encourage students to carry a self-assessment of their own learning and to reflect on their language learning process and motivation to learn (Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988). These have also been used as a learning record

where trainers reflect on their own learning and thus become aware of how they learn (Jarvis, 1992). Correspondingly, as an evaluative purpose or what are sometimes referred to as 'interactive diaries' (Yi, 2008), diaries have two-fold benefits, that is the learners write diaries to assess their learning by reflecting on how they learn the language, and the strategies they use in their learning; and for teachers, diaries provide feedback about ways they can use to modify their teaching strategies based upon the learners' reflections and experiences (Jarvis, 1992; Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988). Moreover, diaries provide a detailed and individual cycle of learning where the learners can monitor their own learning progress and report about it confidently, (Chappell, 2006). Reflecting on the idea of Chappell (2006), the students in this study would have a better chance to report about themselves as they are writing a personal account of how they see their participation and their learning in the classroom.

As a research tool, diaries also help the researcher to examine students' feelings and perceptions on how they view their learning, what they do outside the class, and what they can recall about a specific lesson in relation to certain learning phenomenon, such as learning strategies or motivation to learn. (Howell-Richardson and Parkinson, 1988).

On another note, Wenden (1986) highlights that introspective techniques, such as diary keeping, is very beneficial towards getting into the learners' minds as well as their personal tacit knowledge of what makes their learning develop. Wenden (1986) interviewed 34 foreign adult students studying English as a second language as part of the American Language Program. Using 'think-aloud' techniques, she investigated learners' perceptions of their beliefs about the learning. She discovered that students have implicit beliefs about how they learn, and this influences the way they perform in class.

Chi Hung (1998) used students' diaries as a research tool to study students' classroom learning and motivation with reference to mathematics lessons. The analysis of the students' diaries showed contrasting views of the learners on their perception of learning and motivations. The researcher thus comments that diaries are useful tools but their effectiveness depends upon the characteristics of the learners and their respective achievement histories. This can also be viewed as one of the limitations of diary keeping, like any other research method or instrument. Three main concerns or limitations are associated with students' diaries or journals namely validity, confidentiality and data handling (Wagner, 1999). As far as validity is concerned, self-report writing is always subjective and based on the information that the learners write about themselves, thus the validity of the data is often questioned (Hutchinson et al., 1988; and Cohen et al., 2007). Learners may also try to go in-line with researchers or the teachers' expectations as most often they try to look for what is expected of them and then react accordingly. I agree with Hutchinson et al. (1988) that validating students' self-reports is problematic as it is subjective;

however, in the case of this study, I feel that allowing students to express their views and talk about their experiences in the classroom subjectively is of a significant advantage, as this is the aim of study. I was also interested in searching for what students wrote, in order to determine more about what they thought about classroom participation, and how they viewed the process from their respective points of view. Also, their diary entries were explored further in their interviews, while alongside, their behaviours were studied through classroom observation so that a comprehensible picture was gathered and triangulated.

Another problem with the students' writing diaries is that learners know they are not writing for themselves. They pay more attention to what they write and there is a high probability that altered and targeted data is being produced. Confidentiality is yet another issue relating to the diaries and students' journals. Learners have a fear of the use of the data being collected. It is thus important that participants are clearly informed about the purpose of the research and how the information is to be used by the researcher. A final concern of this research tool relates to the data analysis. Normally, diaries produce large amounts of data which is both time consuming and difficult to analyse, and therefore, the researchers have to be careful in their selection of the data. Guided by the purpose of the study, they need to recognize carefully what is and what is not relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, but at the same time they must consider that what all the participants produce is worth investigating, especially at the very beginning of the data collection process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The general aim behind using students' diaries in my study was their utilisation as a source of data which could provide an elaborate view of the learners of what transpired in the classroom, and how students perceived their participation in class. The learners reflected on their participation in particular lessons and assessed their perception on what caused them to participate or not in the classroom. Furthermore, students' diaries give students an opportunity to express themselves at their own time and think deeply and report what they want to say in writing. Student could write about things that the researcher has not thought of which could be important to the study. Finally, as stated earlier in this section that diaries are used to support and consolidate some of the data gathered from observation and interviews in reference to students' participation. Furthermore, in this study, diaries are used as an independent research tool whereby new data could be revealed which can contribute to the data of the study. Therefore, the data gathered from students' diaries not only complement the data obtained from classroom observation and students' interviews; but may also provide new data that have not being explored by the other research tools which the researcher uses.

### **3.1.6 Ethical Considerations**

Since I was part of the context where the study was conducted, I was also aware of some of the ethical and cultural issues related to the regulations of carrying our research in the college, and the rights of the participants of the study. The process of gaining approval to do any research studies in higher education institutions in Oman started by contacting the Human Resource Development Department at the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE, henceforth). This department at the MOHE issued an official written letter allowing me to conduct the research in the college. A copy of this official letter was then sent to the college, specifically to the English department. To clearly inform the participants about the purpose of the study, I had a short informative meeting with the participating teachers, during which I provided details about the aims of the study, and of the nature and importance of their participation. As for the students, they were given a written information sheet in Arabic (see Appendix E, and for a translated version, see Appendix C) and were also given the choice whether to participate or not. Teachers introduced me to the class prior to the commencement of classroom observation, and I had an informal talk with the students, explaining the nature and importance of their participation, as well as giving them the information sheet (Appendix E), and the participant consent form (Appendix F) for perusal and signature.

I followed all the prescribed procedures in order to ensure that all participants of the study were fully provided with the information they needed before the commencement of the study. Finally, the participants were ensured of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, and that their real names would not appear in any documents of the research. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study if they so wished, but this would need to be during the early stages of the data collection only, so that other teachers could be sought before the end of the data collection (see Appendixes B and C).

Culturally, I was aware of the issue of mixed gender classes in the college, and how female students presented themselves in the class. This helped me to respect their views when they did not want to be video-taped in class, and also when they preferred to be with the same gender during the interviews. Participation in this study was made voluntary. Only those teachers who were interested and wanted to participate were involved. Below, I will talk about some practical considerations regarding the recording of the data (tape or video), as well as the language used during the interviews.

#### **3.1.6.1 Using Videotaping or Tape Recording in my Data**

After careful consideration, I decided to use a tape recorder to record both the classroom observations and interviews as part of the data collection. Tape recording helps maximize the

accuracy of the data and avoid memory loss of some important conversation that could be missed if not recorded (Kvale, 2008). It also allows multiple listening and readings through the recorded data. I therefore recorded both the student and teacher interviews. It would have been more beneficial to video-tape the lesson as I could then gain better access by virtue of the ability to observe the video as many times I liked. Also, with classroom observation, videotaping can be of great assistance towards the data collection process, as it provides a live picture of what is happening in the class (Gibbs, 1997). However, this was not possible in my study as there were some practical constraints related to the nuances of the Islamic culture. Many female students refused to be videotaped when they were asked. Furthermore, many students in Oman do not want to be videotaped as they do not want their faces to be visible to other people, as they feel that this threatens their privacy, especially the female students. This was the reaction of the students when I asked them informally, and I therefore I decided against using videotaping. Also, when I asked the students if I was at liberty to take photographs of the classroom while they were there, they immediately refused. I wanted to take a picture of the classroom that showed the seating arrangement for research purposes. Instead, I took a photo when the students were absent from the classroom (see Seating Chart - Appendix J). In order to record what occurred in the classroom and also during the interviews, I took notes while observing the class and interviewing the participants. Note-taking was helpful to follow the conversation and keep a written source to re-visit for further reference.

### **3.1.6.2 Choice of Language to be used During the Interviews**

There has been some discussion regarding the language of the interviews when the interviewer and the interviewees do not share the same language, or when the language of the study is different from that of the participants (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002). One way of helping the researcher when the language of the participant is different, is translation. Although there is extensive literature on the problem of translating scales for use across cultures, very little has been published on the problem of conducting qualitative interviews in another language with the assistance of an interpreter. A study by (Frayne et al. 1996, cited in Kapborg & Berterö, 2002) shows that the exclusion of non-English-speakers from the research is affected by various issues regarding the recruitment of subjects, as well as, for example, the nature of the study question and decreased literacy in native tongues.

In my research, I had the advantage of being an Arabic speaker, specifically the same language as that of the students. Also, since the purpose of my interview was to gain access to the students' opinions and attitudes about classroom participation, it was easier for them to express themselves in Arabic. I also retained the original interviews in Arabic as a record of the participants' views as expressed in their mother tongue because there is a possibility that the

translation might sometimes leave some of the culturally embedded notions out of the conversation if these were translated literally. Also, sharing the same language was beneficial for me as I understood the linguistic background and the culture of the students. This was helpful especially when the students used Arabic expressions, idioms, or several colloquial everyday Arabic phrases. It is also important to highlight that I interviewed teachers in English as they were either native speakers of English or were very competent non-native English speakers. Also, the interviews were conducted in English as the teachers did not speak Arabic. Alternatively, if there were some teachers who were Arabic speakers, I would then give them the choice of using their preferred language in the interviews. It would be good for me to be able to use English in order to save time in the analysis process, and not have to worry about the translation.

Having previously talked about the language used in interviews, I now outline the way I treated the data of the interview. I mentioned earlier in this section that I did not translate the Arabic interviews of the students in the analysis stage. I listened to the students' interviews and transcribed them in Arabic for the purpose of keeping the original words of the respondents, and to maintain any embedded cultural notions associated with their utterances. I read, several times, through all the Arabic transcripts of students' interviews (both male and female) and noted the points relating to the factors that influence student participation. Then, after gathering the selected data based on the aims of the study and the research questions, I organized this into themes, as shown in Table 12, Chapter 4.2. Finally, I translated some of the interviews into English for the purpose of providing evidence and to use for cross-referencing. These are attached in the Appendices section. Since teachers' interviews were all conducted in English, there was no need for any translation. I followed the same procedures that I used in analysing students' interviews. However, teachers' interviews were different in terms of the content of the questions as the aim of the interviews was to gain more information relating to the incidents that took place in the classroom.

### **3.1.7 Limitations of the Study**

Understanding the students' participation involves developing an understanding of the learners, classroom contexts, social contexts, teachers' roles, to name but a few. Similarly, each educational and classroom context differs from one country to another. Therefore, classroom interaction is not an area that could be studied and explored easily as there are many factors that contribute towards classroom participation that have the potential to influence it. Keeping these in view, this study looks only at the factors that emerged from the data.

This study, as its data suggests, is a small scale study looking at two classrooms and including a small sample of participants. It was intended to explore the factors that influence student

participation in a specific classroom context in Oman. The study was also limited geographically to the Ibri College of Applied Sciences. As mentioned earlier, the students enrolled in each College of Applied Sciences come from all over Oman, therefore conducting the study in one college may be considered to be a representative of all colleges to some extent.

## **Part - II: Piloting and the Lessons for Data Collection**

This section describes two elements of the study, namely the piloting stage and the lessons learnt towards the process of data collection. This part not only talks about the pilot study and how it was conducted, but also presents some of the practical challenges that the researcher encountered and the lessons learned from piloting the research methods.

### **3.2 Aims of the Pilot Study**

The pilot study is important in conducting research in all disciplines. It has many advantages that are helpful for the researcher. First, it helps the researcher test the feasibility of the research instruments to be used in the research (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). It also provides the researcher with practical feedback about the actual context of the study, and whether or not the particular instruments used are appropriate and useful for the study (Baker & Risley, 1994). Furthermore, a pilot study can warn the researcher about some of the potential problems associated with the process of the research. Finally, it trains the researcher on the implementation of the research instruments and the process of carrying out the research with a small-scale representation of the sample of the study. This in turn builds the researcher's confidence and also helps him familiarize himself with the process of conducting research.

#### **3.2.1 Piloting the Research Methods**

One of my colleagues voluntarily accepted to be part of my pilot study as he was interested in the research as well. I shared my research interest with him and he became interested in taking part in the study, and therefore invited me to view his class. He taught Class C 20 (C Level Foundation Year class). This is one of the levels that the study intended to observe. Therefore, we decided to use his class and students as participants in the pilot study. Later, he informed his students about my visit and my research.

##### **3.2.1.2 Piloting Classroom Observation**

Based on my knowledge of observation as a supervisor of English in schools during the years 1999-2004, I developed an understanding of conducting classroom observation. However, the nature of observation in this study differs from my previous experience. In this research I was interested more in gaining a better understanding of student participation, and also the factors

that could influence it. I attended the class and ensured the students that I was only observing their lesson for research purposes, and not evaluating their work in the class.

Classroom observation also gave me a chance to position myself in the class where I could sit without causing too much disturbance to monitor what was actually going on. I therefore, sat in the last row of the classroom within the male students' corner, from where I aimed to observe both the male and female students. I used a tape recorder to record the lessons and an observation sheet to write comments about the lesson being observed. There were 7 male and 13 female students in the classroom, and the lesson went on for about 50 minutes. It was difficult to decide on what to observe as the aim of this pilot study was to gain first-hand experience of observing the context of the study. However, I wrote the following guidelines or tasks to observe and follow in the class. These are similar to the aim of the study and I felt they will guide me and help me to focus on specific tasks.

Thus, I focused on the following points:

- Recording what the students were doing while they were involved in a task.
- How the students responded to the teacher's questions or their classmates?
- Who answered the teacher's questions or posed questions to the teachers?
- How the students worked together?
- Whether the male students work with the female students?
- How teachers managed their class and dealt with students?

### **3.2.1.3 Piloting the Interview**

Piloting the interview is also important as it helps the researcher test the prepared questions to see if they are clear and are able to generate good responses from the interviewees (Cohen et al., 2007). It also offers the researcher an opportunity to practice asking the questions and understand the perceptions of interviewees about the questions. Piloting interviews also helps the researcher modify the questions (Yin, 2009), and enables him to devise suitable prompts to encourage interviewees to express their views more openly.

I conducted the interview immediately after the lesson because the students had already had a full day of study and were only available for an hour after class. The interview lasted for about 30 minutes. Three male and five female students attended the interview. The interview began with general questions where the students introduced themselves and talked about some of their personal backgrounds (their town, command over the English language, parents' education etc.). Five questions were discussed in the interviews, based upon the students' attitudes about their participation in class, and the factors that influenced their participation. These questions included the following:

- 1- Do you think it is important to participate in the class? And why?
- 2- Does the atmosphere of the class or being in a mixed classroom promote participation?
- 3- Do you think that the teacher's gender influences your participation in class, and if yes, how?
- 4- What are your parents' attitudes toward your study in college? Do they support you? And how?
- 5- What else could help you to enjoy the lesson and participate?

### **3.2.2 Advantages of Piloting the Research Methods**

Generally, the pilot study proved to be of great use as it gave me experience in conducting observation and interviews. It also informed the research methodologically as I modified the way I observed the class, and also conducted the interviews during the actual data collection process as highlighted below.

#### **3.2.2.1 Classroom Observation**

- 1- I was planning to focus on one group in each class that might have a mixture of both boys and girls, but this was not possible as the class was organized and divided almost into two halves, where boys sat in one corner and girls sat in the other. This greatly limited my preference of focusing on one group alone. Therefore, I decided to observe the class as a whole and observed the two corners of the class, making notes of who participated in the class. I also observed students as groups when they were undertaking group work.
- 2- It was difficult to hear what the students were saying when they were involved with some of the tasks. I was not close enough to the students. They were talking quietly and when I looked at them they further lowered their voices. Their voice was also not clear on the recorded tapes because I placed the recorder on the table where I was sitting. I therefore changed the position of the tape recorder when I initiated the data collection stage. I also changed my own seated position in the class, as I assessed that it would be better to sit in the middle row in order to be as close as possible to both male and female students.
- 3- I felt that the students were a bit shy because of my continuous presence in the classroom. Many of them hid their faces, only looking down at the table and trying to avoid being seen by me. When I looked at the group, they whispered their answers and discussed the task quietly. I managed to make myself familiar to the students and built a good relationship with them by arriving at class

earlier, even before the teacher. I also engaged in some informal chat sessions, so that the students felt more comfortable and less concerned about my presence in the class.

- 4- I had to be careful not to give the teachers too much detail about what I was observing as I felt that during the pilot study the teacher tried to tailor his teaching styles and methodology in order to modify his lesson in such a way that it included the research topic. During the data collection stage, I informed the teachers about the aim of the research as it was their right to know. I told them, however, that I was looking for general classroom lessons and they should not worry about making their lesson reflect exactly on what I was looking for. Every lesson had good data, especially when it was being conducted naturally.

### **3.2.3.2 Interviews**

- 1- Because both male and female students were interviewed together, this caused a kind of resistance and created an uneasy feeling amongst some of the participants. Thus, during the data collection stage, I interviewed each gender separately. This gave them the freedom to talk about themselves and also to talk about issues that were gender-sensitive. For example, girls expressed that the boys passed comments when they answered questions and sometimes even laughed at them. They would not possibly have said this had they been accompanied by the boys in the same interview.
- 2- Asking questions and following up the interviewee's answers is important in interviews. For example, I felt that I did not allow students enough time to answer the first question, and immediately went to the second question without asking the interviewees for more explanation. Thus, during the actual interviews, I gave students more prompts to continue expressing themselves and providing more detail.
- 3- Some of the students were quiet during the interviews. It could be that they were shy or maybe they did not have the courage to speak. I called on some of those participants and asked them to express their views. This encouraged them to talk more and express their opinions. This aspect was also emphasised while making use of the students' diaries as a third research method in my study, where it allowed the students to express their views more openly.

### Part - III: The Process of Data Collection and Analysis

#### 3.3.1 The process of data collection

This part describes and outlines the structure and the process of data collection in the main study. It provides information about the participants of the study, specifically both the teachers of English and the targeted Foundation Year students, and also the classroom being observed. I have used tables to present some of the data about the participants. This section also discusses the procedures followed in collecting the data and how they were carried out, as well as talking about some of the constraints associated with the process of data collection. It then moves onto describing the research methods used for data collections, namely the classroom observation, the interviews and also the students' diaries in more details. Previously in the above section 3.8, I described the method used in the pilot study, while in this section I discuss the main research methods in more detail.

Furthermore, this section also discusses some of the issues relating to the use of tape-recording or video-taping in research, as well as the language used in interviewing the participants. The section concludes by talking about the quality issues of the research, such as generalizability and trustworthiness.

The process of data collection was carried out in three inter-dependent and concurrent stages, as shown in Table 6 below. The decisions outlining the structure of data collection were based upon the aim of the research and also the researcher's interest in gaining a deeper insight and understanding of the factors influencing students' participation over different times of the participants' Foundation Year program. It is also important to mention here that the aim of the study did not look at time as a variable that influenced the study. The decision was also informed by the principles of the ethnographical and grounding theory standpoints which emphasized the concurrent collection and analysis of the data gathered during the course of this study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; and Charmaz, 2003).

Stages	Methods	Dates	Completed
Stage 1	Classroom observation	November 2012 to December 2012	2 teachers were observed
	Interviews (students and teachers )		2 teachers were interviewed and some students from each of the two classes observed, were

Stages	Methods	Dates	Completed
			interviewed
	Students' diaries		2 diary entries were sent to my university email
Stage 2	Classroom observation	February 2013- March 2013	4 teachers were observed
	Interviews (students and teachers )		8 students and teachers' interviews were conducted
	Students' diaries		15 diary entries were collected
Stage 3	Classroom observation	April 2013- 10 June 2013	2 teachers were observed
	Interviews (students and teachers )		2 interviews (students and teachers )
	Student's diaries		No diaries were collected

**Table 4 Details of the Structure of Data Collection**

### 3.3.2 Stages of Data Collection

Data was collected in three stages during the academic year 2012-2013. Two classes were observed at three different times i.e. at the beginning of semester one; towards the end of semester one; and at the end of the semester two.

Table (7) shows some details about the participants of the study. The names of the teachers are pseudonyms towards maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

Teacher (pseudonym)	Gender	Nationality	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Teaching Experience in Oman
Shanti	Female	Indian	Many	1 year
Debra	Female	American	7 years	2 years
Nicole	Female	UK	More than 20 years	1 year

Tany	Female	American	5 years	1 year
Susan	Female	American	15 years	1 year
Rashid	Male	American	Many years	1 year

**Table 5 Participants of the Study**

### 3.3.2.1 Classroom observation

#### 1- Stage One

I began stage one during the second month of the first semester in November 2012, in Iabri CAS. Classroom observations were aimed at capturing what occurred in class at three different times. The first observations were aimed at observing and exploring student and teacher participation over a period of one semester. Two classes were observed voluntarily from the Foundation Year classes: class level (C) and class level (B). The levels of the classes were recommended by the Head of the Department with an agreement from the teachers who were willing to take part in the research. They all signed the consent forms, see Appendix (C)

There were also some considerations regarding the choice of the class and the preference of the researcher that the classes should have a mixed gender composition according to the aims of the study, which is also the nature of the classroom in the college. Another observation was that the number of female students in the Foundation Year outnumbered the male students during the academic year 2012 - 2013. These facts about the classes greatly influenced the study regarding the choice of the classes, and also the focus of the study. Initially, I planned to focus on one group which might have had a combination of male and female students in each classroom, but after the piloting stage it became unfeasible to focus on one group alone due to the structure and organization of the classroom as mentioned earlier. The class was divided into two corners; boys sitting in one corner and girls in the other. The idea was to see how boys and girls worked together in one group, and also to observe how they participated. I modified the focus of the observation and decided to observe the class as a whole. More detail about the actual data collection during the three stages will be discussed systematically in the following sections of this chapter. Table 8 below shows dates of classroom observation during the three stages.

Teacher (pseudonym)	Class	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Debra (T A)	B (20)	5/11/2012	-	-

Teacher (pseudonym)	Class	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Shanti ( T B)	C (20)	5/11/2012	-	-
Nicole ( T 1)	C20	-	Visit (1) 25/2/2013 Visit (2) 24/3/2013	Visit (3) 14/4/2013
Rashid ( T 2)	C 20	-	Visit (1) 11/3/2013 Visit (2) 2/4/2013	Visit (3) 13/4/2013
Sara ( T 3)	A 10	-	Visit (1) 6/3/2013 Visit (2) 31/3/2013	-
Tany ( T 4)	A 10	-	Visit (1) 12/3/2013	Visit (3) 20/4/2013 Visit (4) 19/5/2013

**Table 6 Chronology and Stages of Classroom Observation**

The reason for choosing two different classes that have different levels of English (level C and level A), see Chapter One, Section 1.2.4.1 and Table (2), was based on the assumption that students of the higher language proficiency level may be more capable of using the language which could help in increasing their participation. Although I have this assumption, I did not base my observation in the light of this preconceived assumption but rather allowed the data to emerge as it happened. I also need to clarify that each classroom was taught by two different teachers. This was because students studied two different courses: ‘General English Skills’ and ‘Academic English Skills’, See section 1.2.4.1.

As shown in the table above, two teachers (Shanti and Debra) were involved in Stage One. Shanti taught class C10 and Debra taught level B10. I observed them only once as it was in the middle of the first semester. I recorded classroom observations, students’ interviews and teachers’ interviews to collect data and to help triangulate it using those methods. Table 9 below shows the classroom observation sessions conducted during the study, and the duration of time taken for each session.

Teacher (pseudonym)	Classroom Observation	Date	Interview Length
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Teacher (pseudonym)	Classroom Observation	Date	Interview Length
Shanti C20	Observation 1	5/11/2012	48:10 minutes
Debra B 20	Observation 1	5/11/2012	01:06:18 minutes
Nicole class C	Observation 1	25/2/2013	49:05 minutes
Susan	Observation	31/3/2013	48:56 minutes
Tany A	Observation 1	14/4/2013	40:17 minutes
Nicole class C	Observation 2	14/4/2013	20:00 minutes
Rashid C	Observation 2	16/4/2013	01:04:10 minutes
Tany A	Observation 2	20/4/2013	55:35 minutes
Nicole	Observation 2	24/3/2013	NA
Susan	Observation 1	6/3/2013	NA

**Table 7 Classroom Observation Sessions**

As suggested by the grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), I took notes (theoretical memos) of both the verbal and non-verbal interactions and any other significant remarks that might have the potential to enrich the data. It was assumed that the students at the beginning of the course were newer to the classroom environment, as compared to other students and teachers, and this might have had affected the way they interacted with their teachers and other classmates (Biggs, 1999). Similarly, as they became acquainted with each other, they might have become familiar and felt more comfortable about taking part in class and participating more (Javid et al., 2012). Furthermore, the teachers' role and their understanding of their students might have changed over the course of the semester. Teachers could have developed knowledge and an understanding of what the learners were like in terms of their learning styles and ways of responses. Teachers could also have developed their techniques to suit the needs of the learners. Analysis of the data will be discussed in Chapter Four in more detail.

## 2- Stage Two

The purpose of the second stage of classroom observation was to further explore the data that had been collected during the first observation and the first interviews, as explained below in this section. In Stage Two, I could not continue visiting the same teachers I observed in Stage One. When the students moved to semester two, many aspects changed. All students succeeded and passed in both levels, according to the information I received from the Head of the Department (HoD) and the Foundation Year Co-ordinator (FYC). This change affected the data in stage two as firstly, all students in both levels were shuffled according to their results in semester one. This meant that some students were grouped with new students and joined new groups. Also, some students remained with the same students, as was the case in semester one. In short, I was not able to use all the student participants during stage two whom I had observed during the previous stage. Secondly, the teachers also changed, as Shanti and Debra continued teaching C and B groups in semester two respectively, but their previous students moved to levels B and A.

I sat with the FYC and looked at the list of students' names in levels (B and A) in order to see the names of the students whom I had observed before. Luckily, I found the majority of the students in the lists with only a few students missing in other groups. I identified the groups and talked to the HoD to explain the new change with regards to the new classes to be observed. Luckily, the new teachers who were teaching the new levels had agreed before to be part of the research. This was good as I did not have to ask for their new approval to participate in the study. Four teachers were involved in stage two (see Table 9 above). As mentioned earlier in this section, each level was taught by two teachers who were teaching two different courses. Although as part of this study, I was not interested in comparing the students' participation in the different courses, but looked at their participation in general, bearing in mind the research questions stated earlier in Chapter One, Section 1.3.3.

I observed the students' participation, bearing in mind the factors that had emerged and the participants' viewpoints from the collected data. At this stage, new concepts or factors which had emerged from the first data analysis, were explored and developed. It was a way of developing a deeper understanding on the emergent factors. Moreover, students and teachers might have viewed the observer differently during the second visit. The observer might not have been received as someone new and the effect of his presence might have had become less; thereby giving students and teachers the feeling that he was not a stranger. Also, the students might have interacted in class in a more natural way.

### 3 Stage Three

The third observation was collected near the end of the second semester (see Table 9) above. In addition to the advantages mentioned in stage two, this visit was crucial as it summed up all the data collected. Also, the role of the observer was oriented towards further exploration of the factors that had emerged from the previous data (Charmaz, 2003). The researcher, after this observation, could bring the process of data collection to an end (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). A final categorization of the factors that emerged from the data were constructed to be analysed and interpreted.

#### 3.3.2.2 Interviews

Interviews were aimed at gaining teachers' and the students' views on the factors that influenced the student participation in the classroom. Interviews were also aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of what actually transpired in the classroom. The data gathered at each stage informed the next observation, as highlighted by Glaser (2002).

Teachers and students were informed about the purpose of the interviews. Their permissions were obtained prior to the interviews, and they were assured of any matters of confidentiality. I arranged to interview boys and girls separately in the same class. The interviews varied according to the discussion and topics being discussed, as well as the time available, with the teachers and the students.

The following table gives information about these interviews.

Teacher (pseudonym)	Interview	Date	Interview Length
Shanti	Interview 1	5/11/2012	11:00 minutes
Debra	Interview 1	6/11/2012	09:18minutes
Nicole	Interview 1	25/2/2013	13:10 minutes
Tany	Interview 1	11/3/2013	15:30 minutes
Susan	Interview 1	20/3/2013	22:21 minutes
Tany	Interview 1	27/3/2013	14:45 minutes
Rashid	Interview 1	3/4/2013	21:58 minutes
Nicole	Interview 2	14/4/2013	10:15 minutes

Teacher (pseudonym)	Interview	Date	Interview Length
Rashid	Interview 2 catch up	14/4/2013	07:00 minutes

**Table 8 Teachers' Interviews - Dates & Duration**

The interviews lasted for average of about 15 minutes each. I conducted most of the interviews on the same day as that of the classroom observation. I gave myself some time to prepare for the interview and also to go through the notes that I had written about the lesson, as well as quickly listening to the recording of the observation. It was considered more effective to conduct the interview while the information was still fresh in my mind, as well as the teacher's mind. It was also easier to recall events that took place during the lesson. In the case of Rashid's interview on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2013 (see table 10 above), I did not record the whole interview because of a technical problem. I failed to turn on the recording device, and had thought it was recording. It was almost near the end when I checked the device and found it on the pause position. I lost some of the recording but I used the notes and my memory to recall some of the important episodes of the interview. I also asked the teacher to confirm some of my doubts regarding the notes I made later.

Students	Interview	Date	Interview length
Female Students A	Interview 1	11/3/2013	16:27 minutes
Male students A	Interview 2	11/3/2013	15:36 minutes
Female students C Nicole	Interview 3	12/3/2013	13:46 minutes
Female students C Nicole	Interview 1	25/2/2013	16:06 minutes
Nicole group mixed	Interview 3	16/4/2013	10:00 minutes
Male students C	Interview 1	14/4/2013	9:04 minutes
Female students C Shanti	Interview 1	5/11/2012	16:22 minutes
Debra Female students B	Interview 2	6/11/2012	15:09 minutes

**Table 9 Students' Interviews - Dates & Duration**

The students' interviews lasted for an average of about 15 minutes. I interviewed male and female students separately, as shown in the table above. It was only Nicole's class, Level C on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2013 (as shown in Table 11 above) where both male and female students were interviewed together. This was because of the timetable schedule factor. I tried to arrange separate interviews but it was difficult to find a mutual time when they were all free because of their timetable. They agreed to be interviewed together and I was aware of the cultural issues regarding this so I was careful to seat students away from each other so that they could speak with ease. For the same reason, the interview was conducted in their classroom so that we had enough space for the students to remain in their original seats.

Another problem associated with this situation was the problem of the recording, as I had to place the recorder in the middle of the classroom in the hope that I could capture both male and female voices. I could not record a very audible recording despite the best of my efforts, and therefore, I took notes of the key points that the students talked about. The class had a small number of participants (three boys and five girls). This interview was thus comparatively short, being only 10 minutes or so. There was also a great deal of shyness on the part of both genders, which contributed towards this shortness.

### **3.3.2.3 Student's Diaries**

The students' diaries were the third research method. Out of the two classes I observed, I only received 15 written diary entries from the participants, five entries from Class C and ten entries from Class A. Three were sent to me through my university email and I collected the rest from the students in class, while some students brought them to the office that I was allotted within the college premises.

I expected to have more diaries returned, but the students were a little reluctant in this regard. There were many reasons for the low number of diaries I received as well as why students did not write. My personal feeling suggest that students were not familiar with writing journals or diaries at this stage. Besides, writing diaries required the learners to reflect upon their learning experience and talk about themselves, as argued by (Hiemstra, 2001). It could also mean that they did not seriously something that was not part of the learning requirement from the teacher, or part of their assessment. Although these were my own projections, many studies indicate that collecting journal writing or diaries has been a problematic. (Howell-Richardson and Parkinson, 1988; Young and Fong, 2003; Yi, 2008)

However, I used several methods to encourage them to write. Whenever I visited their classes, I reminded them to write and again explained the reason for this in Arabic. I gave them hints of what to write, such as their feelings about being in the classroom and their views on their

language progress. I also reminded them during the interviews and sent emails to those who gave me their email addresses in order to encourage them to write. Furthermore, I asked their teachers to remind them of the diaries. Nevertheless, all these tactics of encouraging students to write diaries were not very successful. Finally, I had to ask them to write in the classroom after I finished observing the class. I made this optional because I told them from the start of the data collection that it was a voluntary exercise. I also did not want to force the participants to write if they did not wish to do so. The group of students who did write the diaries were told that there was no need to include their names. Nevertheless, it was difficult to judge how sincere the students were in writing their diaries. I acknowledged here that students needed more training and further orientation to encourage them to write but this was not within the scope of this study, and better preparation is required in the case of other researchers intending to use diaries in their research.

Having talked about the description of the research instruments and the data collection process, below I will highlight some of the issues relating to the quality of the research, trustworthiness and generalizability.

### **3.3.3 Quality Issues**

#### **3.3.3.1 Quality of the Research**

The quality of research depends on different aspects including the researcher's awareness of the technical knowledge involved in conducting research (Gray, 2013). This involves the researcher's clear understanding of the topic he is researching, and the mechanism of conducting research which is being used to investigate the topic (Gray, 2013). As a new researcher, I tried to equip myself with some research conducting knowledge in order to improve my general skills on undertaking research. Towards this end I attended a Research Methods course at the university. During this course, I learned about different research methods and research approaches. I became more involved by writing an assignment for the course, in which I talked about observation and interviews as part of educational research. I feel that this gave me a good reading background on how to conduct research methods and I learned about the problems associated with each method. Needless to mention the valuable role of my supervisors as they continuously guided me on how to carry out a case study based research. They also suggested some reference books to read and helped me to refine the methods I used in the research. The quality of the research was also strengthened by the use of different research methods. I used classroom observation, interviews, and students' diaries to develop a deeper understanding of the topic being researched. Each method consolidated the other and made the research methodologically and analytically coherent. The concurrent and iterative nature of the research made me visit and revisit the data for validation and also for linking themes based upon

information gathered from different sources of the data. This reinforced the triangulation and quality of the data analysis. Two other important qualities of the qualitative research are trustworthiness and generalizability, which are discussed in the next sub-section.

### 3.3.3.2 Credibility

The aspect of credibility, or trustworthiness of a qualitative research is deeply embedded within the internal validity i.e. whether the research has successfully measured what was actually intended. Another important dimension of credibility deals with the compatibility of the research findings with reality (Patton, 2005; Ary et al. 2010; Cohen et al., 2007)

In order to cater for the requirements of credibility as outlined above, I chose the methods of research accordingly. Towards maintaining the internal validity and also the research's applicability to the real world, I selected the methods of interview and observation, both of which helped establish the grounds for realism, and also streamlined the findings in accordance with the research aim and questions. This was primarily because the chosen methods of data collection incorporated the voice or points of view of the participants, instead of being subjected solely to my interpretation.

Furthermore, Ary et al. (2010) mentions a number of methods to enhance credibility in qualitative studies. These are summarized in Table 12, adapted from Ary et al. (2010:501):

Criteria	Strategies
Structural corroboration	Data triangulation Methods triangulation
Consensus	Peer review/peer debriefing Investigator triangulation
Referential or interpretive adequacy	Member checks/participant feedback Low-inference descriptors/thick, rich Description
Theoretical adequacy	Extended fieldwork Theory triangulation Interdisciplinary triangulation Pattern matching

Control of bias	Reflexivity Negative case sampling
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**Table 10 Approaches to Enhancing Credibility in Qualitative Studies**

Looking at the methods proposed in the table above, I tried to cater for some of those methods to ensure that the findings of the study answer the research questions, and it serves the aims for which it was set. The research methods used in the study (classroom observation, interviews, and students' diaries) had a strong “structural corroboration” to allow data triangulation. Although each method was used independently, the data gathered from each instrument complete the other. For example, students’ interviews were valuable in gaining in-depth data about most of the issues raised, such as talking about their behaviours in the classroom or the role of their teachers in enhancing their participation. Student diaries, which were the third research method, provided more information that helps in triangulating the data mentioned in the interviews by the students. This triangulation shows that the data was collected through different sources, and the researcher gained different points of view expressed by different instruments so that they all present better evidence from the data (Ary et al., 2010). I also used some referential adequacy strategies on some occasions to ensure that what I interpreted from the data was true to the meaning that the participants intended. For example, there were times when I consulted some of my colleagues about the meaning of some colloquial Arabic words to ensure that what I had interpreted was accurate. Another strategy for enhancing credibility was reducing the amount of my personal interference in the analysis of the data. I went through the data many times and revised my analysis. Also, I checked some of my analysis with some of the participants to make sure that I understood exactly what the participants wanted to convey.

Despite the above attempts to increase credibility, qualitative finding is context-specific but can be used in a similar context while considering any other peculiar factors associated with the original study.

### **3.3.3.3 Transferability**

The aspect of generalizability, or the transferability of a qualitative research, falls in the realm of the external validity of the research, that is whether the findings of the research can be successfully applied to similar cases or studies (Ary et al., 2010; Miles et al., 2013). The transferability or generalizing of the finding is not the goal of qualitative research, but other researchers can make use of the similarities found between the context of this study and their contexts and make use of some of the findings. Although this research suffers from a smaller sample size and also the limitations of the study being restricted to a few teachers, students and classrooms, I feel that the sample was very carefully selected from the target population, thereby

ensuring that the findings obtained from the observations, interviews, and the students' diaries from a single educational institution in Oman are accurate and generally applicable to similar cases and studies. The aspect of transferability or generalizability has also been ensured by including both male and the female participants. Also, I mentioned earlier that the context of study is very similar to the contexts of the other 5 CAS colleges in other regions of Oman. On this basis, the result of the study can be regarded as having relevance to other contexts of the five colleges in Oman generally. Other researchers wishing to make use of the findings of this study need to consider its socio-cultural context, bearing in mind any similarities and differences. I can confirm that many Muslim countries, at least in the Gulf Countries Council (GCC) (Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia), share similar Islamic culture in terms of the issue of gender, with some variations on classroom organization. Besides, on the basis of similar studies conducted in some of the GCC and mentioned earlier in this chapter, share similar findings which make the finding of this study to some extent transferable. I have also mentioned the influence of my role in this study so other researchers consider the issue of bias that can be caused by the researcher.

### **3.4 The process of data analysis:**

The analysis of the data went through various stages and trials. After collecting the data, I found that I had a vast amount of data which I needed to report. Initially, I planned to use a descriptive analysis of the lessons observed and write an account of the interviews I conducted with the participants. However, informed by the analysis of the pilot study and the lesson learned from it, (see Section 3.2.3), I further improved my understanding of data analysis. I considered another way of looking at the data and thought of a different way to analyse it. I felt that the previous strategy, as in the descriptive analysis of the whole lesson, limited my thoughts and my real involvement, considering the role of the observer as suggested by an ethnographical approach. While looking at the phenomena of the study as whole was a merit in my previous approach, it lacked the technique for observing the details that occurred in the core of the event. The latter was of an equal importance to the holistic understanding of the phenomenon of the study. I needed to delve deeper and look for details as characterized by the aim of case study research, (see Section 3.1.3.1). According to (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Cohen et al., 2007; Hulstijn, 2005), (see Section 3.1.3), the research paradigm influences or directs researchers as to what to study, how the research should be carried out, and how data could be collected and analysed, and so on.

The study aims to explore the types of participation that take place in English classes of Foundation Year students in the Ibrahimi College of Applied Sciences in Oman; understand what factors influence why it takes place or does not take place as it does; and understand the

relationship of teachers and students in mediating classroom participation. I try to uncover and understand what causes students' participation in its natural setting, the classroom, where everything in the class might have some kind of contribution. In other words, the study aimed at looking at how the cultures of students, teachers and the classroom were mediated and mingled to make one event (or events) in the class. For this event to be uncovered it required a deep understanding of the causes and importance, as well as the relevance of the event, to the study.

I followed the inductive approach which guided me in the analysis of the data. According to this approach, data is analysed through multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data (Thomas, 2006). The use of the inductive approach in the analysis of this study is consistent with the guidelines of the grounded theory that I mentioned earlier in 3.1.1. Through this approach, the researcher makes decision on how the data is analysed. For examples, decisions about what is important and what is less important helps the researcher focuses on the emergent data based on the aims of the study (Thomas, 2006). That is, the analysis would be more concise and reliable.

In light of the above, I followed the procedure suggested by the inductive approach in dealing with the raw data gathered from the research methods. As mentioned earlier in section (3.1.3.1), for collecting data I used:

- classroom observation sheet
- audio recording for recording lessons and interviews
- keeping written notes during classroom observations and interviews
- students' and teachers' interviews
- Students' written diaries I collected from the participants.

I began data analysis by transferring the data from the recordings of the classroom observation to word document texts. It was not feasible to transfer the entire data from the recording but the data was transcribed selectively bearing in mind the aim of the research. The information from the recordings and the observation sheets and the notes that shows explanations of the incidents were selected. I listened to the recording of the observation and made notes on separate sheet so that I can use them for the analysis and data cross-referencing. I transcribed the selected data from classroom observation because it was difficult and time consuming to transcribe the entire observations. Furthermore, the selected data and the notes taken from the observation were then checked with other data from the other data sources so that all together they give rich explanations to the emergent themes discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.2).

Second, regarding the interviews, I conducted 11 interviews with the teachers and 8 interviews with the participating students from the two classes observed see 3.3.2.2. I transcribed the 19 interviews followed the same procedures in dealing with both interviews. While transcribing, I

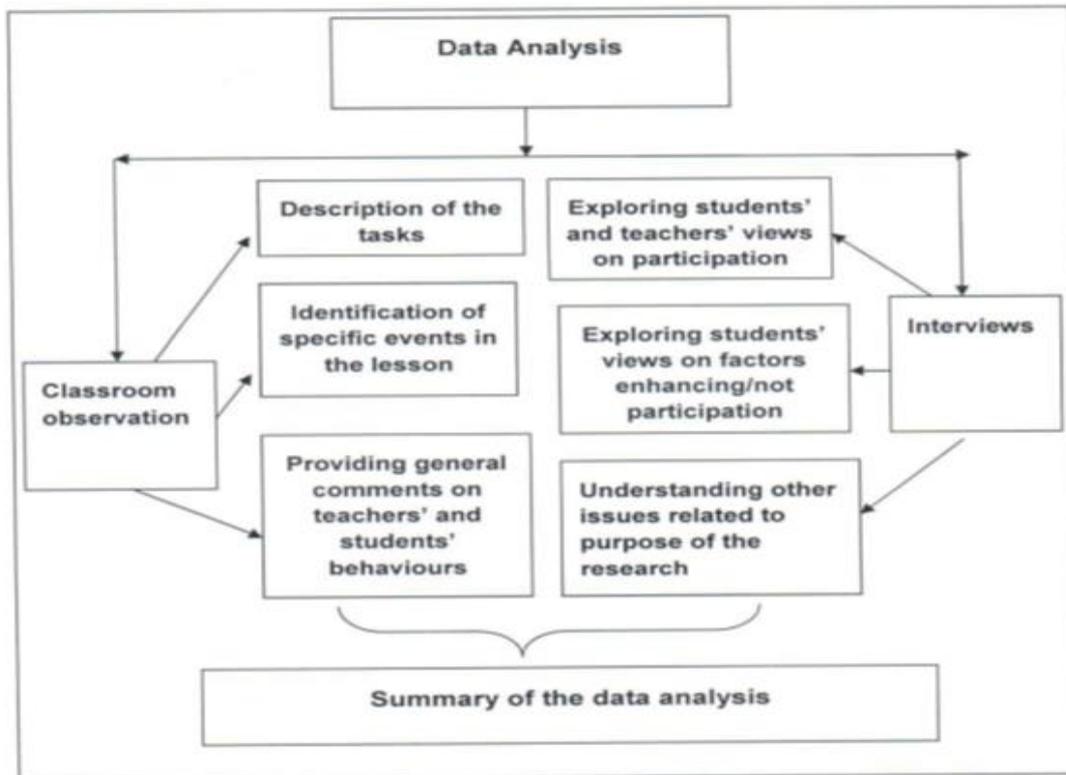
wrote down some notes from the interviews to help me make sense of the data and identify some links to the notes derived from classroom observation. However, transcribing the students' interviews took more time because as mentioned earlier that the language used in the interviews were Arabic. I listened to the recording and took notes in Arabic. I felt more comfortable and considered it more advantageous that I shared the same language the students speak because I was able to understand all what they said, whether the words were standard or colloquial Arabic. I also preferred to transcribe the interviews in Arabic to retain its original meanings. Later, I translated the selected data into English and made links to the notes I took while transcribing classroom observation, (see appendices M and N samples of teachers' and students' interviews). I also made notes about the new information emerged from the interviews and added it to the other data. I kept visiting and revisiting the data during the process of data analysis to develop a comprehensive picture of the data or the content (Newby, 2010).

Finally, regarding the analysis of the diaries, I followed a similar procedure to that of the way I treated students' interviews, mentioned above in this section. I pointed out before in section 3.3.2.3 that the diaries were written in Arabic; so I did not translate their writing to English. I read through the diaries and wrote down in Arabic all the points they mentioned which were related to the aims of the study and the research questions. The reason for not translating the diaries was based on my aim of reading and understanding the original words as expressed by the students. Some of the students expressed their views in informal language and not all students used one writing format. Some students wrote in a paragraph form and others in a form of a list of ideas and sentences see appendix (L). Overall, I understood what the students expressed in their standard Arabic and their colloquial Arabic. However, later, I translated and wrote an English version of some of the students' diaries and highlighted the extracted quotes that I used as evidence of some of the emergent factors. In the appendices, I included both version (Arabic and English), see appendices (L).

The data or the emergent factors and themes obtained from all those research instruments were grouped and examined, see Chapter 4 section (4.2) A set of themes or topics were identified and factors related to the themes were also examined (Given, 2008; Charmaz, 2014). Finally, an overall picture of the data was derived and a detailed analysis is presented in Chapter 4.

Having talked about the general process I used for analysing data, below I illustrate how I analysed classroom observation and interviews analysis using the following diagram. I designed the framework below to guide the way the data was analysed and also to illustrate the process of the analysis. These processes were applied in the analysis of the data as explained earlier in this section and also using the suggested framework below. However, the steps of the framework

were based on ideas from different researchers, such as (Kvale, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Miles et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2001; Thomas, 2006).



**Diagram 2 Summary of data analysis**

Before explaining the diagram above, it is pertinent to bring up again here the meaning of participation in this study. Participation, as discussed in 2.5.1, refers to students' verbal and non-verbal behaviours in the classroom. Participation is socially and culturally constructed in the class and therefore, it is important to look at the relationship between the interlocutors of the classroom and try to understand those related and integrated relationships. As argued earlier, what happens in the class is a result of many implicit and explicit factors that make up or determine students' participation (see Section 2.5.1 for more details). The diagram above explains the process of the data analysis. The diagram was developed in order to reflect the theoretical aspects of participation that I am taking in this study; and I argue that participation is not just what happens in the class but it is informed by the social and cultural context and the identities of the participants of the classroom.

In the coming chapter, I present the data following the suggestions made by (Miles et al., 2013; Kvale, 2008). Rather than analysing the lesson as a whole as mentioned before, I describe the task of each lesson and analyse them by looking at some specific incidents related to classroom

participation and the research questions as explained in the framework above. What I mean by the word incident in relation to data analysis is explained in Chapter 4 (section 4.1.4.1).

First, for classroom observation analysis, I described the tasks of the lessons observed by identifying specific incidents which happened in the course of the lessons, as explained below and which illustrated students' participation in different ways. In Chapter 4, for the purpose of showing evidence of students participation and students/teachers' behaviours while doing tasks in the class, I present and discuss two incidents from the tow classes I observed.

For example, I looked at how student responded to teacher's question (do they speak individually or in groups? and what types of teacher-students' interaction being used? And do students talk to each other while doing group work and in what language?)

Second, during the analysis of student interviews, I looked at their views on classroom participation, quoting examples of some of their opinions and views on participation. I then looked at students' perceptions on the factors that could promote or minimize their participation in the classroom. For example, I asked about some of their behaviours such as why they used Arabic when they were doing the task in groups. Similarly, in the analysis of teacher interviews, I looked at their views of their student participation, and their role in overall student participation in class. Examples quoted from the data are provided to illustrate this when I talk about themes and factors in Chapter 4.

Third, I analysed student diaries (see Appendix L), and identified the emergent issues which related to the research questions, and also used some of the examples of students' statements, linking them with the issues that emerged from observation and interviews. I then show the similarities of the emergent topics and elaborate on them in brief explanations. Furthermore, I quoted some of the statements and related them to the incidents I observed in the class as well as triangulate them along with the interviews and classroom observation

My decision of not including the description of the lesson and tasks is due to the vast amount of the data that would be included if I decided to comprise all the descriptions in this chapter. Reference to the data was made to give evidence from the data and show where it came from.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter embraces three parts. In this first part, I have discussed the research design and described the research methods used in the research. Then, I highlighted my role as a researcher in this study and explained that my intimacy to the context of the study is important to understand many aspects related to the context of the study. I also explained that I need to be aware of such closeness to the context and need to take a researcher perspective so that I let the

data speaks for itself and reduce my personal involvement so that I do not influence the data. After that, I described the participating subjects, and discussed some of the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. In the second part, I described the pilot study and talked about the lessons I learned for the development of the actual research data collection. In the third part, I described the process of data collection and explained the three stages through which the data was collected. Finally, I described and explained the process of data analysis used in this study. The next chapter will cover the data analysis and findings.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### Introduction

The previous chapter describes the process of data collection and talks about how it was carried out. It also describes data analysis process used in this study. This chapter is set to present the analysis of the data gathered over three stages. The literature shows many approaches to analysing qualitative data. Most researchers and scholars seem to agree on 'data reduction', 'data condensation' coding, and drawing conclusions (Kvale, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Miles et al., 2013).

The purpose of my analysis is to look for incidents that describe the culture of the classroom in order to explore and understand the factors that influence student participation in the classroom. In other words, I try to show and use different types of data to illustrate what I observed happening in the course of the classrooms and how students and teachers talked about it and how students wrote and reflected about these incidents in their diaries. Thus, I showcase some examples from classroom observation, interviews and students' diary entries as pointed out earlier in Chapter 3 (section 3.4).

The chapter presents the data following the process explained by inductive approach mentioned earlier in Chapter 3 (section 3.1.1) and my initiative designed diagram that show how the analysis of the data develop throughout the study. It is pertinent to mention here that the whole data gathered from the three different research methods is huge as explained earlier in Chapter Three, section (3.3). Therefore, I decided to talk about two lessons taught by two different teachers in different levels from the foundation year classes (A and C). I purposely described two tasks which were related to the incidents from each lessons. For each incident I described, I have selected the data from one particular lesson where I looked at classroom observation, students' and teacher's interviews and students' diaries. I provided information which were all related to one point in the data. This hopes to make the analysis rich and provides chronological links of the different sources of the data.

Section one and Section two in this chapter describe and show the analysis of the data: classroom observation, interviews and students' diaries. Examples from the different data sources are provided to give clear explanations of the incidents reported and also to show how the different data sources are linked.

The chapter ends up by highlighting key issues emerging form the data and which are related to the research questions of the study. Those issues are discussed and illustrated with evidence from the data. As mentioned in Chapter One (section 1.3.3), the study aims to explore the factors that

influence students' classroom participation at the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman. It primarily sets out to understand:

- What types of participation takes place in English classes of Foundation Year students in the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman?
- What factors influence why it takes place or does not take place as it does?
- Understand the relationship of teachers and students in mediating classroom participation.

#### **4.1. Section One:**

In stage one, two teachers were observed and interviewed. I reported each teacher individually where I analysed their classroom observations and interviews. However, here in this section I only report about one lesson (class 1, level A, group 10, for more details see table (2) Chapter one section 1.4.1.2) and I provide two episodes of what I observed in the classroom together with interview data and diary data relating to the class and based on the aims of the study as shown above. For participants' information, see table (1) in Chapter one (section 1.4.1.2). Below I provide some information about the teacher and the class observed. I also describe the lesson and the tasks achieved in the lesson.

##### **4.1.1 Classroom observation Analysis:**

The context of the classroom is very complex to understand as there are many things that happen at the same time, (Conteh, 2000; Haneda, 2006). Some of the things such as students' oral participation and behaviours as well as teacher's verbal reactions to students' participation are observable. However, others such as students' perceptions and attitudes to being in the class are not seen or implicit and may influence the dynamic of the classroom and the overall atmosphere of students' participation, (Auster and MacRone, 1994; Breen, 1985).

As mentioned above, a classroom is a world of events that happen among and is created by the participants of the class. Therefore, it is challenging to report about every event. Below I describe, with some details, one event that relates to the research aims and one aspect of the culture of the classroom. This event is relevant to the issue of "shyness and respect" and how individual students perceived and talked about it. "Shyness and respect" emerged as one of the factors that shape students' participation in the class. There is evidence from classroom observation, students' diaries and interviews that support this as shown in the analysis below. Below, I describe the context of the lesson I observed by giving information about the teacher, describing the classroom and giving a summary of the tasks achieved in the lesson.

#### **4.1.2 Background of the teacher:**

Tany is a middle-aged female teacher in her 40s. She teaches in the foundation year program. She is from the United States and has taught English for 5 years in the United States. She has a B.A in modern languages and literature and an MA in international education with connection on international students and study abroad Program. She has taught high school and adult students. This is her first year in Oman and she is teaching A-level students, group (10).

#### **4.1.3 Description of the classroom.**

I observed class (A10) on 12/3/2013 at 8:00 in the morning. 17 Omani students (8 males and 9 females) were in the class. They came from different regions of Oman. According to their A level placement scores, students were assumed to have good English skills. They had to pass this level to be eligible to start their academic studies in the college. As described earlier in Chapter one (section 1.2.4), the class is physically divided into two halves where the boys sit in one corner and female students sit in the other corner with a wide empty area between the two corners as shown in the picture of the class (section 1.2.4). Below, I give a description of the tasks that the teacher achieved in her lesson. The purpose is to show

#### **4.1.4 Description of the tasks:**

The teacher covered four tasks in her lesson. The lesson includes different language skills.

##### **Task one: (talking about favourite food, fruits and drink)**

In this task, the teacher asked students about their favourite food, fruits and drink. The students responded and the teacher corrected her students' mistakes as they structured the sentences. The teacher involved most of her students and asked many male and female students about their favourite foods and drinks. Students responded and participated in giving their answers. Then the teacher asked the students to ask her about her favourite food, fruits and drink.

##### **Task two: sorting countable and uncountable nouns and completing a table.**

The teacher revised the meaning of countable and uncountable nouns with the students. Then she began reading the words and asking students to say if the words are countable or uncountable. After checking some vocabulary items such as apples, water, coffee, etc. she asked students to work with their classmate to complete the task in their book.

Students were responding to teacher questions as a whole while the teacher was asking for the vocabulary. Then, students worked with each other in each row to complete the task. Students were talking quietly.

The teacher was active reading and writing the vocabulary in the board. She asked students questions and explained to them the vocabulary. While students were doing the task, she moved

in the class and gave some help to some students. She encouraged students to work together and referred them to the page number in the book for more information about countable and uncountable nouns.

### **Task three: listening task**

Students listened to a conversation and complete the task. They had to tick some boxes about food, fruits and drinks the speakers like. The students listened to the conversation but some students asked the teacher to repeat the conversation so that they can hear again and check their answers. The teacher asked them if the accents of the speakers were clear. The students said that the accent was clear but the speakers were a bit fast. The teacher explained the word “accent” and tried to refer students to the different accents in Oman. She told students that students from Muscat might pronounce words different from student from the interior of Oman. The teacher may not be aware of the difference but generally speaking, I think she expected that accents also exist in all languages and societies. The teacher then checked the answers with the students. The students responded as a whole class.

### **Task four: speaking**

In task four students had to practice using the grammatical structure “*would you like..... , I ‘d love and I ‘d like*”. The teacher asked students to look at the conversation in their book and then work in pairs to practice asking and answering questions using the structure above. Students worked in pairs ask and answered questions. Most students practiced silently the task and some talked in Arabic. The teacher walked in the class and listened to students practicing the task. She helped students with some of the answers.

Later, the teacher asked two female students and two male students to practice the task loud. Students did not come in front of the class but they were in their places.

Below I present the analysis of the incident (1) I observed in the classroom (A 10). I think it is crucial to explain as I said previously how I came to the decision of using the word “incident” in data analysis. According to the theoretical principles of the inductive approach, the researcher must make decisions about what is more important and less important in the data, (Thomas, 2006). Therefore, I selected one point in the data that is related to the research questions and labelled it as incident, to mean a particular event in the lesson. By reading through the different data sources, I also identified similar examples that have links based on commonalities in meaning from interviews and students’ diaries in the same lesson observed to support the data. The incident is represented by two examples or episodes that happened in the classroom I observed. As mentioned previously, the study aims at identifying examples of participation

which explain students' interaction in the classroom. This incident shows one aspect related to culture and explains how students and teacher respond and react to it.

#### **4.1.4.1 Incident one:**

There are two episodes I observed related to incident one. These events are relevant to the purpose of the research study which tries to explore what types of participation take place in the classroom and how this shape what happens in the class. It also aims to explore how the participants of the study create participation in the classroom where it happens and how they talk and write about it. There is evidence from classroom observation, students' diaries and interviews that supports and explains what happens as shown in the analysis below. However, before showing and discussing the context where the incident happens, I describe the context of the lesson I observed by talking about the teacher' background, describing the classroom and giving a summary of the tasks achieved in the lesson.

##### **1- Event one:**

I was observing class (A 10) and I noticed two examples that were related to the one of the emergent factors that I discussed later in this chapter. These examples are related to the issue of "shyness and respect". While the class was doing task three (writing task), I noticed two examples. Example one happened when the teacher asked students to write sentences on the board. Some male and female students wrote on the board but there were two female students who had different attitudes or behaviours. For example, one female student was writing a sentence on the white board and one of her arms was uncovered due to the loose sleeves of her dress. I noticed that many male students then looked down, trying to avoid looking directly at the board. I also noticed that some of the girls were uncomfortable. I observed some female and male students were looking at me.

I was sitting at the back row on the students' corner. I tried to ignore their look and pretended that I was busy taking notes and have not seen the girl. They probably felt shy that the girl's arm was not covered. I looked at the teacher to see here reaction to the student's behaviour but I observed that the teacher did not say anything or showed any reaction. Teacher's reaction did not surprise me because the teacher may not consider this as a cultural problem. However, I made a note in my observation sheet and marked the student's name so that I can investigate later about this behaviour, not by asking the student about what she did because this would embarrass her especially that I am a male observer and also an Omani who belong to the same culture of the student. I just made a note of the student's name to see what would she say about the issue of being in class with boys and whether or not this impact on her behaviour in the class. A detailed analysis of this example is discussed further below in this section.

Looking at the students' interviews, some students talked about their attitudes towards studying in a mixed-gender class and talked about their concerns which show different views on the issue

of shyness for example. For example, regarding the above example of female student whom her arm was not covered, the same student has a strong negative opinion on being with male student. She said:

*We feel shy too. You know it is better that we study alone, only with girls. We will work better and benefit more. We have been with only girls for 12 years. It is not easy to get us mixed now after those years. Really it is hard for us. They have more courage to talk in class than us. We did not dare to comment on what they said as they did. We just keep silent. We do not have that comfortable atmosphere in the class to participate, from (A10, Female interview, line 47)*

The student above expressed her attitudes about being with boys and commented that she feels shy and does not have the courage to speak. However, the data from observing the behaviour of the student and what she said in the interview might show different examples of the student's behaviour and identity. I am not sure if we can consider this behaviour expressed by the female student as a contradiction in her behaviour. Nevertheless, it is also hard here to interpret her behaviour in the class as contradicting behaviour because the student may not mean to let her sleeve go down and let her elbow or arm clear without being covered. It could be also seen from another aspect because of her "Abayia" style and design. It could also be that she was not aware that other students might interpret her behaviour in a negative way. I observed the girl's behaviour to see if she would do something like trying to pull her sleeves down or to indicate any sign of feeling embarrassed but I did not observe anything that might indicate that she was not aware of her behaviour or whether she felt sorry or embarrassed of her behaviour. Nevertheless, it is again unfair to accuse the girl for not being respecting the culture especially that other students in the class have expressed their discomfort through their facial expression; I mean they were looking at me and indicating some kind of behaviour refusal.

Another female student was also of the opinion that being with boys in class limits their participation and makes them feel shy. She wrote in her diary:

*What I did not like in the college were coeducation and the assessment system in the college. I have never studied with boys and I really felt unhappy and uncomfortable. I felt shy to participate in the classroom. Sometimes, the teacher asked a question but I felt shy to put up my hand to answer, though I knew the answer. (A 6 F)*

However, one male student expressed his feeling of being shy in his diary differently. He looked at shyness from another cultural perspective and wrote:

*"We faced problems such as shyness but this is part of our culture and traditions. We as Omanis or Muslims in general, our nature is that we feel shy when we deal with women. It is shyness with respect. As time passed by, we became familiar with each other and became like brothers." A6M*

The students' reaction to the student's behaviour in the class was a natural reaction. Judging by what the male student wrote in his diary reflects what some of the male and female students did in the class; when they tried to avoid looking at the girl's uncovered arm. There is a cultural and Islamic explanation. The Holy Quran asked and encouraged all male Muslims to lower their eyes to avoid looking at a female Muslim in a situation similar to what happens in the class. Allah the Almighty said in Surat Al- Noor, (the light) verses 29 and 30:

*"Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is Aware of what they do, (29).*

Finally, many male and female students felt that studying in a gender-mixed classroom is not comfortable for them and most of them felt shy to participate because of the opposite gender.

However, none of the male or female students talked in the interview or wrote in their diaries about what happened in the classroom regarding what they saw in relation to the female student who was not covering her arm when she was writing. Also, I did not ask about it in the interview because it is not ethical and culturally not accepted to talk about things like this with people even if you are conducting studies. The consequence might not be good as I explain this later in this section. However, there is evidence from students' interviews and diaries that students talked and wrote about the issue of shyness and how they felt in the class. This shows that the quotes I have taken from interviews and diaries which I called above "commonalities in meaning" are gathered from the raw data and they are linked to the same classroom I observed.

They provide information and are linked to the incident identified in the classroom observation. This evidence is derived from the data related to the same classroom as I conducted the interviews after the class and the diaries were also collected after the lesson observed but not all of the diaries were selected at the same time as explained in Chapter Three (section 3.1.5).

## **2- Episode Two:**

The second episode happened in the same lesson in class (A10) with the same teacher on the same day. The students were doing the writing task with the teacher. I noticed that the teacher tried to ask most students to come to the board and write a sentence. Among the students, the teacher called on one female student (Khadija) to answer and write the sentence on the board. Khadija answered the question and said the sentence but I noticed that when the teacher asked her to come to the board, she was a bit nervous and seemed not to be happy to come out.

I noticed that she looked at her classmate who was sitting next to her. She said something in Arabic but I could not hear it and it was not also caught by the recording device that I kept in the

middle of the class. From her face and reaction, I felt that she did not want to come. The teacher, however, kept calling the girl to come out. She said

*"Come on, your answer is correct and I am sure you can write it on the board"* extracted from the classroom observation recording

Then, Khadija quietly came out and went to the board. I noticed that she was looking down when she went to the board. She seems to be shy and was not comfortable going out to the board. In fact, her finger was shaking and she misspelled some words when she was writing. After the girl finished writing, she did not wait for the teacher to give her feedback on her writing on the board; but quickly walked to her chair. I think the teacher probably noticed and realised that the girl was confused and she did not want to keep her wait in front of the class. The teacher, then, asked students if the sentence was correct and she corrected the spelling.

I was watching Khadija when she sat back on her chair. She started again whispering to her classmate which I could not hear. The teacher continued her lesson.

I also made a note in my observation sheet so that I can trace this incident later when I look at the other data form the interviews and students' diaries.

In the female students' interview, the students generally talked about the effect of mixed-gender environment on their participation in the class. They said that it limited their participation and they didn't feel comfortable to participate but sometimes they had to because the teacher asked them to. In the following quote from the students' interview, some students expressed their attitudes towards gender-mixed class: Quote (1)

18	T.	Yeah and then you get used to the teacher's way, what else?	
	Am	Shyness	
19	T	Shyness?	
20	Am	Yes, Shyness. We feel shy especially when the boys are here in the class. We can't talk louder because sometimes the male students make some jokes if we make grammar mistakes or if we give wrong answer. At the beginning, we did not talk at all but now it is better. We get used to study with the boys.	
21	Ab	I think it would be better if the teacher gives us a task where boys and girls work together. I do not mind but maybe other girls will not like it.	
22	Many students	we do not want to work with the boys	There was disagreement on what Ab said regarding her suggestion of the task. Many girls

			strongly expressed their opposition to what Ab suggested.
23	T	So you do not prefer to work with the boys?	
	Ab	No, it is better to work together with only girls.	

Later, I looked at the student' diaries and many students described their first experience in the college. For example, looking at what Khadija wrote, she expressed that she was not comfortable to participate in the class or talk in the presence of the male students. The following quote expressed her attitude:

*“But in the college, in the first day, I was shocked to see groups of boys and I felt shy and wondered how I would study with those boys whom I am not used to. Therefore, I faced difficulties learning in the presence of boys with us in the class. I could not cope with it and I was not able to talk in the class and even to walk when the boys were there.” (A2F)*

The above quote by the student may explain and reflect her behaviour in the class when she did not want to go out and write on the board. She might also try to confirm her reaction by whispering to her classmate. I cannot speculate exactly what she was saying to her classmate but my two observations to her behaviour before going and after coming from the board might give a hint that the student has talked about her discomfort to go out to the board and as if she was trying to explain to the student that she did not want to go but she could not refuse the teacher's command and order. Also, such behaviour conducted by Khadija is a common behaviour in the Omani culture that people would normally do. They do not speak in public but they can whisper to friends or classmate. This is based on my own experience in classroom and also in other similar contexts. This analysis is elaborated later in this chapter.

On the other hand, I observed the teacher's behaviour or action regarding the two episodes above. The teacher's reaction was normal in the sense that she might have considered the behaviour of the first student who was showing her arm as something normal as I mentioned before. That is why she did not comment about it in the class and neither in the interview with her later after the lesson. Also, driven by my cultural background and understanding of both the Omani culture and the western culture that such behaviour can be considered as normal as in the case of the western culture while it is the opposite in other culture as in the case of some Islamic culture. As I explained in Chapter Three (section 3.1.4.2) the nation of the insider/outside position of the researcher, I was aware of the cultural background of how students felt about the

behaviour of that student. I did proposed some explanation of that incident based on my shared knowledge of the context, but I my explanation is not a clear cut as it is difficult to speculate exactly what the girl might think of here behaviour. Besides, much of what happens in the class is not born at that moment but rather it has deep rooted causes that differ from one individual to another. This again goes in line with the definition of students' participation in this study that students' participation is socially constructed; see the suggested model of Classroom Interaction Umbrella I explained in Chapter Two section (2.1.2). I also here restate that studies of class interaction and participation tend to suggest that the classroom is a world of its own, with its own rules and conventions. Furthermore, the classroom cannot be isolated from the outside social world which is brought in by the teachers, students, materials, culture, and all other related factors that enhance and influence the learning and teaching process, (Conteh, 2000; Weaver and Qi, 2005).

Finally, in episode two, the teacher' reaction to the student who quickly went back to her chair may reflect that the teacher seems to understand the stress which was put on the student. I observed that the teacher did not ask the student to wait until she gave her feedback and also she did not ask her to correct the sentence on the board like what she did with some other students in the same lesson. I observed that she asked students to rectify the sentence on the board, if it has some grammatical or spelling mistakes. Once again, it is difficult to interpret the causes of why the teacher did not ask the student to stay and have a discussion with her regarding her writing on the board. One reason could be that the teacher used different correction techniques where at one time she asked the same student to rectify his or her problem and at another time she preferred to ask other students to correct their peers' mistakes so that she involves other students in classroom participation.

Similarly, when I analysed teacher's interview, the teacher expressed her lack of the experience of the educational system used in Oman and she is learning about the culture and the system. She commented:

*“ I had no expectations. I had no knowledge about Oman in terms of being a country. I didn't have any idea about the education system and the culture in Oman. I'm learning as I go along as to how the education system set up.”, teacher's interview lines (19-21).*

Also the teacher talked about the importance of involving all students in the class. She called most of the students to participate based on her own technique. She used a plastic bag in which she has all the names of the students written in pieces of papers. She picked a paper and called on the name. That is why the female student was asked to answer even though she did not raise her hand to answer. I observed that the female student did not put her hand to answer but she was asked by the teacher. The teacher explained this in the interview:

*“They do not know when they are going to be called. At the same time, it gives everybody a chance to participate without having the same people who are always willing to participate and give the answers” teacher's interview lines (105-108)*

Finally, the teacher did not talk about the two incidents in the interview but she expressed issues related to the research questions and are discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Five.

The above incidents explain some examples of the emergent factors discussed later in this section. Section two below describes another two incidents from class (C 20).

## **4.2 Section Two**

### **4.2.1 Incident two:**

#### **4.2.1.1 Background of the teacher:**

Shanti (T2) is an Indian female middle-aged teacher. She has been teaching in the college for two years. She started her teaching in the Middle East in Oman. She taught six FY groups. Class (C10) which I observed was her 6<sup>th</sup> class; and as she commented in the interview that she found it to be the best group so far in the college. She enjoyed teaching this group and tried helping them improve their English language. She commented,

*“This is my 6<sup>th</sup> group I would say with the foundation. In these ... with the sixth group that I have I think this is the best foundation group I've had lately. Very enthusiastic students and as ... In the beginning I thought the C group I was... unhappy, but when I met the class, I think they are very bright students and they're very interested.”(Teacher's Interview, C10, line 8-13)*

The following table shows information about class (C10)

Class	Class C (10)
Number of students	17
Number of male students	5
Number of female students	12
Level of English	Level (C)
Nationality	Omani
Regions in Oman	They came from all the regions of Oman

In the following sections, I begin analysing the lesson by describing the tasks of the lesson and analysing some incidents that show students participation in the lesson and looking at how teacher and the students manipulate participation. Through this analysis, I try to answer research questions mentioned earlier in (section 1.3.1) and also in the introduction of this chapter.

### **2.3 Classroom observation Analysis:**

I observed class (C10) on 5/11/2012 from 11:00 to 12:00 during the first semester of the academic year 2011-2012. The class had 17 students (5 boys and 12 girls). 16 students were present on this day and one female student was absent. The topic of the lesson was about inventions and the textbook used was Headway Plus (pre-intermediate). The objectives of the lesson were to talk about time and to revise using past tense in new sentences to talk about the invention of different technological devices. During this lesson, the teacher completed three tasks but I only describe tasks (two and three) in which the incidents occurred. Relevant data from interviews and students' diaries are provided to complement data analysis.

#### **4.2.1.2 Description of tasks**

##### **Task two:**

During task (2), students matched the verbs with some pictures (inventions). They used the verbs to describe the pictures and make sentences, such as (she wears jeans; she used the phone, etc.). The teacher introduced the word “invention” and asked students if they knew the meaning of invention. Some students probably knew the equivalent in Arabic but they could not express it in English. As I was observing students, I heard one male student saying the meaning of the word “invention” in Arabic. I was not sure if the teacher heard him as she just went on asking students to get their dictionaries and look up the word. But, even if the teacher heard him, she would not understand the word because she did not speak Arabic.

After students found the meaning of invention, the teacher explained it to them in simple English. Then, they started the task. The teacher made sure that students knew the objects in the pictures by using whole-class response technique and going through the names with all students. Then, students used the verbs to put them in the right box which described the picture. Students only matched the verbs with the picture and did not change the verbs to the past.

##### **Analysing task two classroom observation**

Before analysing and discussing the incident, I began by commenting on one observation I noted regarding the audio recording which happened while the students were doing task two. I placed the audio recording on a table in the middle of the class in the girls' corner for a better position to record the lesson, as explained earlier in Chapter Three (section 3.1.6.1)

During task two, the students were discussing the task in pairs and they were using their dictionaries. I observed one female student talking to her classmate about the recorder as it was close to their table. The students were talking quietly. One female student was a bit more articulate and was speaking in a loud voice in Arabic that I could hear. Another student whispered to her and pointed to the recorder using facial expression (head movement) to remind her to be quiet. Then, the girl stole a glance and reservedly looked at me and softly looked down at her table. I was not sure whether that student wanted to remind her that her voice was being recorded or whether that I was there and she wanted her to be quiet. I felt that there was something they did not like about being recorded. As explained earlier in (section 3.1.6.1), while piloting the classroom observation, I had to change the position of the tape recorder because when I placed the recorder on one of the student's table, I saw the girl moving the tape recorder to another table behind her. I did not ask her for the reason as I felt that she did not want it to be close to her. This example and what happened in the class in the pilot study could indicate that some students do not want their voices to be recorded but they also do not mind recording the class as a whole. They expressed this when I asked them at the beginning of the lesson that I am going to use an audio recorder in the class. Also, prior to the classroom observation, the students were informed about the recording before the beginning of the study and they filled the consent form in which they agreed that the lessons and the interviews will be recorded. From this example, I can relate this again to the topic of "shyness" which was explained briefly above when I talked about incident one in (section 4.1.4.1). The female students normally speak in a low voice and this is part of the culture as well as the teaching of some of the social norms and the teaching of Islam. This is elaborated more in Chapters four and five.

Now, I move to describe and analyse task two. Below there are two events related to the use of the mother tongue "Arabic" that I observed and noted in this lesson.

#### **Event One:**

The following extract from the lesson shows a short students-teacher exchange while students were engaged in doing task two of the lesson. It shows the situation where the students used Arabic in the class.

Extract (1) below shows the use of the word invention (اختراع , Ikh-ti-raa):

Line	Speaker	Statement	Comments
001	Teacher	Let us come back to the page. There are ten pictures. Can you see the pictures?	
002	Many students	Yeeees	
003	Teacher	and what are they talking about?..... famous inventions... and what is the meaning of inventions?	

004	Male student	invention	
005	Teacher	Good, what is the meaning?	
006	Female student	something new	
007	Male student	invention ...new اختراع ( Ikh-ti-raa)	(اختراع - Ikh-ti-raa) is an Arabic word
		(Students began using their dictionaries to look up the word) after about 1 minute, the teacher began talking	
008	Teacher	ok, can you check the meaning of inventions? Quickly..	
009	Teacher	Looking at you dictionaries can you find the meaning of invention?	
		( the students were looking up the words in their dictionaries for about two minutes)	
010	Teacher	(The teacher moves around in the class looking at what the students were doing) Amina? , Again you do not have a dictionary?	
011	Amina (spoke in a low voice)	<b>absent</b>	“Absent” an Arabic word. It means lost
012	Teacher	Absent? Yeess	
		Laughter in the class	
		Hamdan , male student, puts up his hand to give the answer	
013	Teacher	yes, Hamdan.	
014	Hamdan	if someone have invention, it is a new thing	

Looking at the extract (1) above, I made the following observation:

In my observation, I noted that some students used Arabic when they talk to each other in the class. This was apparent when they were looking up the word “invention” in their dictionaries. One of the use of Arabic words in the class was a literal translation of the word “invention” where a male student in line (007) above used the equivalent word, “Ikh-ti-raa” اختراع. This was the answer given by a male student to the teacher’s question:

005	Teacher	Good, what is the meaning?	
006	Female student	something new	
007	Male student	invention ...new اختراع ( Ikh-ti-raa)	(Ikh-ti-raa) is an Arabic word

The student automatically shouted out the answer in Arabic. The teacher did not know the Arabic word but also did not comment and continued listening to other students' responses. She asked them to look up the meaning of the word in English in their dictionaries.

Furthermore, no other comments were made by the other students when they heard the Arabic word but it seemed that it helped them to know the meaning of the English word in Arabic but they continued to look up the word in their dictionaries.

From my experience as a teacher in the same context, it is common that students when taught by Arab teacher often give literal translation or equivalent words in Arabic to show that they understand the meaning of English word. This, of course, depends on the teacher's approach to teaching English and whether or not they allow the use of Arabic in their classrooms. The use of the mother tongue in second and foreign language classrooms has been intensively discussed in the literature and there are different views on this matter (Ellis et al., 1994; Rababah, 2002; Al-Issa, 2006; Malallah, 2000). This is not part of my study but I am looking at this point from another dimension related to how this might influence students' participation. However, the data from classroom observation of the lesson above and data quoted from the other sources used in the study reveal that Arabic is being used by the students in different occasions as I discuss later in this section.

### Event Two

The following event that shows another use of Arabic vocabulary in the classroom also happened in the same lesson above during task two. The teacher was moving in the class to check the students work while they were looking up the meaning of the word "invention" in their dictionaries. The teacher noticed that one girl did not have her dictionary as she was working with her classmate. The following extract shows the use of an English word in a wrong contextual meaning:

010	Teacher	(The teacher moves around in the class looking at what the students were doing) Amina? , Again you do not have a dictionary?	
011	Amina (spoke in a low voice)	<b>absent</b>	"Absent" an Arabic word. It means lost
012	Teacher	Absent? Yees	

I analysed the event using my shared linguistic background to that of the students as objective a way as possible. As mentioned earlier that Arabic is my mother tongue and also I belong to the same social and cultural background, see Chapter Three (section 3.1.4.2.). I also have a good

command of English that qualifies me to judge the misuse of the vocabulary that the student used in that context.

The student used the word “absent” to mean that she lost her dictionary. The word “Absent” in English does not mean “lost”. The student used the word “absent” as a literal translation because she thought it can express the same meaning as the word “Ghaeyeb” (غائب) which means “lost” in Arabic. Interestingly, the Arabic word (Gh-ae-yeb) has three different meanings:

- 1- a person who is missing,
- 2- something that is lost,
- 3- a dead person, (in many Omani dialects)

Looking at the above meanings of the Arabic word, the second meaning better matches what the student intended to mean. Nevertheless, the word “absent” in English is not an equivalent to the word اختراع “Ghaeyeb” in Arabic in which the student wanted to express that her dictionary was lost. Furthermore, surprisingly, “absent” in English does not mean something lost but in Arabic language, when the word translated in Arabic, it could be used and be correct to use the translation of “absent” in that context, meaning something lost. Here, I do not plan to give a deep linguistic analysis of the use of the two words in English and Arabic. However, the example above may indicate that the students try to communicate in English with the teacher and convey the message they want. Going beyond the context of the classroom, we can refer to such linguistic phenomenon as “cross-linguistic influence” or “language transfer”. Foreign language learners sometimes use different ways to express their ideas in the second language. That is to say, they search for whatever possible and present knowledge in their first language to use in order to communicate and to fill any linguistic gaps in the foreign language. The above is example is one of the ways that students use.

By having a close look at the behaviour of the participants in this episode (i.e. the students, the teacher and the rest of the class), the following remarks could be drawn. First, looking at the teacher’s response to the student’s response, I observed that the teacher did not comment on the student’s response but she repeated the word “absent” in a rising intonation with exclamation tone followed by “yees”. It seems to me that the way teacher responded to the student by saying “yees” may indicate that the student was used to forget her dictionary and that is why she did not inquire more about where the dictionary was. I am not sure about what meaning the teacher understood from the word “absent”. Her exclamation tone might mean that she did not find the word “absent” appropriately used in that context. Another interpretation could be that she was suspicious about her answer and may not believe the student. She just stopped there and was satisfied with the student’s response and moved on to let Hamdan, a male student, to answer the question as shown in the extract below.

10	Teacher	(The teacher moves around in the class looking at what the students were doing) Amina? , Again you do not have a dictionary?	
11	Amina (spoke in a low voice)	<b>absent</b>	“Absent” an Arabic word. It means lost
12	Teacher	Absent? Yees	
		Laughter in the class	
		Hamdan , male student, puts up his hand to give the answer	
13	Teacher	Yes, Hamdan.	
14	Hamdan	if someone have invention, it is new thing	

On the other hand, some male and female students laughed when they heard the students answer as shown in the extract above. I also observed and paid attention to the students who laughed to see if they make any verbal comments but I did not hear any comments. I did this because some female students mentioned in one of the interviews that the male students sometimes said comments when the female students made any mistakes in the classroom. In my interview with the students of this class after the lesson, they talked about this observation that students commented in the class and sometimes they laughed and that discouraged them from participating in the classroom For example, the following quote from the female interview shows it: (quote 2)

33	T	I see. We talked about some of the things which demotivate you, you mentioned the issue of teacher, students' desire and so on, do you think of other things?	
34	MS	The boys , really they disturb our participation too much in the class	
35	AN	Yes, they boys commented on our answers and they make noise. When we give answer, they comment immediately.	
36	T	How?	
37	AH	Last semester, they were really disturbing us too much, they laughed at us and they commented on everything. We could not participate.	

The students expressed their discomfort about the comments made by the students. My own interpretation about the laughing of the students could be that the students knew that the girl did not use the right word. It could also mean that the students were laughing because of the situation in which the student was trying to respond to the teacher's question.

Finally, looking at the reaction and the behaviour of the student herself after giving her response, she seemed to be confident on the use of the word as she quickly responded which might indicate that she was sure of using the word correctly. She did not seem to be embarrassed when the students laughed at her answer. I also did not ask the student about it in the interview because I did not want to bring it again so that the girl would not feel embarrassed. The student might also get used to their comments and decided to ignore them.

Other students in the interview also commented about studying with the boys. Besides the comments on students' laughter above, female students also mentioned that they prefer to study alone and not with the boys as shown below. They relate this to "shyness" issues that I talked about in Incident One above (section 4.1.4.1), see quote (3) below.

5	T	I see. So how do you see your participation in relation to the classroom atmosphere being together with boys?	
6	All	Good, we like it.	
7	Z S	Good but you know sometimes we feel shy. Sometimes even when our voices became loud we feel embarrassed and shy.	
8	T	So do you sometimes feel this is as hindrance to your comfort and participation?	
9	Z G	I think it is better if they keep boys with boys and girls with girls but they mix us because they want us to get used so that when we specialize in the second year we will be mixed and are used to being in mixed class.	

Regarding "shyness", the students of this class had two different viewpoints. One view point was that some students thought being in a mixed-gender was not good. They expressed their shyness and uneasiness to participate in the class when the boys were in class. One student commented that we felt "shy and embarrassed" even when our voices were loud. Another student preferred to have boys and girls separated in the classroom but also thought that studying in such learning environment is good. Their comments are below:

*“Good but you know sometimes we feel shy. Sometimes even when our voices became loud we feel embarrassed and shy.” (Students’ interview ZS, line 7)*

*“I think it is better if they keep boys with boys and girls with girls but they mix us because they want us to get used so that when we specialize in the second year we will be mixed and are used to being in mixed class. (Students’ interview ZG, line 9)*

The other viewpoint, however, was that some students felt that it was good to have boys in the class. They felt that they need to mix with the boys because the situation of workplace is made up of both male and female.

*“It is good that we have boys in class so that in the future when we go to work. We might work with men. So it is good. And also if we have to do presentation in the college or in the future, there will be men as well so we need to get used to this.” (Students’ interview ZG, line 13)*

These views are further discussed in more details later in Chapter Five, (see section 5.3.2).

Finally, the issue of “shyness” is not only confined to context of mixed-gender classroom. I mean the classroom organization where both genders study in one room. There are other social and cultural aspects that are embedded and can not only be explained through the behaviours of the students. In other words, For developing a better understanding of the classroom context, one must argue that the multiple interrelated contexts need to be unfolded, analysed and explored individually (Kramsch, 1985, Conteh, 2000) (see section 2.1.1). I restate her that the organization of the classroom is organized in a way that suits the context where it belongs to bearing in mind many social and cultural considerations. For example, in exercise five in task two, the teacher asked students to match words with some objects in the picture. The teacher asked one of the female students about the meaning of the word “**make-up**” مكياج. I observed that most students laughed and some of the female students were quiet and shy. Look at extract (2):

Line	Transcript	Comments
1	T: what is make-up? Make-up مكياج	مكياج mikyaj is the Arabic word for make-up
	(All students burst in laughter)	

2	T: what is it? Show us, (addressing the female students)	
	<i>(Students were laughing and the teacher look at them and called on Sheikha)</i>	
3	T: Sheikha, What is make-up?	
4	Sheikha: (laughed) and drew a face on the air to indicate where make-up is used.)	
5	Teacher: exactly ok, shampoo, what is shampoo?	

When the teacher asked Sheikha to give the meaning of the word, Sheikha did not say any word but instead she drew a face on the air and indicated to the teacher using body language. The teacher might have understood the meaning from the situation when students were laughing and that they did not want to talk about make-up. This is my own interpretation as being an insider and part of the culture of the classroom. The word make-up is not a taboo word that cannot be talked about in public. People can talk about it normally in daily conversation but I think in this particular situation the female students did not want to talk about it in the presence of the boys. It could be for cultural reasons or it could mean that students already feel shy in the class and such vocabulary might bring in different thinking from the boys in the classroom.

Finally, the above episode shows that students feel shy to talk about things that women use such as make-up or any other words that could indicate or describe the beauty of a woman as some considered this like something which cannot be discussed in public especially when male students are present. Some students feel embarrassed to talk about this in the classroom. It could be considered as culturally undesirable. This issue is elaborated more in the cultural influences in the classroom in (section 5.1.1).

The issue of students' use of Arabic in the class is also supported by some data from students' diaries. For example, a female student from this class wrote in her diary

“Also, in the class, many girls discussed tasks in Arabic and rarely speak English. This limited our participation in the class and we lack confidence and we were afraid of making mistake in the class. But, Arabic helps us to understand the words better and we can answer the question when we understand” (C M female 5)

The student above said that using Arabic helps them in doing the task; but due to the lack of their English language, their classroom participation is limited.

A similar example where I observed students used Arabic in this class (C20) was in task three.

### **Task three**

It was about asking and answering questions about the objects in Vicky's room. Students looked at the picture in their books and ask each other questions using the language presented in the lesson: (Is there..... are there ..... and how many..?).

I observed the students working in pairs, asking and answering questions. The teacher moved around and listened to their dialogues. Extract (4) below is from classroom observation that shows a sample of two students doing the task:

Line number	Transcript	Comments
20	S2: is there any.....toothpaste?	mispronounce toothpaste
21	S1: Toothpaste? Yes..... لا	Arabic and English were used. No in Arabic was said and yes was said in English.
22	S2: no..... yes	
23	S1: هيه yes	Yes was said in Arabic and English
24	S1: (talking in Arabic): انا بسالك الحين	It means: now I will ask you
25	S1: How much .....a aaaa how much a a bottle of .....(inaudible)	
26	S2: is there	
27	S1: a lot.	
28	S1: aaaa .....(long pause)	
	S1(stopped for a long pause thinking about what to say. Then, S2 asked her to complete	Pause
29	S2: كملني .	It means : complete
30	S1: aaaaa have they got any hair brush	
31	S2: (she said in Arabic while laughing) كل شيء موجود فقط مشط حق شعرها ما موجود	It means: everything is here accept a hair comp for her hair is not here

Looking at the extract above, I made several observations about their conversation. First, the students achieved the task and they took turns asking and answering questions in pairs with their neighbours in the class. I observed that they enjoyed the task as they were laughing occasionally while they were working. While communicating with each other in the task, they had some grammatical errors which they were not aware of but this did not prevent them from doing the task. In fact, they were correcting each other in order to use the grammatical structure (is there...? are there...?) the teacher asked them to use and practice. For example, student (2) corrected student (1) in lines (25-26) when student (1) said “how much.....”?; student (2) asked her to say “Is there..?”

Those two students (see the extract above) also used Arabic when giving instructions or comments while doing the task. For instance, both student1 and student 2 used Arabic when they wanted to start. In line 24, student (1) said in Arabic, “now I will ask you”, also, student (2) said in Arabic in line 29, “complete” she asked her classmate to “continue, or complete the task”. Student (2) also answered the question in Arabic, she said “كل شيء موجود لكن مشط حق شعرها بس ما موجود”

(( موجود )) which means “everything is here except a hair brush for her hair is not here). Sometimes, when students begin talking, Arabic phrases came first. Like in line 21, the student said, “no” in Arabic. Later she realized and repeated “yes” in English.

The use of the mother tongue (Arabic) in English classroom is common in the college. From my own experience as an English teacher in the college, I have personally experienced this in my own classes. My colleagues who are not native speakers of Arabic have also mentioned this as well.

The students expressed their views about this issue and they argued that the use of Arabic in the classroom was an assist to their understanding and learning. The following quote from students' interviews below showed this argument,

75	Teacher	Ok, how about when you discuss task in class, do you discuss the task in English or Arabic?	
76	Ibtisam	Because Arabic is our language, it is easier to use Arabic when we discuss tasks in group.	
	Intisar	Discussion in Arabic is better. We understand more.	
78	Maha	Sometimes in English and sometimes in Arabic	
79	IBtisam	I feel it is easier and better to discuss in Arabic. We understand fast. In English, sometimes there are difficult words and sometimes we can't express our ideas in English.	

26	T	Yeah, I see, it has become a matter of being used to. Ok so is there any comments <sup>131</sup> made by the students when you answer or speak in the class?	
27		Yes, there are lots of comments made in the class by boys.	
28	H	Yes, boys do comment in the class	
29	AS O	Sometimes boys exaggerate when they commented in the class and the Miss got angry.	The students did not give examples about the kind of comments but I think they meant the students repeatedly commented in the class. I Inferred this from the Arabic meaning of the word “exaggerate”
30 2:50	H	Yes, I see	
31	AS O	Yes and they commented in Arabic and the Miss said please do not speak in English. The boys often do this, and then the Miss just ignored them after that.	
32	M B	She did not understand what they said because it is in Arabic	
33	T	Yes, I agree. It is not a good manner to talk in Arabic when the teacher does not know.	
34	Int O	Yes but they do not know how to comment in English	
35	AZ Q	At the beginning, boys most often make jokes about us when we speak. But now if we talk about boys' jokes and comments about the way we speak and so on, we began to understand them and now it is ok. They do not make jokes as they did before.	

So as mentioned earlier, some students used their mother tongue to help them and facilitate their understanding of the tasks and their learning. However, some male students used Arabic to make jokes and made students laugh. This did not happen in the class I observed apart from the laughing of the student when the girls said “absent”. The students mentioned this in the interview and commented that their teacher was upset about this and asked them to speak only English in the classroom. Students agreed that boys should not speak Arabic because the teacher did not understand what they were talking about. The comments that the boys said in the class

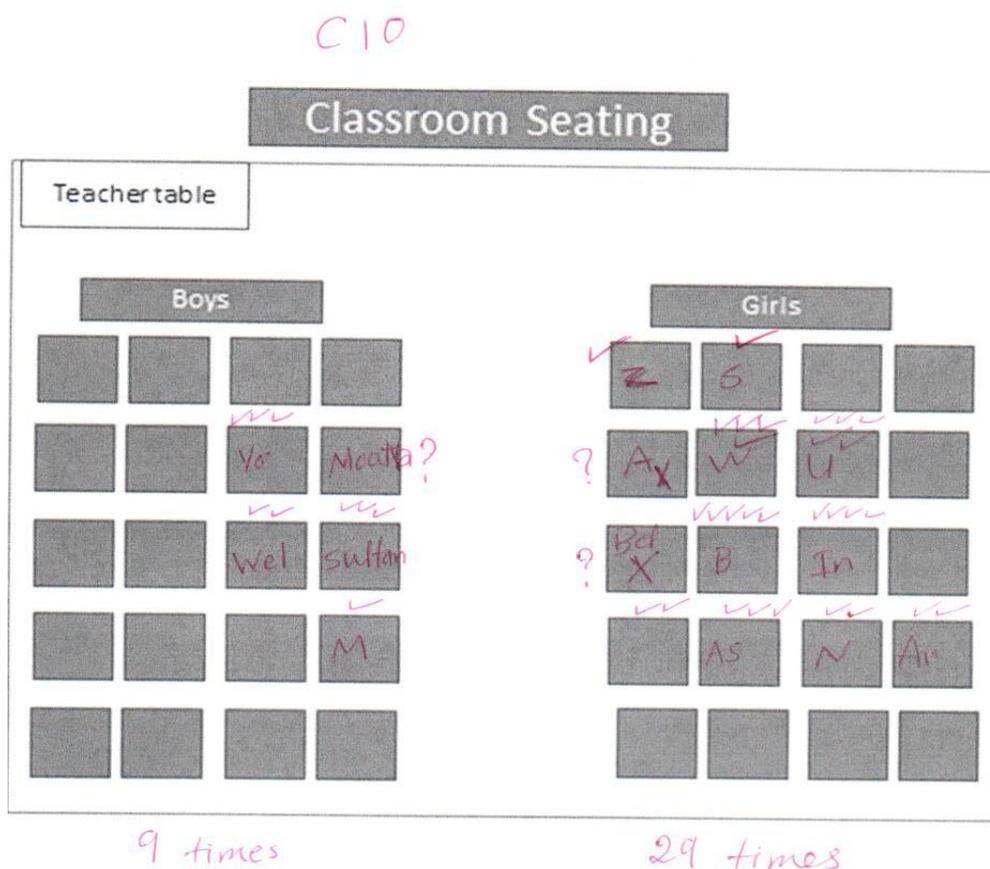
were also one of the things that prevented female students from participating and talking in the class, especially at the beginning of the semester. The female students talked about this when I interviewed them after finishing classroom observation on the same day. This was expressed in the following quote

To sum up, from the analysis of the events related to incident 2, I can draw some remarks related to the research questions in which I discuss them thoroughly in Chapter Five. The study aims at exploring the types of students' participation and behavior that take place in the classroom. It also tries to understand what factors influence what happens in the class.

Incidents (1) and (2) show different types of students' participation such as group work and pair work. For example, in incident 2, students worked in pairs when they were working on the last exercise in task two, see extract (4) above. I also observed students working in groups when they were doing task two and three.

Looking at the teacher's behaviour, one of the common teaching behaviour I observed in this class was teacher-whole class interaction. The teacher asked questions and the students gave the answers based on who knew the answer. Five or seven students would shout the answers and the teacher accepted that and moved on to the other questions. She used this technique during the three tasks. I observed that some students raised their hands, waiting for the teacher to call on them. I thought because the whole-class responses were a dominate practice by all students; this made the teacher not to notice the individual students who were ready to give individual answers.

The seating chart (see Appendix J) I designed for the purpose of ticking who participate in the class showed that most students participated in the lesson except three students. Two female students (Belqees and Afra) and one male student (Moath) did not respond verbally to teacher's questions in the class and most of the time they were silent. Nevertheless, those students were working with the other students in their groups when they were doing the tasks. The classroom seating chart below pictures the classroom and shows the students participation.



The seating chart shows that the three students (Moath, Afra and Belquees), marked with (?) did not answer any question individually by the teacher, whereas, other students (marked with a tick) responded many times as indicated by the number of the ticks above each box. Also, looking at the two corners of the classroom (shown in the chart above), we can see that male students answered only 9 times compared to the female students who answered 29 times during task two and three. We cannot claim that female students participated more as the male-female ratio in this class is not equal. Besides, participation also depends on the nature of the questions and answers. The chart also showed that some girls seemed to answer a great deal more than the others and more than other boys. I did not trace the reasons for such observation. It could be that the girls were more interested in the lesson and then participated more; or maybe their English level is better than the others. This requires a closer look and further exploration.

Few remarks can be drawn from this observation and the analysis of the two incidents. First, the analysis of the incidents responds to the research questions which are related to the factor that might influence students' participation and behaviors in the classroom. Both incidents suggest that many students in this class do not feel comfortable to participate in the class in the presence of the opposite gender. As mentioned above in this section that students' reactions or behaviors

are made up many interrelated motives. In other words, much of what occurs in the class is culturally driven and socially constructed. Therefore, when students expressed their views both in their behaviors in the classroom (see students' reaction to the female students in event (1)); and in the interviews and diaries, their views are based on their culture and Islamic views as well as their own identity. Issues like shyness and not accepting to look at girl's uncovered arm is part of Islamic culture and social norms. This is elaborated more in the coming chapter.

Finally, the analysis of incident (2) also indicates that Arabic is used by the students in the classrooms for different purposes including helping each other, translating or passing funny comments. A detailed discussion on the influence of the first language in the foreign language production is discussed in Chapter Five.

#### **4.2 Topics emerged from data analysis:**

I presented the general themes and topics mentioned or emerged from the data, which contributed to student participation in the classroom in Table (11) below. I decided to categorize these into three main themes: students, teachers, and culture. This decision reflects the intended understanding of the aim of study which was based on the research questions. While the study tries to explore the factors that influence student participation in the classroom, the research questions aims at gaining an understanding of the effect of the elements, or the participants of the classroom. Based on the incidents mentioned above, the two incidents showed different types of participation from which some factors appeared to have some kind of influence on how participation took place in the class. It also showed how students and teachers managed classroom participation. In this study, I have referred to the participants of the classroom to include students, teachers, and the classroom. In other words, questions (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) explore the role of students in the classroom and student participation.

Question 1 attempts to explore the types of participation that take place in English classes of Foundation Year students in Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman; and the other questions relate to the classroom environment and context, and its relation on student participation.

Table (13) below shows the three themes and factors that relate to each theme. I have talked briefly about some of the factors here in this section, but have discussed them in more detail in the discussion students' and teachers' interviews and students' diaries chapter following this chapter. These factors emerged from the analysis of classroom observation, (see section 4.1 and 4.2). It is important to mention that the list of these factors was not classified according to their negative or positive influences on student participation.

Note: Teachers' Interview (TI) Students' Interview (SI) Students Diaries (SD)

**Table (13) summary of emergent themes and factors**

Themes	Factors	Reference from the data
Classroom context and Culture	Co-education	TI
	Gender	TI
	Culture	TI
	Shyness	TI SI
	Use of Arabic in the classroom by students or teacher	SI, SD
	Classroom climates/atmosphere	SI TI
Teachers	Teacher's teaching styles and techniques	SI SD
	Varieties in teaching (games and activities)	SI SD
	Teacher's culture and their understanding of students' culture	SI, TI
	Teacher's class control and management	SI, SD
Students	Students' desire and temperament to learn	TI , SI
	Students' motivation	TI , SI
	Students' culture and religion	TI ST
	Students' level of English	TI
	Students' attitudes about teachers	SI TI
Others	Family support and encouragement	SI, SD
	The role of administrators in the college and their role in facilitating learning	SI
	Students' lack of socialization with their teachers outside the classroom to practice English, and to become more familiar with them	SI, SD

### 4.3 Summary of the emergent factors:

Based on the analysis of classroom observation and interview, the following topics emerged. The sequence of these factors was not based on the importance, but rather on the high number of occurrences mentioned in the interviews and the students' diaries.

#### 4.3.1 Gender and Coeducation:

Students expressed concern in their interviews and diaries (see Appendix L) about being in mixed-gender classes, as they felt the term 'co-education' held a negative meaning. To them, co-education means gender-mixing in its social and cultural sense, where to some extent the mixing of men and women is culturally restricted in Oman. The impact of such an understanding seems to limit student participation as well as their overall interaction with each other in the classroom.

The analysis of the data shows that student participation was influenced by their gender. In my observation, I saw that students only worked with the same gender and did not talk with the opposite sex. Similarly, one teacher, from the class I analysed, commented in his interview that there was zero interaction between boys and girls. He said:

There is practically zero interaction between the students intellectually; verbally they do not even look at each other. In fact, they're very ... they're not comfortable with each other in the room. *Rashid's interview (line 37)*

Coeducation and gender have also impacted on the teaching and learning process, and gender has limited the choice of teacher's teaching techniques, as the teacher whom I observed explained, and because of gender she was reluctant to ask boys to work with girls. She commented:

Yes, actually, I want to get boys to mix with girls but it is difficult to do this. Sometimes students refuse to work together and as teachers, we do not want to force students. You know learning is not achieved through enforcing students. We also respect the culture. Sometimes there is a role play activity where the original characters are a man and a woman. It would be good to have a boy and a girl to act out the dialogue but we just ask either two boys or two girls. *Tany's interview (line 60)*

The teacher felt that this impacted on her teaching and dealing with the classroom, and as she commented earlier she was learning the system and adjusting her teaching to meet different students' abilities. She also found that the girls were more anxious in the classroom. She commented:

Because of this classroom context, I found that girls are more apprehensive than boys. *Tany's interview (line 93)*

The teacher did not try to make the students to work together but she kept the organization of the class as it was set up by the regulations of the college, so that each gender would feel relaxed when working with the same gender in class.

Female students also commented about the negative effect of gender in their learning and participation. They said that gender and studying with boys created the feeling of being shy they also felt uncomfortable in class because some of the boys tried to make jokes and teased their answers or when they talked in class. One girl commented:

Yes, Shyness. We feel shy especially when the boys are here in the class. We can't talk louder because sometimes the male students make jokes if we make grammar mistakes or if we give the wrong answer. At the beginning, we did not talk at all but now it is better. We get used to study with the boys. *AM, female students' interview 2(line 20)*

However, looking at the above comments made by the female students regarding shyness created by the mixed-gender setting in the classroom and the number of girls participating in the class seem to show some kind of contradiction. I mentioned earlier that the girls participated more than the boys, as shown in the observation chart above. Few personal possible assumptions could be made here. First, there is a tendency that students might reflect and express what is expected by the society which means that girls normally feel shy in the presence of boys. Therefore, they expressed a common opinion which may not necessarily represent their personal opinion. Second, it is possible also that the students participated because the teachers asked them to and they did not want to refuse as it is considered impolite not to respect and obey teachers in class. It is also possible that within the same gender there are variation on how each individual express themselves in the class. This depends on the students' identity and way of self-representation in the class. These were my own explanations based on my shared knowledge and understanding of the culture and the classroom.

Nevertheless, some of the male students thought that being in a mixed-class might create competition. However, not all students felt the same. The following quote from the male students' interviews (line 89-98) shows this.

Line	Participant	Statements	Comments
89	H	If we are all boys, it would be much better.	
90	M	No when we have the girls, we have more competition	
91	Z	Yes, yes. He is right it will be more competitive	

92	.....	Disagreement, no, no. It is not good	Students talked at the same time expressing their disagreement.
93	M	No, there will competition.	
94	S	What competition? No it is not. Girls will not like to work with us maybe.	Students argued and exclaimed with laughter that there was no competition and girls will not like it.
95	A	No, there will be shyness.	
96	T	Who is going to be shy? You or the girls?	
97	S	The girls, they do not speak. The boys will be happy. (laughter)	
98	W	We have no problems but the girls...	

On the same issue, female students also have a similar opinion regarding being in a mixed-sex classroom. Some of the students felt it was good to work with boys, while other girls thought that it was better to work with only girls, as shown in the female interviews lines (21-23) below:

21	AH	I think it would be better if the teacher gives us a task where boys and girls work together. I do not mind but maybe other girls will not like it.	
22	Many students	We do not want to work with the boys	There was disagreement on what AH said regarding her suggestion of the task. Many girls strongly expressed their opposition to what AH suggested.
23	T	So you do not prefer to work with the boys?	
	AH	No, it is better to work together with only girls.	

According to my knowledge of the class and the students' social backgrounds, it seemed to me that these factors could be brought about by the student's culture and religion (see Section 2.4 of the literature review). In the second point below I talked briefly about culture and religion. Culture, however, was dealt with more in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.3.2 Culture and religion:**

Culture and religion were considered as one of the emergent factors as shown by the analysis of the incidents and the data gathered from interviews and students' diaries. The analysis showed that there were some issues such as shyness and how students expressed and reflected it in their behaviours in the class and also talked about it in the interviews and diaries. Besides, students also reacted to the incidents mentioned in 4.2 in reference to their Islamic cultural and their social identities. To give an example, the students' reaction to the girl whose her arm was not covered explained some of the Islamic teaching and some of the students' beliefs.

Cultural influences in teaching and learning in any learning environment are unavoidable. In fact, from my own personal experience as being involved in writing curriculum specifications for Grade (7) Basic Education System in Oman in 2003, the educational system and curriculum design were informed by the Omani culture and Islamic views and beliefs to some extent. They contributed to making many decisions related to the teaching and learning process, such as the choice of materials to be taught, the structure of the classroom, and so on.

For example, the analysis of the data showed that some students were more explicit in voicing what to accept in a classroom and what to question or reject. A clear example of the above argument was illustrated by the teacher in the interview. He gave an example of a female student who left the classroom while the male student was presenting his oral presentation. This incident is described by the teacher: (Rashid's interview, lines 64-82)

**(64) Rashid:** For example, I had my second year research students in English 2111 or 21-111. They have to give their research presentations. Some students, the female students prefer to do their 10-minute oral presentations with slides and PowerPoint. They preferred to do this without the male students in the room.

**Mohammed:** Okay. Yeah, yes.

**(69) Rashid:** And then I have one student who was a Design Major named Khaled ... He did a presentation in his major field of study about the house of Versace, which is the famous design house. In his presentation he had a few slides where the ... the women perhaps were not as covered as much as they could be. There was one, I think, student whose brother ... quick to anger sort of a person and she

was so upset that she stormed out of the classroom. Later on she calmed down but I said to ... when this situation came up again this semester, I said “Make sure in your presentation that everything you have is appropriate under this class. It’s not going to make anyone upset.

**Mohammed:** Okay. Okay. How does a male student feel presenting in front of the female? Do they also feel the same ... the girls?

**(80) Rashid:** I’m not sure how this batch feels but ... in a way they’re not all that different from when I was that age. There’s a lot of peer pressure. It’s always with teenage boys; you’re cooler if you do not take school so seriously.

One female student left the class because the boy displayed a photograph of a woman who was not dressed appropriately. The female student’s reaction could be the normal behaviour of a Muslim not accepting to look at a woman who is not dressed appropriately. As Muslims, we are required to avoid looking at parts of women which are not covered. It is called “Ghadh Al-Baser” "غض البصر" in Arabic. The English meaning of it would be “lowering their gaze” or “not looking at”.

I understand the girl’s behaviour in that situation being an insider to the culture and Islamic rules, as mentioned in (section 3.1.4.2). Other students did not act in the same way, but again we cannot assume their agreement. Some students, like any other Muslims, can tolerate certain situations and do not display or explain their disagreement, while others are less conservative or concerned about Islamic rules and norms. As I have mentioned before that each individual has his own identity which shapes and influences his or her behaviour in the classroom. Also, people normally vary in the way they confine to the religious practices.

A similar behaviour of cultural influences in the classroom I noticed was during observation of class (C20). As I mentioned in this chapter in (section 4.1.4.1 event 1), one female student was writing a sentence on the white board and one of her arms was uncovered due to the loose sleeves of her dress. In the analysis above (section 4.1), I discussed students’ reactions to this situation where I showed their opinions and reaction expressed in their interviews and I also observed their behaviour that I talked about earlier. Students did not talk in the class about the event but it was clear to me that they were uncomfortable looking at the girl in that situation. I read their reactions through their non-verbal hints and notices. They were conservatively looking at me. However, I made a notice of their look but I did not show them and I pretended that I was not looking at them.

Furthermore, the example above and the explanations offered in the analysis of the incidents above brought the theme of shyness as one of the emergent factors that is linked to what shapes students' participation in the class. Shyness, then, was another topic that students expressed had an influence on the way they participated. "Shyness" as defined in this study refers to students' unwillingness to participate due to being in a mixed-gender situation as well as their feeling of uneasiness and uncomfortable to talk or come in front of the classroom in the presence of the opposite gender.

While shyness was seen as a negative attribute by some students, one male student talked about shyness in his diary (see Appendix L/A6), in a quite distinctive and cultural perspective. He referred to shyness as being a positive feature to occur in class when both genders meet. He believed that this feeling was natural and part of the Omani and Islamic culture. He wrote in his diary:

We faced problems such as shyness but this is part of our culture and traditions. We as Omanis or Muslims in general, our custom is that we feel shy when we deal with women. It is shyness with respect. *Male student's diary (A6)*  
*NB: (A6: means A: Class A, 6: student's number given in the diary to avoid real names of the students)*

Shyness as expressed by the student above matched what my colleague described when he talked about his classroom. I had an informal conversation with my colleague who was teaching in the foundation year program in the office and he shared some of his opinion about his classroom. My colleague related the causes of not wanting to participate in the class to religion and cultural reasons. I tend to agree with what the student and my colleague described. They thought of another meaning which is beyond the definition of shyness I defined above in this section.

In other word, the point is not shyness which is stopping them, but influence of Islamic culture, school ambience and social relevance of the Islamic concept of "Hayia" with respect to male and female communication are the most important factors which affect student participation as well as team work.

In the literature, shyness is seen as negative by many educators and can be a problem that affects students' learning negatively (Hughes and Coplan, 2010, Lawrence and Bennett, 1992). Shyness, however, as expressed by the student mentioned above has a different meaning and is associated with "good manners". To illustrate this more, it is better expressed by the Arabic word "حياء" "Hayia", which can be translated as "modesty or decency". Muslims are encouraged by Allah and the teaching of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) to be shy in the positive sense as explained above. The concept of Hayia is acquired from society and mostly from home, i.e.

from the parents. For the sake of being fair, how much of Hayia is expressed by students depends on the individual's way of behaviour and how he or she represent their identities in the society or classroom. Further discussion of culture and Islamic behaviour are presented in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.3.2 Use of Arabic in the classroom**

The data analysis of the study shows that students used Arabic for communication in the classroom (section 4.2.4). It was used in two different functions. By function I mean students used Arabic when they talk with each other or when they discuss the tasks in the class. Also, some other students used Arabic to communicate with the teacher. The later use of Arabic was related to Arabic transfer or the influence of L1 in L2 communication. As shown in incident two above in (section 4.2.4, event 2), the student used the word "absent" in a wrong way. For this particular example, the student seemed to have used translation as the word "absent" has a similar word in Arabic "غائب ghaeib". However, the meanings of the two words are not the same and each word has a different meaning.

Regarding the issue of role of Arabic in the classroom, many students believe that using Arabic in the English classroom or when English is used as the medium of instruction has a positive role in their learning and understanding of the lesson. This was mentioned by some students in the interviews as discussed above in this chapter. Nevertheless, some students who were keen on learning English preferred that teachers use only English in the class. This helps them to learn and practice English. One student talked about her interest of acquiring the accent of the teacher. She continued that students did not have other sources of hearing good English except from the teacher. She wrote in her diary

Because most English teachers in the college were foreigners, we had to learn how to speak English and this is good because we are forced to learn in English and communicate with the teachers in English.

Recent researchers and classroom studies found that learners use their L1 in learning L2. Studies also show that there is a high possibility that L1 is used when the all learners share one language in the classroom (Storch and Aldosari, 2010). For example, the findings of the study confirm the findings of Guk and Kellogg (2007) in the Korean context. They found that learners used their first language when interacting with each other in doing group work. Brook-Lewis (2009) cited in (Storch and Aldosari, 2010) encouraged the use of L1 (Arabic) in L2 learning context and concluded that learners appreciated that the teacher allowed them to use their language along with L2 in the classroom. The learners showed good performance of learning the L2. In short, the use of the mother tongue or the first language is inevitable in second language classrooms. In

fact, there is a positive potential that L1 facilitates the learning of the foreign language as claimed by the participants of this study. This issue is elaborated more in the discussion chapter section (5.1.1.2).

#### 4.3.3 Influence of teachers on students' participation:

The data shows that there was a common agreement among students on the important role of the teacher in the classroom as one of the factors that could contribute to students' learning, participation, and motivation. Interestingly, the students also mentioned that teachers contributed negatively to students' lack of interest and participation in the lesson. Under the topic of the teacher's role as contributors to students' learning and participation, students talked about the teacher's teaching styles, techniques, and support offered (see Table 9 above in this chapter). Students also seemed to prefer teachers who used games and different activities in their lessons. One female student commented,

I mean he changes his teaching, not doing the same activity every day.  
*Female student interview line 12).*

Students thereby felt more interested in the lessons. This made them feel more relaxed and more motivated to participate in the lesson. Another male student commented,

Teacher's style and if there are any interesting activities that the teacher does in the class. The students will enjoy the class and take part.  
*Female student interview (line 4).*

Some students also compared their English teacher with a different teacher who taught mathematics. They talked about their enjoyment in the mathematics lesson in which they attributed their active participations to the teacher's style and his ways of support. Students elaborated on this point and said that their mathematics teacher explained the rules in a positive way and provided them with a list of words that contained mathematical terms in their mother tongue (Arabic). Therefore, some students mentioned that using Arabic facilitated their learning and raised their interest in the lesson. Others, however, preferred to have foreign teachers who speak only English so that they can learn the language from them.

The data also showed that students did not like the teacher who talked more in the class and did not explain the rules clearly to the students. Two students commented about this in the interviews. The following exchange shows their views: (Female students' interview C20 lines 54-59)

54 06:45	H	Today, I did not feel that the teacher conveyed the lesson and therefore, it is difficult to follow the teacher and understand. For example, she wanted to teach us about possessiveness but I did not	
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		understand. She just went on talking about name of the...name of the... I did not understand.	
56	T	She gave you examples to write ...	
57	H	Yes, I understood the basic but she did not explain well. I do not understand and if you ask the students I do not think they understand.	
58	T	I see, ok. Mariam, what do you think?	
59	M	Yeah, it was not clear and I did not understand. I am at the beginning, I asked Hessa, what does this mean? And she said it is about passiveness, then I understood a little.	

Similarly, one of the female students in Level (C) also believed that the teachers in the schools were better in terms of explaining the tasks and helping the students learn and understand better. She wrote:

There was a big difference between teachers in the schools and teachers in the college. In schools, teachers were better; they cared a lot about the students and they used varieties of teaching techniques to make teaching easier. They used methods that made students comprehend what they taught. However, in the college, I did not like the way teachers taught us at all. I felt bored and this feeling has become a daily routine in the class to the extent that I feel sleepy. Also, the teaching method in the college was completely different from the school. In the college, teachers just show information verbally. They only lectured and did not check if students understood the lesson.  
*Student's diary (A4)*

Another male student also commented on the teacher's way of teaching as he believed that the teacher did not check if students understood the lesson. He commented:

It was difficult to understand teacher's instructions and the lesson because the teacher did not check students' understanding and comprehension.  
*Male student's diary (A10)*

On the same token, some student also did not like some of the techniques used by their female teacher, especially when calling students for the answers. They preferred to raise their hands when they wanted to answer, rather than being called by name. One student expressed her discomfort:

Yeah, the Miss suddenly asked me to read and I was embarrassed and scared in front of the boys. I felt shy and felt embarrassed. ....I was really embarrassed.  
*Female interview line (128-131)*

Finally, students also talked about teachers' techniques and styles in teaching. They expressed that they like the teacher who helped them understand and use techniques that the students like. The following exchanges from students' interviews show examples of what students said:

7	T	What were the things that have helped you in your learning and participation?	
8	M	Practice and training, when the teacher repeats the lessons many times helped me. This helped m remember what I learned	
9	H	The person who always teaches me. I learn from him if I like him. I like to learn English but from the teacher whom I like .... But....if I do not like him, I will not learn	
10	T	What do you mean "if I do not like him" can you explain?	
11	H	Yes, I mean I like his way of teaching and his techniques. If he does not teach well or does not make you understand or if I do not understand what he is teaching us... difficult...	

Finally, some students like their teachers and benefited from their teaching. One male student talked about the language of the teacher and thought that it was good to have teachers who speak only English in the classroom. Although he found this difficult at the beginning, he felt later it helped them improve their English by practising using English with the teacher. The student wrote:

When we came to the college, we found that most teachers were foreigners especially in the Foundation Year. We faced difficulties understanding and talking to them but this was positive because we were forced to speak with them in English. Then I realized that foreign teachers had a positive effect on students' learning as I mentioned that the student has to learn and exert more effort to learn the language so that he can communicate with his teachers in English. *Male Student's diary (A6)*

Another student also commented on the language of the teachers as he found it useful for improving his pronunciation of English. She wrote in her diary:

I was lucky to have native speaker English teachers, the people who speak it who taught me in the Foundation Year. It was an opportunity for me to learn the language; but also there was one thing that I considered very crucial. I needed somebody to help me learn how to pronounce the words correctly as the way native speakers pronounce them. Thanks to Allah, I have benefitted from the teachers, in this respect. *Female student's diary (A9)*

As mentioned above, the role of the teacher played an important part in students' participation, both positively and negatively. This is elaborated further in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.3.4 Influence of students on their learning and participation:**

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, (see 2.5.5) learners also bring to the classroom their own identities and learning styles, as well as their own tacit knowledge about their learning and how they represent themselves in the classroom. Below are some of students' related issues.

##### **4.3.4.1 Students' level of English:**

The level of the students' English language can be said to be low according to their placement tests. Thus, the students were enrolled in the Foundation Year program to improve their English, as well as to be able to proceed to their program of the study. There was an agreement among the teachers of this study that the students' level of English was low. This resulted in limiting the students' participation in the classroom as they were not confident enough to speak in English or to become involved in oral discussion. Other students, despite their weakness in the language, tried to participate and were eager to learn.

Furthermore, the class might have different groups of students, including students and repeated students, as explained by one of the teachers in the study. For example, one teacher commented about her students as "having two classes in one classroom". She attributed this to the fact that her class consisted of newly joined fresh students and repeated students. The fresh students started their Foundation program at the beginning of the academic year and were eager to learn and work hard. The repeated students were those who failed the previous year and were repeating Level (C). These students made up the majority in the class. The teacher found these particular students difficult to get through the course, as commented below:

There's actually two very distinct different groups within the one group.....Okay...because It is amalgamated.....Some of them have failed. They're on their last legs here and they're a lot ... they're the ones that are harder to get through to. So there's two groups within the one group.  
*Tany's interview, line 16-19*

The teacher tried to consider this "distinct different groups within the group" in her teaching. She commented that new students enjoyed the lesson more and were eager to learn better than 'repeating' students. Generally, student participations varied according to their interest in the lesson and in learning in general.

The teacher expressed her views by saying;

But with most of the students, especially the students from the newer group, fresh out of high school group, their participation is very good. The other ones,

it's a little bit pulling more out of them and ... yeah.  
*(Interviewee line 53)*

In the interview, I asked one of the teachers what he thought of his students' learning and participation in the class. He talked indirectly about their poor level of English, and that they tended to learn by imitation. He said:

They learn just by being here by osmosis. Some days when their excitement energised by the topic and there ... just a momentum gets going in the class then they'll volunteer to read. They'll answer questions. Sometimes I teach them like its pulling teeth to get them to speak English. I say, "I am the dentist, you are the student and I'll ...", like they're pulling their teeth from the mouth and yank out a tooth. They understand that.  
*Rashid's interview line (109-114, P 4)*

Students then commented that student's low levels of English influences their interest in participating in class as they do not feel confident enough to speak out. This could also be related to motivation which is explained below.

#### **4.3.4.2 Students' motivation**

Some students seemed to have intrinsic motivation to learn. They started studying at college and felt the need to exert more effort to learn English in order to pass the Foundation Year program. Furthermore, students expressed an interest to learn English and realised that they need to participate in the class to improve their English language. Some students faced difficulties at the beginning of the course because they did not like studying English at school. Faced with the reality of the importance of English in their studies, they began to develop a positive attitude to learning English and participating in class. One student expressed her willingness to learn English as she felt jealous of others using English in class or outside of school, college. She said:

I have the desire to speak English and whenever I see any girl talking in English, I feel jealous. *Interviewee (line 108)*

The desire to speak English motivates students to learn and exert more effort even outside the classroom or college. Some students mentioned in the interview that they had attended English courses outside of the college to improve their English. They seemed to exert effort to help themselves in their learning. One student mentioned that she "used to learn new vocabulary everyday", so that she could then use it in class. Another student also commented that she had an inner interest to learn English. She commented:

Yeah I feel from inside that I want to learn. And even in the dormitory, I tried to ask the girls about the meaning of some words. *Female interview (line 110)*

Generally, most students believed that they needed to develop an interest in learning and participating in class, even if they make mistakes.

However, not all students were motivated to learn as expressed by Rashid, a teacher who teaches level (C). He was slightly concerned about his students' awareness of what they want to do and how learning English might help them in their future life.

He expressed his concern about some of his students who had hoped and wanted to learn, but they lacked motivation because of the uncertainty of their goals, and what they wanted to do with their learning, as well as their poor English competency. He also talked about motivation and students' parental support. He commented that students found it difficult to learn when their motivation to learn was low.

Motivate them. Motivation is the major ... it's the key to learning. Even to learning the English language, all this scientific research they do it, Oxford and Cambridge. Of course it's valid and their ... it adds to the body of knowledge that what research does. But in the real world, when you're learning another language, motivation is the key, the religion. If you're teaching students who lack this motivation, the best teacher in the world armed with the best materials, the best experience is not going ... they're not going to learn English. *Rashid's interview line (135-140)*

Motivation was seen by some of the teachers in this study as a key element in encouraging students to learn. Their intrinsic motivation can be reflected in their behaviour in the classroom, for instance, their willingness to learn. (Ushioda, 2009, cited in Murray et al., 2011) addresses the individuality of the learners who reflects themselves in the social context of the classroom. She asserts that learners bring into the class context their identity, personality, motives and intention to the classroom (Murray et al., 2011). This issue of identity and motivation are addressed further in the discussion chapter.

#### **4.4 Other issues influencing student participation in the class:**

Students talked about many factors that could contribute to their participation in the classroom. Some of these factors are discussed below.

##### **4.4.1 Classroom atmosphere**

As mentioned earlier in the Literature Review (Section 2.3.2), the context of the classroom is quite complex to understand as there are many interrelated elements that constitute classroom context (Kramsch, 1995; Breen, 1985; Ellis et al., 1994; Wedell and Malderez, 2013). Classroom atmosphere as a whole learning environment varied in definition. In this study, I refer to classroom context by considering the feasible physical actors of the classroom which could be characterized by teachers, learners and the curriculum. However, this does not mean that

classroom context is only shaped by the three elements that I mentioned as the sole creators of classroom context. Within those elements mentioned above, there are many unseen related and part and parcel of those components, such as students' and teachers' beliefs and culture, their knowledge of the world around them, and how they perceive areas of life in general (Stables, 2003; Van Lier, 1984; Conteh, 2003; Wedell and Malderez, 2013). Each one of these factors brings to the classroom many cultures which make what occurs in class difficult to understand, or be attributed to a single culture or factor.

Wedell and Malderez (2013) argue that context is changing and it is complicated to try to describe it as a whole or any parts of it. Classroom context is one context brought out of multi-contexts which are integrated. In other words, teachers, learners and classroom atmosphere contribute to the context of the class, and those contributions are also borne from, or based on, other resources such as religion, big culture, and the world outside the class (see the section on classroom context that discusses interaction models (Section 2.3.2). I have also presented these integrated relationships between the factors that might shape the classroom context in my proposed interaction model, as explained in (Section 2.4.1). More explanations of context are considered in the discussion chapter.

In the interview, students referred to classroom atmosphere to encompass the relationship between teacher and students, as well as between male and female students. As an insider of the Omani culture, I understood that the Arabic words equivalent to classroom atmosphere which students used, referred to a meaning beyond the teacher, students and curriculum mentioned above. They referred to the sense of humour and how students and teachers welcome and accept each other in class. They also meant that teaching and learning occurred in a stress-free environment where laughter was accepted in class and no embarrassing comments were made by any students that might restrict students from participation.

The Arabic word “Jaw almadrasha” “جو المدرسة” which students used to describe the classroom context was limited, as mentioned above, to their sense of wishing to feel comfortable in the classroom. This, I would argue, is essential for students to feel at ease to participate in the classroom. It again brings us to the topic of interest and motivation to learning, as discussed above.

Teachers, on the other hand, talked about the context of the classroom by referring to its physical atmosphere, namely classroom seating and physical structure. As mentioned previously, the students were seated in two different corners (see photograph of classroom in Section 1.2.4). Tany, who taught level (B) commented:

I think that in terms of what we experienced as a classroom in reality is very different. I think you can see that as the two different doors ...Girls' door, boys' door, and two different size of classroom. The classes are structured so that you have this kind of dual. *Teacher interview lines (60-67)*

The students also spoke about other areas, such as their interest in the topic of the lesson, as well as their parents' support and encouragement. The section below talks about the topic of the lesson.

#### **4.4.2 Topic of the lesson:**

Students expressed their interests in topics that they felt related to them. For example, in the lesson observed regarding shopping and cooking in level (B), the female students seemed more interested in the lesson because of the topic, shopping and cooking. They were able to talk more about types of food. Similarly, the boys were also interested in the topic because they said that they helped to buy food for their families too.

The data shows that some students argued and wished that their teachers used different teaching techniques and activities. They suggested that teachers use games and competition in the classroom. One female student asserted the usefulness of teachers' use of games and varieties of activities in the lesson. She wrote in her diary:

The teacher should have a very attractive teaching technique so that he can transfer the content to the students. He should use different activities such as games, puzzles, competitions or visual shows.... because the daily routine of the lectures kill enthusiasm and does not help to make us love learning. Also, the students lose their appetite to learn and participate. *Female diary A1.*

Thus, the topic of the lesson and the activities seemed to be one of the factors that might arouse the students' craving to learn and participate in the lesson. Students also considered family support and encouragement among the factors that influence their learning and participation positively, as explained below.

#### **4.4.3 Family support and encouragement**

Family support is an important factor in motivating students in their studies as expressed in their interviews. Students agreed that their parents and relatives played a significant role in motivating them. Many students mentioned their parents' support in their diary entries. One student expressed her gratitude to her father who supported her, always providing her with what she asked for in order to be able to succeed in her studies. Students said: (appendixes of diaries)

- *My parent supports me and encourages me to participate in the class and to compete with other students (Male student's diary A7).*

- *My parents encourage me and always ask me about my participation in class. They sometimes buy me stories and books in English (Female student's diary A2).*

One female student also talked about her family support in the interview.

I practice English with my uncle and I consider him an example of a good speaker of English. I want to be like him. This encourages me to speak in the class with the teacher and friends (female student's interview C20).

In conclusion, students felt that they received support from their family and friends and this encouraged them and motivated them to learn.

### **Conclusion:**

In summary, this chapter presents the analysis of the data. It presents some of the data which was analysed. The analysis was presented into two parts: the first part gave a brief introduction on how the data was analysed. In section one and two, I showed two incidents from the classroom I observed which were then supported by other data related to the incidents from students' /teachers' interviews and students' diaries that show where the emergent factors came from. The second part, I described and discussed briefly the emergent factors as shown in the table above in (section 4.2). It is important to mention here that the analysis above is not comprehensive, but rather presents examples from the data of the themes. The discussion chapter, which is devoted to talking about many of the issues presented above in Table (13), will also have more details and quotes from the data which supports the analysis.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

As mentioned in Chapter One, the overall aim of this study was to explore the factors that influenced student participation in the English classroom at the College of Applied Sciences. The study specifically sought to find an understanding of the possible influences of student participation, and to try to understand the relationships between the interlocutors or the participants of the classroom.

In the previous chapter, the study presents the data analysis in which the major findings in relation to the factors that may have an impact on students' participation were highlighted.

This chapter aims at developing a general understanding of the emergent factors that could have an influence on student participation, and extends our current understandings of the classroom context and student participation. Furthermore, it discusses the major issues suggested by the key findings of the research questions (as shown in Chapter One, section 1.3.3) with the aim of relating them to the literature, and also drawing together what is new and can be taken forward into further research, policy and practice.

To help guide the discussion, this chapter, first, provides brief summaries of the results that related to the research questions of this study. This is followed by an interpretation of the results focusing on the main themes that emerged from the study, with reference to the literature review in Chapter Two.

The research questions specifically try to explore three themes, by which the study attempts to understand what types of participation take place or do not in the classroom and unfold the factors that influence student participation in the class, as summarized below:

- Exploring the effect of classroom context (environment) on student participation
- Exploring students' perceptions of classroom participation
- Exploring the role of the teacher on student classroom participation

Within these areas of the research's inquiry, specific questions were set out to help explore those areas in more details. (See 1.3.3)

Therefore, the discussion chapter is presented in two sections: Section one provides general answers to the research questions, while section two discusses the emergent themes. The themes relate to four areas:

- Classroom context and culture
- Students' influence on classroom participation
- Teachers' influence on classroom participation

- Other social factors related to classroom participation

It is important to mention here that within those areas/themes mentioned above there are other factors which have emerged from the data (see Table 12 in Chapter 4.2).

## **Section One**

### **Introduction**

Generally speaking, the findings of the data show that student participation is influenced by various factors including the roles of both the teachers and the learners employed in the classroom, their relationship, classroom context, and culture, see Chapter 4.2.

Previous research has tried to understand student participation by focusing on specific factors such as the size of the class (Blatchford et al., 2011), gender (Crawford and MacLeod, 1990), oral participation and classroom organization, and the formal and informal structure of the class (Weaver and Qi, 2005). Those studies focused on the explicit factors that impact on student participation (see for example Weaver and Qi, 2005, p. 571).

I argued earlier (see 2.3.2) that what we observe in the classroom cannot be attributed solely to the explicit and observable behaviours or factors, giving the whole context of the classroom with its participants more attention to how student participation is constructed and presented. Thus, my discussion of the findings is influenced by the notion of social and cultural impact on student participation. This falls in line with the proponent of the researchers that view social and cultural factors as important factors on what impacts on student participation (Allwright, 1984; Breen, 1985; Fassinger, 1995; Conteh, 2003).

In accordance to what has been said above, the findings of the data of this study reveal some interesting issues regarding the importance of unseen factors of the influence of culture and society that contribute to student participation, as discussed below in this chapter.

The context of the study as described earlier in Chapter One (Section 1.2.4) indicates the uniqueness of the classroom context in relation to the organization and structure of the class as being prescribed by the regulations of the college system on one hand, and the Islamic culture and society expectations on the other. This, by large, has appeared repeatedly in the analysis of the data as I explained below in the coming sections.

Before moving into discussing the data, it is worth mentioning here that what makes this study valuable was the use of students' diaries or learners' reflection as one of research methods for collecting data. Many studies that I looked at used interviews to understand the perception of the participants or learners, or classroom observation to depict what happens in the class. It is pertinent to say that interviews and face to face communication between the researcher and the

participants are valuable in building discussion about the topic of the study and gaining a verbal opinion of the interviewees (Murphy et al., 2001; Wellington, 2015). However, students' diaries empower the learners or the respondents to reflect more freely on the phenomenon being studied (Yi, 2008). It gives participants more opportunities to reflect and write about their own learning at their own pace and comfort, as the writing is carried out informally at their own homes and in any form they like (see Section 3.3.5). However, written diaries also could be difficult to obtain from the students, as mentioned in Chapter Three (Section 3.3.5).

In this study, the analysis of the diaries shows that students were more expressive and talked about issues in more personalized ways, which reflected their social identity. Their reflections about their classroom participation and learning in the class provide retrospective data which I may not have obtained by the other two methods I used: classroom observation and interviews. The data from the diaries not only complements and helps in triangulating the data but also provides in-depth data about the students' personal learning and their perceptions on classroom participation.

This chapter moves on to reflecting on the research questions and providing answers from the data, relating the findings to the literature.

## **5.1 Exploring the effect of classroom context (environment) on students' participation**

Classroom context, as defined in this study, encompasses the elements of the classroom, specifically teachers, students and the physical classroom organization. It also views the context of the classroom in its wider socio-cultural and political domains, or the Islamic culture. Thus, to explore the effect of this context on student participation, we need to consider the various impacts of those interrelated factors.

However, exploring the effect of classroom context is a general and broad issue, and therefore I used sub-questions to limit the focus and facilitate data collection and analysis. These questions are:

- What is classroom context?
- What is the teachers' and students' knowledge about the class context and organization?

### **5.1.1 Classroom context**

When talking about classroom context, we cannot separate it from the whole organizational structure of any educational system that aims at achieving success in building its learners intellectually, socially and politically. Thus, I am of the opinion that the classroom mirrors the outside world and the culture of the whole society. Metaphorically speaking, I think the

classroom is like a new born child that has some of the innate qualities or characteristics of the parents.

(Brunner, 1996, in Conteh 2000:81) points out that the classroom cannot be "*culturally free standing*", and that the culture of the classroom is influenced by the "external factors" of the culture of the society. Also, on the same stand, Conteh (2000:8) argues that

...what happens inside classrooms which mediates learning cannot be understood without taking external influences into account.

Walsh (2002:117) points out that what happens in any classroom can be viewed as a dynamic and complex "series of interrelated contexts". This shows that a classroom cannot be seen within a single context, but rather as a combination of multiple contexts that are interrelated. They shape the whole structure of the classroom and also influence what is happening among the participants of the class. This is because it involves many interrelated, as well as implicit and explicit, factors that make up the social context of the classroom (Fassinger, 1995), see Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2). The discussion above leads us to ask the question - *what constitutes classroom context?*

The answer to the above question is only limited to our interpretations of what we might think of what could influence and shape what happens in the classroom as a result of many interrelated contexts (Walsh, 2002; Seedhouse, 1996). The causes are numerous. In line with the notion of understanding the complexity of understanding classroom context, it is pertinent to highlight again the models of interaction ecology of Breen (2001) and Bronfenbrenner (1993), and the four layers of interrelated spheres of interaction proposed by Conteh (2000), see Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2). In these models, the researchers emphasised the role of the learner, society, community, and politics that need to be taken into account in relation to understanding classroom context. They also argue that understanding classroom and what happens in the class requires paying attention to what (Oxford and Anderson, 1995 cited in Conteh, 2000) called the hidden curriculum or the cultural iceberg; i.e. the world outside the classroom.

As we have seen above, the context of the classroom could not simply include the participants of a certain classroom; i.e. teachers, students, and the classroom itself as a physical premise. But rather, within the participants of the class begins the complexity of understanding class context as those participants holds many interrelated perceptions and beliefs about their being in the classroom due to their different personalities, identities, cultures and more. I argue here that the participants of the class bring outside world culture into the classroom directly or indirectly, and yet it is represented in their behaviours and specifically in the way students and teachers mediate learning and participation in relation to the aim of this study. For example, the findings show

that students prefer to sit in the designated areas for males and females, and they did not want to be mixed. Such behaviour is practised in their actual lives at home, for example, men sit separately from women in most social gatherings in most areas in Oman. Also, the teachers, being influenced by what they learned about the culture of Oman respected the choice of students' desire to sit and work separately from each other. One teacher commented in her interview that "we do not want to challenge the culture".

I consider the views of the literature in defining culture and classroom context as mentioned above and in Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2). However, in this study, I try to define classroom context considering another dimension and paying more attention to the role of the Islamic culture in defining and structuring context in the classroom for the following reasons. One of the reasons for the choice of giving the role of Islamic culture importance is driven by the fact that the government policy of the structure and the organization of the public educational institutions are governed by the Islamic principles to a great extent. As (Al-Hammami, 1999 cited in Al-Lamki, 2009) states, the educational philosophy in Oman is based on some of the principles of Sharia and Islamic law; specifically based on the Qur'an, the Holy book of Muslims, and the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him, PBUH). This determines many issues to the structure of education, including classroom organization as mentioned above in this section. Another reason also relates to the background of the students (the participants) as Muslims who consider agreeing to society and Islamic principles, which is of vital importance when they present their identities in the classroom. There is evidence in the data that supports the influence of the Islamic culture on students' participation and the representations of their social identity in the classroom. Among these findings of the data are the issues of shyness, gender and social factors that have contributed to what types of participation and interaction took place in the English classes that I observed. These considerations are discussed further in the coming sections.

In light of the discussion above, I move now to discuss some of the research questions of the study, and link the data to the existing literature.

#### **5.1.1.1 What is the nature of student participation in the English classes of Foundation Year students at Ibri College in Oman?**

By exploring the nature of student participation, the study aims at trying to understand the relationships between the participants of the classroom, the process of classroom participation and how they interact and work in class. To simplify this question, I subdivide it into two sections:

- a) How does the structure of the classroom determine the relations and the types of participation?

b) In what ways does the classroom environment facilitate classroom participation?

The above questions relate the discussion of the impact of classroom context/atmosphere in defining the relationships and role of students and teachers in the classroom, in relation to classroom participation.

Fritschner, (2000) argues that both learners and teachers have their own definitions of classroom participation. This knowledge of definition, along with other factors, confirms or determines the behaviours of the teachers and students, and how they act accordingly in the classroom. As mentioned above, the tacit knowledge of participation is an accumulated experience of how participation should be in class in view of the participants.

Learners perceive new experiences according to what they have experienced before and try to make links to the new situation. Short and Clark (1996: P.8) defines the college classroom as:

One setting where clear conceptions of normative behaviours have been institutionalized and passed from generation to generation of college students.

Students and teachers have different views and expectations of the college classroom based on their beliefs and general understanding of society and culture (Fritschner, 2000; Short and Clark, 1996).

Looking at the context of the study, see Chapter One (Section 1.2.4), the students have a previous concept of the school classroom setting which is different from the situation of the college classroom. The findings show that the students have an idea about the classroom setting of the college from their friends or the surroundings. I have observed students adhering to the seating arrangements made by the college, and teachers have not tried to persuade the students change seats. The seating chart (see appendix J), which I used in my observation to make notes about the students' seating, shows how classroom seating was organized.

In this study, the participants talked about their new experience of the classroom in the college. According to the findings of the data, the participants found the beginning of their studies in the college interesting but also challenging. It was a complete new experience for them as they commented in the interview and stated in some of their diary entries. Most students viewed their first two weeks of their studies as learning to live in a new classroom context being in a mixed classroom in which they were not used to.

Some of the female students described their feelings of shyness, being embarrassed and too uncomfortable to participate in the class, as shown in (Chapter 4, incidents one and two)

Male students also shared similar feelings of shyness, discomfort, and limited participation in a mixed classroom. They expressed their views in their diary writing. (For further opinions of respondents, see the appendix on students' diaries (A4F, A9F A8M and A10M).

In my observation I saw that some students were quiet and tried not to put their hands up and just looked down, facing their tables. Similarly, in the interview, students mentioned that they did not put their hands up to answer, even if they know the answer. The boys also had a similar feeling of not being comfortable with the girls around. I noticed while observing the classes that students were separated and there was no girl/boy interaction, and the students did not talk to each other in class.

It is pertinent to say that when students move from school to college or any higher education institution, they face some challenges. Students' adaptation to a new learning environment has been one of the suggestions cited in the literature (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Littlewood, 1997; Freeman, 2007). According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological transition model, students need to negotiate their new roles to accommodate themselves in the new academic environment. Freeman (2007) talks about the demands required from the learners to fill the gap between the experiences they have in schools and in the new environment. He argues that "many traditional freshman students in the United States face challenges, being separated from their high school support groups and former way of life (Freeman: P. 204).

The findings of the study complement what Freeman describes as the difficulties many students face when they move to a new environment. Students mentioned their psychological tension and anxiety of being in mixed-gender classrooms. Tinto (1987) cited in Freeman, (2007: p. 204) talks about the need for the fresh undergraduate students to integrate academically and socially in the new academic context. He continued his argument by saying that failure to achieve "satisfactory interpersonal relationship" in college may lead to depression and anxiety (Hoyle and Crawford, 1994).

The social and cultural challenge that the students of this study face in college is their ability to cope with the opposite gender in the same class. The findings show that many students do not only face changes in the academic system in terms of teaching, assessment, and type of involvement required from them, but also the social integration which was set for them by the system. Female students talked about some of the male students' behaviours which they did not like. For example, one of the female students (A9F) talked about male students' commenting (mocking/sarcasm) in the classroom when the female students spoke up or answered questions in the class. I think what the student means by "student's comment" was that students tried to make jokes in the class. They commented in Arabic.

Students teasing or mocking each other is likely to happen in most classrooms. Nichole (2013) carried out a study to analyse student-teacher interaction, focussing on participants' strategic use of humour in the classroom. Students use teasing for implicit or explicit reasons. She argues that students use humour in different ways, sometimes telling jokes or teasing each other. She listed three main reasons: building rapport, creating a collaborative floor, and enhancing group solidarity (Nichole, 2013: p. 2).

My experience of this as a teacher tells me that students normally use teasing or jokes in the classroom to attract the teacher's attention, and also that of their peers. Sometimes they want to be the centre of attention in the classroom. Whatever the reasons, the findings of the study show that many female students in this study felt that this practice from the male students hindered them from participating in the class and made them feel shy. They also did not like it because their teachers did not understand Arabic, and argued that it was not ethical or socially unaccepted to tell jokes in the mother tongue in the presence of teachers who may be offended by such behaviour.

In summary, the study shows that the nature of students' participation is governed by how students perceive their role as a learner in a mixed-gender classroom setting. The students at the beginning of the course felt they were not comfortable as they needed to adjust themselves to the new situation while they keep their own personal identity and act accordingly in the classroom.

Below is a further discussion on the Islamic and social influence in the classroom.

#### **5.1.1.1.1 Islamic/social influence in the classroom**

It is pertinent to say that the most surprising finding emerged from the data is the issue of shyness. Shyness as a factor seems to suggest a contradictory impact on student participation. It has a two-fold argument as brought up by the participants of the study. It is also surprising because I did not expect shyness to have a positive impact, or be a quality preferred by some students as I will show below in this section. On one hand, shyness was reflected in the classroom as positive, and recommended by the socio-cultural norms and expectations. Being a member of an Islamic culture, respecting the opposite gender and showing a feeling of shyness is expected and even required, and is associated with good manners. The Arabic word for 'shyness' in this sense is 'Hayi'. The sayings of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said while he was listing the qualities or the pillars of Iman (faith) is that "Hayi is part of Iman". This encourages Muslims, and also asks them to be shy or have "Hayi" in dealing with others, especially between men and women.

However, it is important in this study to give a precise definition of what it means to be shy in a positive way. I tried my best to find an English word equivalent to the word "shyness" that

means the same meaning intended by the students in this study. I came across many words that could have a similar meaning, although I am not totally confident about the exact meaning. For example, the word “modest” in English could imply showing respect and more of being humble or modest. Other words such as “bashfulness” or “timidity” could show some of the meaning of shyness. Native speakers of English might argue about the similarities of the English meaning of the words above and the meaning that I am trying to associate with the Arabic word shyness - Hayi).

The fact, however, remains that shyness was perceived positively by some of the students in the study. For instance, one male student talked about shyness in a quite distinctive and cultural perspective. He referred to shyness as being a positive factor to occur in the class when both genders meet. He believed that this feeling was natural and part of the Omani and Islamic culture. He wrote:

We faced problems such as shyness but this is part of our culture and traditions. We as Omanis or Muslims in general, our custom is that we feel shy when we deal with women. It is shyness with respect. (A6M)

The student (A6M) explicitly related this feeling to Islamic culture and Omani traditions. As an Omani, I could attribute the ‘shyness’ feeling that students talked about to culture and tradition, as well as students’ personal beliefs. As an insider and part of the culture where students come from, I expect to see men and women feeling uncomfortable when talking to each other, especially when they are unfamiliar with each other, and in public places such as the classroom. I could probably relate to the way we welcome guests at home. Many Omani people have separate guest rooms for men and women. Unless they are very close to each other by family blood, and are allowed to mix by Islamic norms and conditions, they rarely sit together in one sitting room. It is also fair to mention that there are some variations in regards to the issue mentioned above. With some families in various cities in Oman, gender-mixing is becoming more normal, and both men and women can sit in one living room and talk openly. This could be explained by to the social-economic change that the country went through in the last decade, which is beyond the focus of the study but has influence on the classroom as explained above.

Also, some students had similar positive views about mixed-gender classroom. They thought it was good and challenging. C5F found that the mixed-gender classroom was not scary or uncomfortable, as she stated:

I have found the situation of a mixed-gender environment is suitable and not as I had negatively expected it to be scary, C5F

Also, (C2F) felt comfortable in the class as the girls only worked with girls and no contact with boys. She wrote

Regarding the boys, they caused us no trouble. They worked with themselves and we work with ourselves. We have no contact in class and that makes me comfortable.

(A8M) thought that co-education or the mixed-gender class was beneficial and challenging. He stated that it “creates competition and helps in sharing information and support.” (A8M)

Shyness, in its general meaning, has been a concern of many researchers especially when studying children in schools. Research suggests that shy students are found as early as kindergarten, all the way through to college level (Asendorpf 1993, Fordham & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999, Galiguzova, 2000, Coplan, 2005).

Many of the studies that tried to explore shyness and its influence on student achievement indicated that shyness relates to “socio-emotional and maladaptation”, as mentioned by Asendorpf, 1993, cited in Coplan, 2005: P.21). Shyness in childhood has been recognized as a social anxiety where children do not engage in game play (Asendorpf 1993). They also try to get more attention from teachers, and do not interact with other children (Coplan, 2000; Coplan & Prakash, 2003) and in turn, they are not welcomed by their peers (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003).

However, the findings of the study show some other interesting causes for shyness based on its socio-cultural context. The findings indicate that shyness relates to different causes such as the unfamiliarity of the class context, and the expected social and Islamic practices. In this study, female students expressed their shyness more explicitly which relates to the social expectation of girls being shy than boys. Many studies suggest that female shyness is expected and also rewarded, unlike the shyness of boys. Coplan (2005: p22) argues that there is “a greater social acceptance of shyness for girls than boys in Western culture. Similarly, Islamic culture encourages the shyness of girls in social interactions between males and females. In fact, it is recommended, according to teaching of the Prophet Mohammed and the Islamic disciplines, as one of the male students mentioned in the interview earlier in this section. The findings of the study endorse other research and studies which indicate that shyness influences students’ achievements negatively in schools, especially in expressing themselves orally (speaking skills) or participating in social conversations (Crozier, 2001; Coplan, 2005). Furthermore, Asendorpf (1993) relates that the social withdrawal of many learners from participating in conversation in class could be attributed to other “underlying social wariness”, and that they may not have such difficulties as a linguistic competence. Again, he relates this issue to the underlying factors that need to be further explored.

In the literature, studies looked at the psychological impact caused by shyness on the learners, especially the boys. For example, the findings of the study argue with Stevenson-Hinde and Glover (1996) who suggested that shy boys are more affected because society does not expect boys being shy, as this is not thought of as a male personality character. The result of the current study reveals a different aspect in terms of boys' shyness. Some male students considered shyness as rather positive in the sense that boys show more respect to girls, as expected by society and encouraged by the Islamic religion. The findings also confirm the conclusion of the previous studies that girls are shy than boys, as expressed by students and teachers in the interviews and diaries.

Finally, the above discussion shows that students have different experiences of the gender-mixed classroom in the college. Many students felt that it causes student fears of shyness and uneasiness in the classroom. Others also view the classroom situation as encouraging, and felt that the mixed-gender classroom can be positive. The gender issue in the classroom was reviewed in the literature and the studies indicate different opinions. Previous research indicates that students prefer to work with the same-sex in class. Wilkinson (1985:9) claims that when learners are engaged in social interaction, they are more likely to work with the same gender.

The next section talks about the perceptions of students on classroom participation, and what factors they thought might influence their classroom participation.

#### **5.1.1.2 What factors influence students' participation (students' voice)?**

As mentioned earlier in Section 4.3.3, students talked about many factors that influence their learning, and classroom participation in particular. The findings of the study show that students mentioned different factors which contributed to their participation in class (see Table 13, Section 4.2). Some of these factors are discussed below:

##### **1- Students' attitudes about the role of the teachers relating to their participation**

The findings show that there was a common agreement among the students about the importance of the role of teachers in influencing their participation in the classroom. Students view the role of the teachers as one of the most influential factors that could contribute positively or negatively in their participation, and generally their performance in the classroom. They wrote in their diaries about the importance of the teaching styles and teaching methods used in the classroom by their teachers.

Teacher's style and if there are any interesting activities that the teacher does in the class. The students will enjoy the class and take part. *Female student interview (line 4).*

Students reported a preference towards teachers who use interesting activities and games in the classroom. They also preferred teachers to support and encourage them in class.

I mean he changes his teaching, not doing the same activity every day.

*Female students' interview line (12).*

The findings also show that the students participated more in the class when the teacher asked for a whole class answer. I observed that most of the students shouted out answers to questions proposed by the teacher. This was one of the techniques teachers used in this study. It shows teacher-students interaction which was common among all teachers involved in the study.

On the contrary, many students preferred not to be called out individually by name by the teacher to answer questions, unless they raise their hands. The findings show that the students did not like this technique when it was used by their teachers. The students unwillingly responded to the teacher, but were not happy and felt embarrassed. They, as they commented in the interview, (see students' interview A10) wanted the teacher to call them only when they raise their hands to avoid being embarrassed. The teacher who used that technique explained that it was good, and it helped her to make different students answer instead of the same students who always put their hands up (see Tany's interviews).

On the same account of the importance of the role of the teacher, the findings of the study also show that students prefer teachers who explain the tasks clearly and give them as much help as they can. They said that they did not understand the task. The importance of the teacher in facilitating learning corroborates with the many studies in the literature (Borg, 2008; Nunan, 1992), see (Section 2.5.2).

The students compared their learning experience and college teachers with their secondary school experience. They mentioned that the teaching at school level was better because the teachers explained the lessons better, and sometimes used Arabic in the class. They rationalized their lack of not understanding some of their teachers' explanations to various factors including the speed of teachers' talk, and their low level of English. One student stated in her dairy (see appendix 4):

Teachers in the college only lecture but they do not explain the task in different ways, like the schools. They do not check if the students understand the lesson or not.

While observing class (C20), I noticed that some students tried to rely on other students in the group, by asking them for an explanation in Arabic, as well as asking them to show them how to do the task. They seemed to fail to understand the task requirement from the teacher as they commented that the teacher did not ensure that students were clear about what was required of them (see Section 4.3.3 - female students' interview C20 lines 54-59).

Recent studies have shown the positive benefits of students' collaborative learning and support. Webb (2003:173) argues that students help and learn from each other in the classroom in many ways. He states that "students give and receive feedback from their peers, share knowledge and ideas". This research supports the role of students in helping each other, especially when using the shared linguistic advantage of using Arabic, as well as the role of teachers in facilitating learning.

## **2- Students' level of English and their participation**

As stated earlier in Section 4.3.4.1, one emerging factor that influences student participation is the students' level of English. Some teachers of this study attributed students' low classroom participation to many factors, including their low level of English. The findings reveal that some students lack motivation to participate in the classroom due to their inability to speak English in class. They also lack the confidence to talk in class. Furthermore, some students talked about some of their psychological concerns regarding the image that other students might have about them if they used poor English. Other female students also mentioned in the interview that some male students commented in Arabic about their English when they spoke up in class (see students' interview C20). This, in turn, has hindered students from talking and participating freely in the classroom. The issue of students' low level of English was also confirmed by some of the teachers' responses about their opinion on students' level of English. It is pertinent here to mention that the opinion of the teachers is diverse, but the majority feel that their level was low. One teacher attributed their weakness of the English language to their previous knowledge of English in school. Generally speaking, the use of English in the school is very limited and is only used during English lessons only. However, in college or any other higher institutions, students are likely to find themselves compelled to use English intensively, in most of their courses. Some students found this challenging, see Appendix (A4). Therefore, the learning context of English is different; and in the college it requires learners to possess a good command of English so that they can engage in the classroom discussion and participate more confidently. This has created what is called 'learning anxiety' on the part of students, and has influenced their participation in the classroom. It has been referred to by Horwitz (2001:112) as "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety", which in the case of this study is caused by students' low level of English, and the different classroom context represented by the college. Previous literature shows that students' anxieties interfere with their achievement and learning (Horwitz, 2001). Cope (1986) looked at anxiety in language learning as a cause for "students' uncomfortable learning experience", which affects their achievement negatively (Horwitz, 2001).

Nevertheless, the students of the study are expected to show a low proficiency in English as they have just started their academic study in the Foundation Year, which was also proved by their

results of the placement test that showed their low scores. The findings also show that students reported in the interviews and their diaries that they faced difficulties in understanding the teacher's language at the beginning of their course due to their low English proficiency. They also reported that they improved as they developed their English skills.

Finally, one teacher commented that some of the new students were motivated to learn English, and they exerted efforts to participate.

But with most of the students, especially the students from the newer group, fresh out of high school group, their participation are very good. The other ones, it's a little bit pulling more out of them and ... yeah. (*Interviewee line 53*)

The findings confirm that some students with a low level of English were reluctant to participate confidently in the classroom as shown in their responses in the interviews and their diary entries (see Appendix A1 and A3).

Furthermore, the results of the study regarding the students' low level of English and the problems that Arab learners face support some of the claims by other studies conducted in Arab countries, such as Jordan (Suleiman, 1983, Rababah, 2002), Yemen (Abbad, 1988), and Saudi Arabia (Storch and Aldosari, 2010). These studies as summarised by Rababah (2002) claim that students were accepted, in higher education institutions, to show a low level of English (Wehba, 1998), and this was reflected in students' abilities to communicate comprehensively in the classroom (Rababah, 2002). Furthermore, Suleiman (1983) argues that new graduates who join universities lacked a basic knowledge of communication in English. The findings of the study agree with the findings of the previous studies in relation to the level of students and its impact on students' low participation.

Another emergent issue connected to the effect of students' low level of English was the use of the mother tongue by the students when they work in groups. The findings show that students shift to Arabic when discussing the task in groups. In my observation, I noticed that many students discussed the task in Arabic. When I asked them, they said that it was easier for them to talk in Arabic. The use of the mother tongue and its effect on students learning and participation is discussed in the coming section.

### **3- The use of Arabic in the classroom**

As explained above, the participants' inability to communicate in the classroom and participate due to some linguistic barriers such as the students' low level of English was seen as an emerging factor in the study. In relation to this factor comes the role of Arabic as one of the preferences suggested by the students while learning English. The findings show two different views on students' preference of the use of the mother tongue (Arabic language) in the classroom. Some students were of the view that Arabic use in class, either by their teacher or

generally in the classroom, facilitates learning or encourages participation. On the other hand, other students were of the opinion that English only should be used in the classroom so that they could improve their English. These views are discussed below.

The students who preferred to use Arabic in class believe that Arabic makes learning easier and they mentioned some reasons. First, the students lacked a good proficiency in English which limits their understanding and participation in the classroom. They stated in their interviews that they were not good at the English language and sometimes could not understand the language of the teacher (see Appendix A1). Secondly, students found using Arabic by the teachers helped them in understanding the course. One student compared English lessons with a mathematics lesson taught by another teacher. He said that the teacher began the course by providing students with a word list of mathematic terminology in Arabic (See Section 4.3.3).

However, the other view regarding the use of the mother tongue was expressed by the students. The findings show that some students preferred to always use English in the classroom. They claimed that by hearing only English in the classroom, they could improve their English language. One student talked about her interest of acquiring the accent of the teacher. She continued that students did not have other sources of hearing good English except from the teacher. She wrote in her diary

Because most English teachers in the college were foreigners, we had to learn how to speak English and this is good because we are forced to learn in English and communicate with the teachers in English.

Recent researchers and classroom studies found that learners use their L1 in learning L2. Studies also show that there is a high possibility that L1 is used when the all learners share one language in the classroom (Storch and Aldosari, 2010). For example, the findings of the study confirms the findings of Guk and Kellogg (2007) in the Korean context. They found that learners used their first language when interacting with each other in doing group work. Brook-Lewis (2009) cited in (Storch and Aldosari, 2010) encouraged the use of L1 (Arabic) in L2 learning context and concluded that learners appreciated that the teacher allowed them to use their language along with L2 in the classroom. The learners showed good performance of learning the L2. A similar view was expressed by the participants of this study as some of them stated that they could do the task easily when their classmates explained to them how to do the task in Arabic (see Section 4.3.3).

There has been an on-going debate in the literature about the benefits of the use of the mother tongue in the EFL-ESL learning classroom (Guk and Kellogg, 2007; Creese, 2005; Rocca, 2010; Storch and Aldosari, 2010). Nevertheless, the choice of using Arabic or English in the class is governed by many factors which is often not in the hands of the teachers. Teachers of English are expected to use English in the classroom. In the case of the study, the teachers were all non-

Arabic speakers which made it impossible for them to use Arabic in their teaching. The findings show that teachers talked most of the time in class, leaving little time for the students to talk. The analysis of classroom observation reveals that students have few opportunities to speak in class. Most of the talking was done by teachers while giving instructions, explaining rules, asking questions, and giving model answers. One student said that teachers in college only lecture and talk; indicating her preference to teachers in the schools who used different teaching techniques more than just lecturing (see Appendix A4).

The students also use Arabic when they discussed tasks in groups. The findings show that students prefer to use Arabic with their classmates in the groups. This confirms another study conducted in Saudi Arabia which showed similar results. Al-Nofaie (2010) concludes that the attitudes of using Arabic in an EFL classroom were positive. He found out while observing intermediate students in the English classroom that teachers and students prefer to use Arabic in certain situations (Al-Nofaie, 2010).

Finally, the findings also show that students used Arabic generally in different situations such as commenting about the lesson to each other, teasing each other and sometimes using translated Arabic words to convey meanings in English when talking to teachers. Here I talk about using translated Arabic words to convey meaning in English.

Learners use different learning strategies and ways of expression when communicating their ideas from the mother tongue in the foreign language, one of which is the use of the literal translation of words. Learners sometimes fail to communicate their ideas in the foreign language due to their limited vocabulary and their general low foreign language proficiency. Therefore, they often try to find an alternative way of using their mother tongue by searching for equivalent vocabulary that may convey their message. It does work sometimes but can be unsuccessful in other trials.

In this study, the data showed that some students used literal translation to convey their meaning to their teachers. There were many incidents when students used Arabic in class as shown in the data (see Appendix (M) student interviews). The following context shows an unsuccessful choice of Arabic-English word equivalent:

The teacher asked students to get out their books. One girl did not have her book, and told the teacher that her book was “absent”.

Looking at the extract above, the students intentionally and innocently thought that she used the right word to mean “she lost her book”. As an Arabic speaker and specifically speaking the student’s Omani dialect, the teacher would understand why the student used that word. The word “absent” seems to be confusing to some Omani students.

To clarify any ambiguity and inappropriate choice of the equivalent word used by the student, let us look at the meaning of the word “absent” and the word “lost”. “Absent” in Arabic has a very similar meaning to the word “lost”, and in fact it is used commonly in some Omani dialects. In English, the words lost and absent have different meanings which do not mean the same. However, the word “lost” in Arabic has a different meaning too. To my interest of judging the use of “absent” in a context similar to the situation used by the student, I asked my colleagues who came from different regions of Oman. They all confirmed the use of the word “absent” in a similar context as being used by the student in the study.

As mentioned earlier, factors influencing students’ participation vary and are brought by various motives. The discussion now moves into the final emergent issue related to other socio-cultural factors as mentioned by students. These socio-cultural factors are religion, shyness, family support and encouragement, and college environment (see Sections 4.2.3 and 4.4). They are discussed as follows:

## **5.2 The socio-cultural factors influencing students’ participation**

### **5.2.1 Religion**

The discussion of religion influence (specifically Islam) in the learning environment in this study is not intended to reflect any argument or views regarding the relationship between Islam and the learning of English. There is an intensive body of literature on that topic which has been summarized by Mohammed-Asraf (2005:103-118). In his article, he presented an argument on the “attitudinal resistance” of Muslims towards learning English and talked about the conflict between English and Islam, (Mohd-Asraf, 2005). However, the findings of the study suggest that students’ behavior and interaction in the classroom seem to be influenced by their social and cultural identity as Muslim representing themselves when they interact in class. Many incidents of reactions have been noted in classroom observation. However, the degree of social and cultural self-representation varies among the participants. For example, as mentioned in (Section 4.3.2), a strong reaction towards showing a disapproval of a social and religious behavior was reflected by one of the female students, mentioned by one of the teachers in the interview, see Rashid’s interview line (64-82) in (Section 4.3.2). The female student stormed out of the class when one of her classmates showed a photograph of a women who was not dressed properly. The teacher commented that the girl was annoyed. The reasons that could explain the student’s reaction could be personal or cultural. Some students are more conservative and may reject behaviors that are not accepted by Islamic rules or teachings.

Looking at this incident, the action of the student could be explained from an Islamic perspective. According to Islamic rules or ethics, male Muslims are asked not to look at a female

Muslim when her body is not covered (except face and hands). The same things apply to a female when looking at males. This is called “gh’dh al-Basar” (Lower their gaze) as shown in the translated version of the Holy Quran from (Surat Al-Noor verses 29).

	Arabic	Translated into English
	<p>قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَعْضُوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ  ذَلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ</p>	<p>Say to the believing men that they should <i>lower their gaze</i> and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.</p>

The findings also show another behavior by one of the female students observed in the classroom that could be related to the above incident, but represented a different opinion of the student’s identity. For example, one of the female students was asked by the teacher to write on the white board. When the student was writing, her arm was not covered because she was wearing a lose “abbia” (a black dress worn by Muslim women) and students could see her arm uncovered, see incident one in (section 4.4.4.1).

Talking about the above incident, I observed that some of the students were not happy and were looking at each other uncomfortably. Being an insider to the culture of the students, I felt that the behavior of the student was not culturally expected. It is fair, however, to say that this action could not only be attributed to socio-cultural reasons and therefore, we cannot accuse the student of breaking some cultural rules by that behavior. It was also possible that the student did not pay attention to her dress and did not want to expose her arm deliberately. Nevertheless, the action was seen as inappropriate by most of the other students.

The two incidents above indicate some of the challenges or actions that took place in the classroom and required an understanding of the context of the classroom from those who try to understand what happens in the classroom such as teachers. Teacher’s knowledge about some of this cultural sensitivity helps them understand the context and therefore consider it in their teaching process.

As discussed earlier in (Section 2.2.2), what happens in the classroom stems from a range of interrelated factors that contribute in shaping the culture and context of the classroom (Rocca, 2010; Lee, 2005; Conteh, 2001; Kramsch, 1995; Breen, 1985). The findings support the argument that learners’ identities are marked by the dominant culture or religion (Shaw, 2000).

Furthermore, the influence of a social-cultural theme was also reflected on the physical organization of the classroom in the college, see (Section 4.3.2), and look at the seating chart of the classroom in the college (Appendix J). The class was organized in a way that male and female students have separate doors, prohibiting mixing the entrance for all students. Gender-entrance segregation also applies to all doors in the college, as well as walk-ways and corridors.

Although the above examples were personal reactions by some of the students, they impact on the dynamic of the classroom and the whole classroom culture. For example, on pedagogical matters, the teachers need to pay attention to such personal actions made by students, and consider them in their teaching. For instance and with reference to incident one above (disapproval of seeing women not dressed properly), teachers need to make it clear to students when doing presentations that they do not show anything that could be culturally unacceptable. This, in turn, requires careful monitoring from teachers. On the same token, it could also limit teachers' choice of materials to be presented in the classroom as it should be culturally acceptable. This agrees with some of the recommendations put forward by Mohd-Asraf (2005) that teachers need to take into account the social-cultural perspectives of learning English in Muslim countries (Mohd-Asraf, 2005). These issues will be discussed more fully in the conclusion chapter.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review (Section 2.3.2), unfolding and understanding those cultural practices and reactions (see examples above) is not easy and often requires a deeper understanding of those interrelated factors shaping the classroom context (Fassinger, 1995; Weaver and Qi, 2005).

However, my general impression and the findings of this research on students' attitudes towards learning in general and their participation in particular suggest that students adhered to those social and cultural norms in the class. For example, the findings show that students did not try to change the seating arrangements set by the college administration. They all sat in their designated areas in the classroom. Also, teachers considered this kind of seating arrangement decided by the college and there was an agreement among all participating teachers that they did not challenge the culture of the students or the rules set by the college. Teachers did not include any activities that require gender-mixing; although one teacher felt that this would be good to try to get students to work together (see Section 4.3.1) (Tany's interviews line 60): She commented:

Yes, actually, I want to get boys to mix with girls but it is difficult to do this. Sometimes students refused to work together and as teachers, we do not want to force students. You know learning is not achieved through enforcing students. We also respect the culture. Sometimes there is a role play activity where the original characters are man and a woman. It would be good to have a boy and a girl to act out the dialogue but we just ask either two boys or two girls. *Tany's interview (line 60)*

Finally, the findings indicate that some students were aware of the role of their socio-cultural influence on the way they deal with each other. For instance, one male student, driven by his Islamic beliefs as he confirmed, said that we need to show respect and be modest (Hayia-Shy) when we deal with girls. Both male and female students also had this feeling of brother- and sister-hood. I think this feeling of intimacy among the students might have arisen from their cultural background of needing to show respect to each other. It could also be possible that they respected the regulations set by the college system for seating and male/female general expected conduct in the classroom. Nevertheless, students may also feel that this is good for them as it reflects what is normally common outside the classroom context in their daily life. The findings of this study do not suggest that students' behavior in relation to a mixed-gender situation in the classroom is so rigid that students never talk to each other but the results had shown very little interaction between males and females as stated by some of the teachers in the interviews, see Rashid's interviews.

Another related finding regarding the socio-cultural factors that influence students' participation is family support and encouragement. This issue is discussed below.

### **5.2.2 Family support and encouragement**

Learners need support from their parents and family members at every stage during their time at any educational institution, including colleges and universities. By family support here, the study refers to the help that students receive from their father, mother, brother and peers. The findings of the study suggest that many students received different kinds of support ranging from verbal encouragement and appreciation to more materialistic gifts and support. Most students find family support encouraging and it helps them to study and gain high achievements. Henderson and Berla (1994) pointed out in a review of 66 studies that looked at how family contributed to students' achievement. In their reviews, most studies showed positive correlation between students' achievements and family support (Henderson and Berla, 1994).

In Oman, based on my experience as a teacher and supervisor, I can confidently say that the culture of parental visits to schools for the purpose of monitoring their child's achievement has developed recently. This could be due to the high percentage of educated parents who care about their child's education. Most parents now work as teachers, doctors, ministerial officers, and so on. They realize the importance of education for their children, so they try to make sure that they study well in school. The findings of the study show that students valued their family's role in encouraging them to learn and gain high marks. This was reflected by the students in the interviews and some of their diaries. As mentioned earlier, some students received gifts from their parents (see Section 4.4.3). One student said

My parents encourage me and always ask me about my participation in class. They sometimes buy me stories and books in English. *Female student's diary (A2)*.

Another student mentioned her uncle as a model for her to copy in the future. She talked about her uncle's educational success in learning English and wished to be like him, (see female students' interview C20).

Previous studies on family support talked about the actual involvement of family and society in schools and colleges. Marcon (1999) cited in (Henderson and Berla, 1994) studied family involvement in the school and made a distinction between "active and in-charge" or "passive" and "reacting" involvement of parents in the school. She concluded that students' achievement was high when parents were actively involved in the schools by participating in school activities and being involved in helping their children in their studies.

Most studies in the literature looked at the role of parental support and involvement in school (Christenson, 2004; Fan and Chen, 2001; Marcon, 1999). Although this study did not look at family support as a cause for encouraging student participation, the findings suggest that family support plays a positive role on student learning.

One of the surprising findings of the study regarding the above issue was the parents' encouragement for students to participate actively and to mix with the boys in the class. This point was brought up by two female students in their diaries and in the interviews. Looking at what was discussed earlier (see Section 4.3.1), students' concerns regarding co-education and gender-mixing might contradict with parents' encouragement for their children to mix in class. The students commented that their parents explained to them that when they finish college and start work, they might be in a mixed-gender working environment. The same reason for gender-mixing was stated by some of the students, in that they need to get used to this kind of environment where they study and work comfortably with the opposite gender. This might suggest that some parents are less concerned about the issue of gender-mixing and do not see any cultural breakdowns that might have an effect on their sons or daughters if they mix in the classroom. Based on my intuitive anticipation and on some observation in the classroom, I had a prior opinion concerning parent's support and encouragement. I did not expect that some parents would encourage gender-mixing for holding a personal view on the matter. Nevertheless, the findings reveal some interesting results which might reflect more openly to issues of gender and co-education. This, however, requires further investigation to be validated.

I mentioned earlier that classroom context in each country has its own social and environmental roles in shaping what occurs in the classroom and how each individual represents themselves in any social situation. For example, City and village environments play an important role in shaping people's nature. Some city students- male and female- are more open and freer. Because

of their exposure to so many people, they become more flexible and more open. Some of their parents have high ranks in society which means they have to deal with some prestigious people with high standard of education. Some students do visit English speaking countries in the summer holiday, either for enjoyment or joining some academic institutions so they could improve their language skills. Up on returning home they become more fluent, less shy to talk with others, more confident.

In a nutshell, the findings suggest that family support has some influence on students' participation. Both students and parents confirm the benefits of family support in encouraging students' learning and participation in the classroom.

Based on the findings of the study and the discussion above regarding the influence of social/cultural factors on mediating what goes in classroom, it is pertinent here to discuss what the data suggests about what it would be useful for teachers and learners in the context to know, in order to understand each other's classroom behaviours better and the type of participation happening in the course of the classroom. The following section talks about the role of the teachers and what they need to know about the context of the study.

### **5.2.3 Teacher's role in EFL classroom**

This study presents a social-cultural gap between the teachers and learners, specifically in terms of teachers' limited knowledge of students' culture and religion. The classroom context of this study also has various challenges for both the learners themselves and the teachers. Those challenges are associated with the complexity of the EFL classroom which is influenced by various factors as discussed in Section 2.3.2. In such complexity, the need for mutual understanding of those challenges is an urgent matter for teachers, learners, and educational policy makers (Cummins, 2009; Wyatt, 2013; Seedhouse, 1996).

There has been a recent focus on teachers' cognition and the relationship of understanding the context of classroom. The work of (Borg, 2006) on teachers' cognitions suggests that language teachers are distinctive in terms of "the nature of the subject, the content of teaching, the teaching methodology, teacher-learner relationship, and contrasts between native and non-native speakers (Borg, 2006:3). Looking at some of the distinctive characteristics of teachers argued by Borg's work on teachers' cognition, the study asserts that the teaching methodology and pedagogy can make a change in creating a learning environment that encourages learners and teachers to design their own curriculum inside the classroom. This view was highly encouraged by the authors and the contributors of the book, edited by Conteh and Meier (2014) on "the Multilingual Turn in language education". In their book, they addressed issues related to accommodating multilingualism in the EFL classroom, bearing in mind that multilingualism is present in individuals and societies of the world.

To make a change in the classroom, it is not fair only to suggest ways to teachers to incorporate in their classroom, without considering other factors that are related to the whole classroom context, even though teachers play a big role in determining how their classroom should be.

Back to the point of ecology and the complexity of the context mentioned earlier in the literature chapter, there are several interrelated factors that need to be attended to, starting from the top management of the educational policy makers and down to the classroom as shown by different models and representation of classroom context and ecological paradigms (Breen, 1985; Kramsch, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Conteh, 2001), see Section 2.3.2. Thus, the change involves the whole process of the educational parameters that have an influence on learning and teaching. The discussion of such an issue is beyond the scope of this study for its limited focus on student participation. However, looking specifically at the role of teachers in relation to mediating culture and language, it is pertinent to suggest briefly some crucial guidance that teachers need to be given by the authorities as well as areas that teachers need to develop in their general knowledge of the context in which they teach. These suggestions are context-specific but generally can be useful for other teachers in similar contexts. The points are not discussed in order of importance and I recommend two areas of focus: methodological and cultural.

### **5.3.1 Methodological considerations:**

Many teachers complain about not having autonomy in their classrooms and they need to follow prescribed textbooks and materials. Wyatt (2013:238) concluded that many teachers have developed and shown autonomy in their classrooms, based on a “thick description” of small case studies conducted by teachers in the BA Leeds Project in Oman (Wyatt, 2013). Teachers began to modify their teaching, adapted new materials, and tried out new teaching strategies to achieve their attainment goals in their classroom.

It is expected that teachers at universities are given more autonomy in their classes but some of the teachers in this study complained that they do not have freedom and autonomy and they had to follow what is recommended by the English department. One area that teachers talked about was related to assessment methods implemented in the CAS in Ibri. For example, some teachers commented that there were no grades allocated for student participation, and they believed that students would be more responsive if grades were given for classroom participation. Besides, teachers could not make any other seating arrangements in the class as this was set and decided by the college; and they commented that they did not want to challenge the culture of the classroom. Teachers wished that they had more freedom on the above examples. Giving the fact that having more freedom in the class, teachers can modify their teaching techniques to what they think might be helpful for their learners. For instance, teachers might wish to change the seating arrangement in the classroom to make room for weak students to work with good

students. They might also want to mix boys with girls based on their linguistic competencies in order for girls to help boys: first because the number of girls outnumbers boys in the classrooms I studied in Ibri college; and second, the girls are better than boys to some extent. Nevertheless, the above suggestion is not feasible for cultural and social reasons as discussed in the subsequent point.

### **5.3.2 Cultural consideration:**

EFL teachers often have limited knowledge of the culture of the context where they teach in foreign countries. Considering the context of Oman, the teachers who participated in the study acknowledged their limited knowledge of the culture but some of them had some general knowledge which they learned from the internet and their colleagues before coming to Oman. As a former Assistant Dean in the college, I can say that new teachers commencing their teaching in the college are briefed through a one-day orientation program in which they are given information about the educational system, assessment, and teaching in the college. There was a feeling among those teachers that this was not enough and they needed more information about other socio-cultural issues that concern teaching male and female learners in the college. However, teachers asserted that they learned a lot from their learners through formal and informal communication, as well as from other colleagues, and this helped them to understand some of the socio-cultural issues.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the classroom is a unique context or social world (Nieto, 2010; Weaver and Qi, 2005; Kramsch, 1985) that not only represents the classroom but also the world or society outside. Furthermore, the classroom has valuable sources of knowledge for both teachers and learners to use in understanding their roles and duties in the classroom. I argue that successful classrooms are those that share a mutual understanding and good relationship between the teachers and learners. Both teachers and learners bring knowledge about their identities and if shared between teachers and learners, many issues of socio-culture can be managed and used for the benefit of the learning process. (Alexander, 2010:3 cited in Conteh and Meier, 2014:8) asserts that teachers can benefit from such a relationship with his learners to “precisely diagnose pupils needs, frame their learning tasks, and assess their progress”.

Some FLT teaching in the context of this study find that classroom context is not encouraging teachers to use different teaching techniques because of the culture of the students. They observed that students do not participate more in the classroom and each gender works with the same gender. However, learning can be achieved without students have to mix with each other, giving the students self-choice or freedom to work with whom they feel more comfortable. The issue here is that teachers need to be aware of why students prefer to work with each gender. This helps teachers design activities suitable for both genders. Similarly, teachers also need to

know that for cultural reasons, teachers should keep a distance between him or her and the female students. For example, when teachers assign a task to students to work on, most teachers prefer to go round to make sure that students are doing the task or sometimes to help them while they are working on the task. Culturally, teachers should avoid going from the back of the female students because the students feel uncomfortable. I have observed female students feeling restless when I go to the back of the class to see their work. Many would try to alter their head scarf to make sure that no sign or part of the back neck is not covered. Such observation limits the space that teachers can go to in the classroom. However, this can be avoided when the teachers understand such subtle remarks about the culture and how female students react to it. I argue here that sometimes teachers go to the extreme of not checking the female work to avoid any cultural confrontation in the classroom. This might deprive the female students from getting teachers attention and support. In response to the above challenges teachers might have, they need to consider that students' lack of participation is not a failure on his part nor on the students' part, too. This urges teachers to look for different ways of involving and assessing students' comprehension in the classroom, if we believe that students' participation is crucial in showing students' comprehension.

In summary, the role of the teacher here is to make use of the culture of the learners in their pedagogy. Teachers need to appreciate the culture of the learners; their identity and their language, also see Chapter Six (section 6.3.3.2)

Below I want to shed light on the possible generalization of the findings to other contexts.

#### **5.4 Generalizing the findings to other contexts:**

The aspect of generalizability of the qualitative findings (in the case of this study) is not the goal of the research for its unique social and research context (Ary et al., 2010; Miles et al., 2013). However, other researchers can make use of the try to find similarities between the context of this study and their similar context, (see section 3.3.3.3). In this section, I outlined below some possible contributions and suggestions on how the findings might be helpful for other contexts or researchers. In other words, I talk about the extent to which the findings are generalizable across other Higher Education Colleges and similar Higher Education institutions across the region.

I mentioned earlier, see section (3.3.3.3) that in Oman, there are six Colleges of Applied Science which they all follow the same educational policy and vision. So I can confidently say that the context of this study is to a great extent similar to the other five colleges which mean that they share similar social, cultural and educational context. Thus, the findings of this study might be generalized to other colleges bearing in mind the individual classrooms at each college and the teachers as I argue throughout the whole thesis that classroom context is a unique social context that has its own culture.

Second, most public and private universities and colleges in the region follow similar educational guidelines stated and revised by the Ministry of Higher Education and therefore, it is most likely that the findings of this study might be generalized. However, I would assume that private college and universities in Oman might be more open than public higher educational colleges in terms of regulation and freedom in the classroom. This needs to be investigated by further research.

Third, it is pertinent here to mention that most Islamic countries influence the educational curriculum as their policies derived from the principles of Islam. Thus, there might be some great cultural and social similarities among Muslim countries. This might suggest common similarities of context in which learners present their social identity in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is also important that due to modernization and globalization, many social and cultural aspects have been influenced by multiculturalism and cross-cultural influence. In other words, some Islamic culture in Arab world has changed to go in line with modernization or to accommodate other culture. In nutshell, some Islamic countries are not strict about Islamic rules and teaching. The discussion of such claim is beyond the scope of this study, but I am making a case that the findings of this study might not represent all Islamic culture. A general comment can be said that mixing boys with girls at higher education institutions in Muslim countries has some limitations when it comes to classroom participation as I mentioned in (section 4.3.2)

Finally, in term of research methods, students' participation was researched in other contexts where the researchers used classroom observation and interviews, (Yin, 2009; Kumpulainen, K. et al. 2009). In this study, I used students' dairies as a research method that helps in gaining the learners's self-refelction on their learning and what helps them particiapte more in the class. I found these methods I used are suitable in this context because it gives the students freedom to express their views openly as they may be relectant to do that in interviews, for example. Therefore, I think other researchers having similar context might use the methods I used her I the study but there need to develop it to suit their research context.

In conclusion, the findings of the study are context-specific but they can be generalized to a similar cultural context. If not generalized, the findings are still valuable as they depict an educational and social context where it can be generalized to other higher educational institutions and colleges within the regions of Oman.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. It begins by providing some possible answers to the research questions and tries to link them to the literature and the findings of the study. The chapter then moves on to discuss other findings, such as the effect of the classroom context, and the teachers and students understanding of the complexity of the context where teaching and

learning take place. It then moves on to discuss the findings in relation to some factors relating to students, such as their level of English and the use of Arabic in class. The chapter ends with a discussion of religion and family support and encouragement, their impact on students' participation and the importance of the EFT in understanding some cultural aspects. In this chapter I also discussed the generalizability of the finding. The proceeding chapter is the final chapter where the study comes to end and offers a conclusion and recommendations for further studies. It also discusses possible contributions and implications based on the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter concludes the study and discusses limitations, contributions and recommendations of the study, as well as describing my personal reflection on the process of the research. First, it talks about the limitation of the study and discusses possible contributions to the area of the study. After that and based on the results of the study, I then suggest some recommendations for policy makers in MOHE and EFL teachers and discuss the implications from the study and propose some possible areas for further work on students' participation. Finally, I end the chapter by describing my own reflection on the process of conducting the study, highlighting the knowledge and experience I learned as well as the challenges involved in conducting the study, both personal and general challenges associated with the research process.

#### 6.1 Limitations

The study aims at exploring the factors that influence students' participation in the English classroom at Ibri CAS in Oman. The findings of the study are valuable in providing a general socio-cultural understanding of the classroom context in colleges in Oman, although the study included only one college out of six Colleges of Applied Sciences. Other colleges, to a great extent, have similar classroom contexts, see Section 1.2.4.1. This study has some methodological and practical limitations. These limitations are acknowledged below.

I begin the discussion by critically talking about the methods I used in data collection. First, the use of classroom observation was helpful and provided this research with data, especially about students-teacher interaction in the classroom. Both the observation protocol, appendix (I) and the recording of the observations and interviews helped me go through the data later, and it was easier for me to revisit the data and make some notes for further investigations. However, recording students' interaction and participation in the class would have been better through videotaping. Videotaping provides the researcher with live images and human interaction is expressed through many ways that involve almost all parts of the body. This kind of live image of interaction is a useful source for analysing the data later on and also provides the researcher with data that cannot be recorded only through observational protocols or any other sheets of paper. Besides, the complexity of classroom context, as described earlier in the previous chapters, confirms that understanding students' participation involves more than just the verbal interaction which we as researchers observe or hear. Rather, learners use signals, facial expressions, body signals, and gestures that all express meaningful sources of information that could be crucial to the analysis of students participation (Warayet, 2011). Due to some cultural

reasons, videotaping was not used, despite its valuable means of recording interaction in the classroom. As mentioned in Section 3.1.6.1, videotaping is culturally unacceptable, and therefore I choose to use a voice recorder instead. Students will not feel comfortable but they will also express their objection if I decided to video them. It is also part of research ethics that participants are not forced to be in any situation they do not like under the course of the study and do not want their images to be presented. Roschelle (2000) stated that videotaping has some ethical problems:

“Ethical dilemmas arise when recognizable images of experimental participants are presented (*Roschelle 2000:710*)

Secondly, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is very important to be recognized as this might affect many issues regarding their responses in the interviews and their behaviour in the classroom (Cohen et al., 2007; Miles et al., 2013). In the case of my study, I acknowledge my relationship with the participants due to my position in the college both as a teacher and an assistant dean. Many students and teachers participating in the study understand this relationship and therefore, I tried to minimise my influence on the outcomes of the study by assuring them confidentiality and reminding them that the data gathered is only used for the research purposes as explained earlier in (Section 3.1.4.3), and in the consent form.

The benefits of my role as being an insider to the context of the study were mentioned earlier, (see Section 3.3.3). It helped me understand some of the learners’ views which were related to culture and classroom context, although this might have a negative influence. It is fair, however, to claim that if this study was conducted by another researcher who does not have a similar intimacy with the participants, students might have talked about other issues that might be culturally very sensitive, and not want to share with me in order to avoid any personal opinion that I might hold about them. The findings reveal some indications of some of the students’ concerns being open to behave naturally in the class in my presence. For example, one girl stated that she did not notice that I was there at the back of the class. She said, “I felt shy because I was laughing in the class and then I saw you there; I was embarrassed”, see students’ interview (A10). This might indicate that the students were slightly reluctant to react normally in class due to my relationship to the context of the college.

Thirdly, I acknowledge here that there were many interrelated and hidden factors that might influence student participation in the classroom which this study did not attend to or capture. This study focuses on observing two classrooms to explore factors influencing student participation. I argue here that the data gathered for this study is limited and in some situations inconsistent with the overall plan of collecting data due to unavoidable causes. For example, the study was set to observe two groups of students (Level C and Level A) over a period of two

semesters, one year, as described earlier in Section 3.3. I tried to follow the prescribed process of data collection but it was not feasible. There have been some changes regarding having the same students in the same classes for the two semesters. The students, after finishing their first semester, were regrouped according to their level of achievement in that level. This resulted in having some new students in the new classes in the second semester. This restricted the follow up stage of the same students in one class to explore their new perceptions after one semester. Having the same students again in the second semester might have helped in looking at the changes in their views to issues such as shyness and their relationships with each other. However, the findings, according to the student interviews mentioned that issues of gender and shyness became less of their concern as time passed by and they feel that these issues did not hinder them from participation.

I acknowledge here again that time interval was not one of the factors that the study opted to explore, but considering it might have added new insight to the findings of the study, especially in reference to shyness and gender-mixing as mentioned above. This could be considered for a further research.

Finally, keeping the variables of the study under control was one of the challenges that this research encountered as it is in some cases of the qualitative research. Similarly, to the issue of keeping the same students in both classes under the focus of the study, the same teachers were also difficult to observe throughout the whole study. I tried to maintain observing the same teachers in the three stages of collecting data but again it was not possible for various reasons. First, one teacher left the college after being observed in the first semester due to his contract with the Ministry. Second, trying to solve the problems of observing most students, I had to find the teachers who had a large number of students who were in the first semester. Therefore, the study ended up having two new teachers who were not observed in the first semester.

Regardless of these common practical problems found in most social research, the findings of the study reveal new insights relevant to the context of classroom participation and provides valuable information for teachers who want to teach in a similar context where social and cultural factors have their impact on the way students participate and interact in EFL classrooms. These contributions are discussed below.

## **6.2 Contributions**

This section highlights various contributions based on the findings of this study and it hopes to add some new thoughts to the area of student participation. Despite the specific context where student participation was explored in this study, the findings could highlight general contributions to the existing body of literature. It is also a valuable study for those who are concerned about understanding how participation is manipulated in a context similar to that of

this study where it shows the impact of socio-cultural context on student participation. Furthermore, the influence of society and culture on student participation has not previously been studied in Oman to the best of my knowledge, and this research can be considered as a pioneer study that shed light on the relationship and influence of society and culture and student participation. Below, I describe possible contributions in three areas related to the interpretation of some social and cultural behaviours, such as shyness in Western culture and Islamic culture (Omani context), the use of L1 in the ELT classroom and teachers' role in mediating culture and the use of L1 in EFL classrooms.

### **6.2.1 Shyness in Western culture and Islamic culture (Oman culture)**

As I mentioned in the discussion chapter, Section 5.1.1.1, shyness is one of the factors that has an impact on student participation. However, the findings show that the participants have two different views regarding the impact of shyness on their participation.

Based on the findings, shyness was one of the factors that emerged from the data. The findings related to this issue concur with findings of previous studies, that shyness is a social and psychological personality trait. This study argues that shyness could be both positive and negative at the same time (see the discussion chapter, Section 5.1.1.1). However, what is interesting here is how shyness is viewed by the participants of the study, and how shyness is seen by other studies in the literature.

Some previous studies argue that shyness is a natural social behaviour that might disappear in time as learners progress in their studies and become acquainted with their classmates (Coplan and Armer, 2005). These studies view "shyness" as a social behaviour which has also been supported by Kagan (1997). He added that shyness has a biological basis which could be developed by the surrounding environment. On the same view, Rubin, Cheah & Fox (2001) show that shyness among children can be encouraged by "parental overprotection" Coplan and Amer (2005:21). This might make children dependent and less confident and, in turn, make them less active in class. Asendorpf (1990) also looked at shyness as a social behaviour that reflects "social wariness" and anxiety which some children use to avoid interacting with other children. These studies and others indicate that shyness was seen as a social negative phenomenon. As discussed in (Section 5.1.1.1), shyness was also seen as a social expected behaviour among girls but discouraged among boys (Coplan and Armer, 2005).

I argue here that this study reveals and suggests another dimension of the meaning of shyness which is different from the Western culture in the way shyness is viewed by culture and Islamic perspective. Two different views of the effect of shyness emerged from the data which has contributed to the way student participation is understood, and to the EFL teachers working on such social context.

First, the first view agrees with some of the studies discussed above in relation to students' social withdrawal from participating in class, and working with other classmates as argued by Asendorpf (1990). Female students in Muslim countries are shyer than boys in public places such as the classroom. It is also socially supported and expected (Gazelle and Ladd, 2003) that girls should be generally shy.

The second view relates more to Islamic culture and the teaching of Islam as mentioned in the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). According to Islamic norms (see Section 5.1.1.2.4), both men and women are asked to "lower their gaze" and be modest, as quoted in (Surat Al-Noor verses 29).

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.

As mentioned in the discussion chapter, some male students mentioned that the feeling of being shy is positive and they preferred to work with boys in the groups. According to this view on shyness, I think it could create a safer and comfortable environment for students to participate and work together. This Islamic teaching is supposed to establish a familial relationship among male and female students. The findings show that students repeated the phrase "we are like brothers". Nevertheless, there was no evidence that the students work together or whether such claim of being like brothers in the class has been tested. It needs further exploration to determine the types of relationship observed in the class, and how far such a claim is evident in the classroom.

In short, I argue here that the definition of shyness and its interpretation in the culture of Muslim countries is different from that of other culture. As mentioned above, shyness is encouraged by society and Islamic teaching, which brings a new definition to existing literature on how shyness is perceived in Muslim culture and how this new understanding of such socio-cultural behaviour can shape students' participation in the EFL classroom.

Now I move to the role of L1 in EFL classroom and how this might influence students' participation in the class.

### **6.2.2 The use of L1 in the EFL classroom**

The use of L1 in the EFL classroom has gone through different debates and discussions over the time (Lightbown et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2013). Previously, and influenced by traditional learning theories, the use of L1 was discharged and even prohibited by some scholars for the fear of L1 interference in the learning of FL/SL (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Odlin, 1989; Kellerman, 1995). Language transfer, along with other factors, was proved to interfere with the learning of the target language (Odlin, 1989; Jarvis and Crossley, 2012)

However, recent research and with the development of communicative approach and social theories, the use of L1 has been encouraged positively to facilitate learning and classroom instructions. Brooks-Lewis (2009) views the mother tongue as a useful tool for constructing learning in the EFL classroom and classroom management. He supports the use of L1 in the EFL classroom based on the perceptions of his learners on the L1 inclusion program. The learners reported that it was very beneficial for them for their writing task when they received linguistic support and were allowed to use their first language. A similar study was conducted by Al-Nofaie, (2010), in Saudi Arabia which allows students to use their L1 in group work discussion. The finding also reveals that L1 was used in task management and helped the learners in their vocabulary production (Al-Nofaie, 2010).

In one of my personal experiences, I conducted a small experiment on the use of L1 with Grade 11 students in Oman. I presented a writing task to two groups of students and allowed one group to use Arabic in the brainstorming stage. The first group discussed the task and made notes in Arabic, and the other group used only English in all stages. The outcomes of this small experiment (undocumented) showed that the group who used their mother tongue produced a better writing composition. The findings of this study confirm the usefulness of L1 in the EFL classroom, especially when students used L1 in group work discussion.

In addition, it is pertinent here to recognise the importance of language to individuals and societies. Undoubtedly, every individual appreciates their language as it does not only mean a linguistic vehicle for communication but it also represents their identity and self-recognition. In very recent years, there has been a growing interest on research on bilingualism, multilingualism and pluralism and their relationship to teaching and education (Conteh and Meier, 2014). The idea of mono-lingualism in learning has been questioned and a pressing demand for appreciating bilingualism and multilingualism in education especially in the fast growing economic and globalization. This demand opens doors for L1 and L2 to be used in the classroom whenever possible. Skutnabb-Kangas (1994) argues that the use of L1 is a basic human right for every learner to learn in the language they understand (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994 cited in Conteh and Meier, 2014).

Focusing on language learning and its relation to the benefits of recognizing the importance of bilingualism and multilingualism in the classroom, one can argue that the benefits are numerous. To begin with, as I mentioned above in this section, language represents the identity of its users. I use the term “users” here rather than “speakers” to indicate that language can be shared and spoken by all of those who use it, but not only those who own it. Language is also associated with its unique socio-cultural values that can be learned or acquired by the learners. That is to say, when we learn language, we also learn a lot about its culture which can be reflected in our personalities or identities. As a good speaker of English, I realised that I used a non-linguistic

feature of English language which can be seen through my body language when I speak English. For example, nodding the head with a smile to show agreement or the use of a wide smile to show greeting while passing someone. I could be wrong on those examples but I have developed them through my interaction with many native speakers of English in the UK and in Oman. These non-linguistic features associated with English language, as I think, are part of or shared with the features of Arabic, which is my mother tongue. Interestingly, there are times when those features overlap and I find myself using them when I talk in Arabic.

The personal example or anecdote given above reminds us of the holistic social-cultural values associated with multilingualism, as argued by Conteh and Meier (2014) and Norton (2014). They argue that the language we use shapes our identity, “who we are and how we relate to the social world through language” Conteh and Meier (2014:4). This shows that we do not learn only the linguistic utterances of languages but also develop other social and cultural features of the FL.

Furthermore, many studies in Arab countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Emirates and Oman) were conducted to examine the attitudes of Arab learners to learning the English language. These studies were relevant to this study in terms of context similarities where Islamic culture is a dominant factor. In general, these studies examine the effect of English language and culture on the learners (Al-Nofaie, 2010), the importance of English in the global world and its social and cultural influence on other Arab learners (Malallah, 2000; Musa, 1985; Qashoa, 2006). The findings confirm that the learners like to learn English for different purposes and there was an argument regarding the influence of English culture on Arab learners which could be seen as a positive impact. The findings confirm the relationship between language and culture. Learners of those studies mentioned above acknowledged that they learn a lot about the English culture which helps them when they study abroad or communicate with English native speakers.

The target language cannot be taught separate from its culture as argued by many scholars (Corson, 1989; Flewelling, 1994; Kramsch, 1995; Conteh and Meier, 2014). Brown, 1987:123 cited in Malallah (2000:20) points out that:

A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

The Saudi study investigated the effect of learning English on the culture of Saudi learners. Al-Nofaie (2010) examines the relationship between language and culture and whether learning EFL causes cultural change and threats to the identity of the L1 learners. Many studies also show the effect of bilingualism in EFL classroom where learners express their identities in their behaviour in classroom. The discussion above necessities the importance of realising the importance of culture of EFL in classroom and on the learners of the home language. It is also pertinent here to mention that the home culture is always present in the EFL classroom which in

turn has to be recognised by the EFL teachers when they plan their lessons or interact with their learners. Thus, both teachers and learners have their unique identities in the classroom which represents their social identities as well.

It is methodologically important that classroom context can be created by teachers and students on the basis of mutual understanding of their different and shared social identities for better learning. Gibson (2000) argues that teachers and students have interrelated roles in the classroom and they both construct what happens in the classroom. It is true that they have different roles but the role of the teacher is more important in terms of creating classroom context that meets the needs of the learners, based on his understanding of their identities and culture (Conteh and Meier, 2014; Cummins, 2009).

Similarly, Conteh and Meier (2014:8) assert the important role of learners and teachers in mediating the context of the classroom, and suggest that pedagogy should be more “dialectic and dynamic” (Conteh and Meier, 2014). Viewing learning through ecological paradigms allows learners and teachers to create a learning environment that considers all the factors needed for a successful classroom. This empowers teachers and learners to use whatever available sources of shared knowledge to plan their own learning activities and tasks (Hart et al, 2004, cited in Conteh and Meier, 2014:8), and see Chapter Two on teaching English and culture.

However, in most EFL classroom, there are often situations where the EFL teachers do not speak the language of the learners, and this might create a gap of communication between the teachers and learners.

I can summarise here that one of the contributions brought by this study and which concurs with other studies mentioned above is the importance of multilingualism in the classroom. Also, it places an important role on the teacher in mediating their teaching in the light of their understanding of the issues of multilingualism in the classroom. This issue is my third point in the coming section which describes the important role of the teacher in mediating social and cultural issues, and bilingualism or multilingualism in the classroom.

### **6.3 Implications**

The study focuses on exploring the factors that influence student participation in the English classroom. The findings of the study reveal that there are many interrelated factors that could contribute to student participation in the classroom. Some of these factors were explicit, such as the role of the teachers and the choice of topic and students’ own reflection on classroom participation. These were discussed in the previous chapter, Section 5.1. The findings also indicate that there are other factors that were implicit and required further investigation, such as body language and types of participation (Warayet, 2011).

In light of the discussion above and the findings of the study, various implications can be suggested. Some of these are methodological and others are more related to the context of the college and the organizational system as a whole.

### **6.3.1 Methodological implications**

The analysis of the study reveals some issues regarding the design of the study in relation to the role of the observer and the interpretation of the interviews. As I described my intimacy to the context of the study, my analysis was influenced by my own prescribed knowledge about some of the factors which emerged from the study. Researchers claim that they try to be as objective as possible but their identity remains most of the time. However, I argue here for the possible positive outcomes of acknowledging researcher's identity and mediating it in the analytical processes. As a researcher, I recognize my involvement as an insider to the context that I am studying and make use of my involvement throughout the processes of the research in an unbiased way, as described earlier in (3.1.4.2).

Due to some sensitive issues of the context in relation to gender, shyness, one of the implications is that it is better if the analysis of the interview and the interpretation of students' diaries are double-checked with another co-researcher to avoid any personal judgments based on the researcher's prior knowledge of students and culture. Whereas there were some benefits of the researcher's shared knowledge with the participants in many aspects, another view from another researcher or interpreter might be useful to fill the gap of the researcher's identity and his personal involvement in data interpretation.

Secondly, this study uses students' diaries as a research method to acquire students' self-reflection on the factors that influence their classroom participation. The study proves the important use of this method because it allows students to describe and write about their learning and participation for the researcher to gain an understanding of the factors they write about. The approach in the study was based on the assumption and beliefs that student participation is likely to be guided and influenced by some implicit beliefs which cannot be easily explored through interviews or observation.

Thirdly, as argued earlier, classroom context is a complex social world (Weaver and Qi, 2005; Kramsch, 1985; Conteh and Meier, 2014), classroom participation, therefore, can be viewed through different means of interaction and communication with teachers and students in the classroom. This study focuses on describing some incidents of students' participation which was based on classroom talk (Markee, 2004) and exploring the factors that might cause students' participation. The findings indicate that there were other important forms of student participation which this study did not capture, such as body language and embodied actions (Warayet, 2011). Previous studies confirm that learners use all kinds of verbal and non-verbal actions to construct

social interactions. The implication of this study suggests that various forms of participation need to be taken into account when exploring issues related to culture and society for their complexity.

### **6.3.2 Educational and contextual implications**

The study shows that there is a divergence of opinion on students' and teachers' knowledge on understanding the reality of the college classroom context. Many teachers and students commented on their limited knowledge of the reality of the classroom. The findings of the study indicate that many students reported their unfamiliarity of the classroom context and their expected role in mixed-gender classrooms. Teachers also reported a similar view regarding the challenges they face to accommodate their teaching without conflicting with the culture and students' identities. Therefore, college administration or policy makers should not assume that students and teachers will easily achieve their goals without any difficulties.

In the following section, I suggest some implications for the college administration and teachers that might contribute to minimize such stress on teachers and students. These suggestions might be applicable to similar social contexts.

#### **6.3.2.1 Implications for the college administration**

There have been various occasions when students have talked about their surprises and worries of being in the context of the classroom, in which they refer to mixed-gender classes. This does not mean that they are totally unaware of the educational system in the college, but they expressed their uneasiness in studying in a mixed classroom. Similarly, some teachers reported that they wanted to create and use some activities where they have male and female students working together in one group, but they were afraid that such activity might threaten the culture of the classroom. Thus, I suggest that these views are met with some attention from the college administration. College administration can minimise the effect of the above issue by some of these recommendations.

First, there is a need for familiarising students and teachers with the regulation of the college and their expected behaviour and roles in the classroom. At the beginning of the academic year, the college can conduct some workshops or orientation programs where teachers and students are briefed about the classroom situation. The program may include some of the common social issues that might increase tension in the class, and need to be clearly explained for teachers and students as well as giving them some rationale justifications. Second, visits to classrooms at the beginning of the academic year can be carried out by the Head of the English Department to sense any problematic issue which require attention and clarification. In one of the students' interviews, one student mentioned that he wished some of the college personnel visited and

asked them about their learning experience in the classroom. Students expressed their desire to share their experiences with the college administration so that they could talk about some of their concerns. Furthermore, informal talks with teachers and students about the classroom can provide the college with data which can be used to solve any obstacles that either teachers or students might have. Thus, familiarity with the context, observation and visits to classroom and informal talk might help teachers and students understand some of the issues related to the context of the classroom.

#### **6.3.3.2 Implications for teachers**

As discussed above in this chapter, Section 6.2.3, the role of the teacher is crucial in providing a good learning environment where the cultures of the students and teachers are represented and appreciated in the classroom. EFL teachers normally hold educational degrees and teaching experience which broadens their knowledge of the world. Yet, each classroom has its own unique social life (Weaver and Qi, 2005, Seedhouse, 1996, Cummins, 2009). The findings of the study show that some students were reluctant to participate due to various social factors. For example, some students were shy about participating in the class, and even to present their identities in the classroom. This might provoke a negative reaction in the teacher, who might think that the students are refusing to participate. As discussed earlier, shyness was viewed as a positive reaction among the students, considering the value of shyness encouraged by the Islamic culture. Thus, teachers' understanding of such interpretations of students' feeling and reaction can make an impact on their views of the learners and in their teaching.

It is pertinent to say that understanding a society and its culture is not learned within a short period of time due to its complexity. Besides, EFL teacher are not required to fully understand the socio-cultural context to be good teachers in their EFL classes. The argument here, as well as the implications, is expressed by many researchers who encourage EFL teachers to learn about the learners and their needs so that they integrate this knowledge into their teaching (Conteh and Meier, 2014, Nieto, 2010). The findings encourage teachers to build a good relationship with their learners by appreciating their identities as people who have something to add to the context of the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings of the study show that students used their L1 in group discussion and in getting help from their classmates. This shows the valuable use of L1 in facilitating learning in the class (Al-Nofaie, 2010, Al-Jadidi, 2009, Javid et al., 2012) and this might, in turn, increase student participation, as shown earlier in this chapter, see Section 6.2.2. The findings concur with other studies on the value of L1 in helping students learn L2. Many studies indicate the use of L1 in EFL classrooms. For example, Storch and Aldosary (2010:335) found that L1 was used for managing tasks in the EFL classroom and facilitating learning.

Finally, the findings show that many students prefer to work with the same gender in the classroom, as discussed earlier in Chapter 5. The study suggests in light of the findings that learning in groups can be achieved without mixing boys and girls. Learning happens when learners are comfortable in their learning environment. The idea of mixing boys with girls, as some of the teachers wish to do in this study, might raise some cultural issues and prevent learners from participating in the class. The implication I propose here is that EFL teachers need to be bound with the regulations of the classroom seating, and avoid any cultural conflict that might be created from trying to mix boys with girls. Besides, keeping the classroom the way it is gives students a sense of accepting their privacy if they are happy about the arrangement of the classroom. As mentioned earlier, this is more important for their participation than being grouped in mixed-gender groups which might have a negative effect on their identities and preferences of learning. Besides, I think there is no urgent need for mixing boys with girls for learning to take place.

#### **6.4 Suggested areas for research**

Several suggestions for further research based on the findings of the study can be highlighted regarding student participation and the factors that contribute to their participation. This study explored student participation in a specific context without having any assumptions of what causes participation. These suggestions are discussed below.

First, as this study explored the factors that influence student participation in a mixed classroom in Oman, the findings reveal some cultural issues, such as shyness. This finding indicates that shyness was one of the factors that contributed to student participation to some extent. A study of this kind has provided a basis for some of the social issues that might rise in the EFL classroom in similar contexts. Thus, in light of the findings of this study, further research can be carried out to investigate the cause of shyness and its influences on student participation and learning. This phenomenon can be examined in different ways. Researchers can see whether shyness relates only to new students, or whether it continues with learners in the other stages of their learning in college, for instance, their other years of study. Looking at shyness as a cultural and social issue, another way of examining shyness can be conducted to see if shyness occurs in single-sex classes too. Many studies argue that the feeling of shyness is normal in classroom, especially during the first few days in a new learning environment, and it is therefore viewed as a psychosocial trait (Rubin et al., 2002).

Further research can also be carried out to investigate the culture of the teacher and how it influences or shapes student participation in EFL in the same classroom context. That is, a comparison study can be conducted to compare Omani teachers with foreign teachers teaching similar classrooms. The aim of such study hopes to see how students react to different cultures in

the classroom. Until this area is researched, one cannot presume that students might perform better with the teacher who shares their language, culture and many other social aspects. In fact, from my experience in teaching similar students, they sometimes do not feel secure with teachers they know as this might threaten their privacy in the classroom. In other words, students, in such classrooms, feel under stress because the teacher knows their parents and might have more information about their lives. This might constrain students' freedom in the class as they reflect a good image of their identity in front of the teacher. Nevertheless, the role of the teacher and society are important factors to be under the scope of research as suggested above.

Finally, further research in the field of classroom participation can be conducted in other contexts or fields of study, such as mathematics or science. In many higher education institutions, science subjects are taught in English, and English is used as a medium of instruction. It is worth investigating student participation in those non EFL classrooms while English is used as means of communication and instruction and compares their results to the findings of this study.

### **6.5 Personal reflection on my research journey**

I have always dreamed of continuing my higher education and completing my PhD. My research experience is mixed with feelings of happiness, challenges, determination, and scarifies. As a new researcher, I knew that I needed to develop myself and develop my research skills. From the beginning of my study, I attended courses on methodology offered by the school and found them very useful which helped me improve my research skills. I also found the seminars and workshops valuable sources of knowledge that broaden my ideas on research. They created rooms for discussion, sharing ideas, and learning from other experienced researchers, such as our supervisors and tutors.

Being away from my family was one of the difficulties and challenges I faced in my journey of study. There were times when I had to go back to Oman to see family and get things settled. I have been through hard times but my supervisor was there for me to lean on and share all my family and personal worries. She often encouraged me and gave me examples of other students who were going through similar situations, explaining that they had to keep going. These comforting words were so valuable in boosting my motivation to continue.

I learned that I have to take ownership of my research and benefit from the valuable educational and research support available at the university. I made use of the supervisory meetings and the feedback my supervisors provided me throughout my study. I was also passionate about the topic of my research and its usefulness to the existing body of literature in general, and to Oman in particular.

Studying in a different context from your own has been a positive experience for me. I learned a lot of things about the culture, the people and the landscape of Britain. I shared many matters with other international students and I learned from them too.

Finally, this study has also made me aware of the challenges and tension that the classroom context might have on teachers and learners. I felt sympathetic towards foreign teachers who were challenged and required to understand a different culture and need to accommodate their teaching to suit students of diverse identities in the classroom. This study also informed me about the complexity of the classroom which I did not realise before when I was teaching in the college. I think it gave me new insight that it will help me when I go back to teach in the college.

### **Conclusion**

The current study has investigated student participation by exploring the factors that influence their participation in the EFL classroom at the Ibri College of Applied Sciences in Oman. This study confirms the importance of looking at the classroom as a dynamic, complex and unique social context in which teachers and learners contribute to what is happening in class. It also points out the role of the outside world (society, culture, and religion) which is brought by both teachers and learners. Throughout the study, I argue that much of what happens in the class could be driven by both implicit and explicit interrelated factors such as beliefs, tradition, religion, culture, and teachers' or students' identities.

This study contributes to the existing literature by confirming the importance of society and culture and their impact on learning FL and that there is a need for understanding this relationship. Although the study does not focus on whether the use of learners' language facilitate participation or not, it indicates that the L1 can be ignored by the teachers, but they can allow the learners to use it sometimes. This is believed to promote the students' feeling of identity and that their language is being valued in the FL classroom, as indicated by many researchers (Conteh, 2003, Cummins, 2009). On the same account, teachers also are encouraged by the findings of this study to understand the role of creating room for multilingualism in the classroom. Learning takes place when the classroom is viewed as a social place where both students' and teachers' cultures and languages are represented in some way in the classroom (Conteh and Meier, 2014)

Finally, this study suffers from limited samples of participants and other unavoidable problems occurred in the course of the study, as mentioned above in the limitation section (see Section 6.1). However, in conclusion, the study provides useful contributions to the literature and also to the local context of Oman and to other similar contexts.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix (A) Student progress report:

Training and workshops:

Based on the training plan that I have prepared for the first year, I have attended the following workshops and training which were organized by the ESSL Faculty Graduate School, the Library ISS and SDDU:

Name of course/training /workshop	Dates
Search and Save: information searching for PhD students	13/10/2011
Finding PhD dissertations and theses,	9/11/ 2011
Aspects of PhD study and research: becoming a researcher and the nature of the PhD	18/11/2011
Introduction to EndNote, Monday	28/11/ 2011
Starting you research degree	26/12/2011
Ethics & Ethical Review	6/2/2012
Research Methodologies: Interviews	7/2/2012
Ethics and Ethical Review	27/2/ 2012
Research methodology: Focus Group	23/7/2012

In addition to attending the above courses and seminars,

- I took the research methods course EDUC5029 and attended EDUC 5028. Those courses have given me useful insights and shaped my understanding of some of the methodological approaches that I used in my research design.
- I have attended almost all the sessions of the Language Education Research Postgraduate student seminars on Tuesdays. I have also presented a presentation about my research in this seminar.
- Outside the University of Leeds, I attended *ERSC Seminar: Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners –Research and Perspectives, Bilingualism and Teachers Diversity in Schooling at the University of Birmingham* on 11/6/2012 about discussing empirical work considering linguistic and cultural capital of diverse teachers, discrimination experienced and ways in which teachers engage with diversity. This seminar was related to some extent to the context of my research topic
- I have attended most of the events in the school of Education to get familiar with the academic and social life. I attended the international social gathering every Wednesday as well as attending the workshop: who is the new Dr.
- In the second year, I plan to take NVivo9 fundamentals course. This will assist me in analysing interviews.

## Appendix (B) Participant information sheet for the Observation and Interviews



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**University of Leeds, School of Education**

### Participant information sheet for the Observation and Interviews

#### Research project:

Exploring the Factors that Influence Students' participation in English classes at college of Applied Sciences In Oman

#### Dear Participant:

I would like to invite you to participate in this project as a teacher of the foundation year program at the college of Applied Sciences in Ibri. Before you decide, it is important and it is your right to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully to help you decide if you wish to take part in the research or not. You may discuss it if you wish with other teachers before you decide. Please get in touch with me if you have any further questions.

#### What is the purpose of the research?

The purposes of my research are:

- 1- exploring the effect of classroom context (environment) on students' participation
- 2- exploring students' perception of classroom participation
- 3- exploring the role of teachers on students' classroom participation

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been nominated and chosen by your head of the English Department because you are teaching students in the foundation year program where my study explores students' classroom participation. There will be two other English teachers from the foundation year program involved with you in this research

#### What do I have to do? What will happen if I take part?

If you decide and agree to take part, I will ask for your permission to attend and observe your class three times at different times of the semester. You will also be asked to sit for three interviews possibly after each lesson or sometimes on the day of the classroom observation. My classroom observation is about

observing how students participate with you and with their classmates in the class. I will be also making notes about students' verbal and non-verbal communication in the class. In the interview, you will be invited to give your comments about some of the points that I will bring from classroom observation. We will be informally discussing some of the classroom observation notes that I have noticed in the class.

### **Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?**

With your students and your permission, I will use voice recorder to record what happens in the class so that I can listen to it later. I am also going to make notes on classroom participation in the class. With your permission, I will also record the interviews, so that I can get a record of what we have talked about. The recording will help me listen to the talk many times. I can assure you that I will be the only person who will listen to the recording of both the classroom observation and the interviews. However, I will only transcribe some of the talk so that my supervisors can read it if they need to. Your name and your students' name will not be mentioned anywhere in the research as I will be using imaginary names. In the recording of the interview, you have full freedom to ask me to stop the recording if you want to share something that you prefer not to be recorded. The recording and all information gathered from the class will be kept confidentially in a save place in the university files. All the information will only be used for the purpose of this study and no one else will look at them without your permission.

### **Why are my students being observed and interviewed?**

The research involves observing your students learning in class. I will be observing the classroom but I will focus on one group. I am interested to see how do they interact and response to your questions in the class. I am looking at their participation in their normal class. You do not need to focus on the groups I am watching but teach normally. Your students of the focus group will be invited for three different interviews after the class immediately if possible. In the interview, they will not talk about your teaching and how do they feel about you as a teacher. The interview aims at discussing some of their behaviour in the lesson observed or on some of the notes I have made during the observation. They will be asked about the importance of participation in class and how do they interact in the classroom. I am happy to share the recordings of the interviews of the students with you if you prefer.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is no risk in taking part in the research. Your participation is completely voluntary and it has no effect on your status in the college. It is not an assessment of your work or your teaching. It is your voluntary work to take part and help us in achieving the study.

### **Who is organizing and funding the research?**

This research is being organized by me, Mohammed Sloum Al-Ghafri; under the supervisor of Dr. Jean Conteh from school of Education and Dr. Radia Kesseiri-Dalgamo from the school of Modern Languages at University of Leeds. The research is funded by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman.

### **Contact for further information:**

If you wish to speak to me, please reply by phone or email:

**Email:** [edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk)

**Mobile:** +968 99335065 (Oman) 4407429449222 (UK, Leeds)

Thank you very much for your time to read this information. I hope that you will find it interesting to take part in this study. I am happy to work with you. Thank you again in advance.

If you wish to speak to me, please reply by email or phone us. Here are my phone number and e-mail:



## Appendix (C) Teachers' Participant Consent Form



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### Appendix (C A ) Teachers' Participant Consent Form (sample filled by participant)

University of Leeds, School of Education

#### Participant Consent form

#### Title of the research:

**Exploring the Factors that Influence Students' participation in English classes at college of Applied Sciences in Oman**

<p>Please read the following statements carefully and write your initial letters of your name in the box provided next to the statement you agree with</p>	<p>Add your initials next to the statements you agree with</p>
<p>I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated ( / / 2012 ) explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.</p>	
<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reasons and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.</p> <p>Research contact number: +968 99335065 Mohammed Al-Ghafri</p>	
<p>I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with</p>	

<p>the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.</p> <p>I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential at the university of Leeds.</p>	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	Mr. Mohammed Sloum Al-Ghafri
Signature	
Date*	

\*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

**Appendix (D) Participant information sheet for the Observation and Interviews**



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**University of Leeds, School of Education**

**Participant information sheet for the Observation and Interviews**

**Research project:**

Exploring the Factors that Influence Students' participation in English classes at college of Applied Sciences In Oman

Dear student:

I would like to invite you to participate in this project as a student in the foundation year program at the college of Applied Sciences in Ibri. Before you decide, it is important and it is your right to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully to help you decide if you wish to take part in the research or not.

If you have any question, please feel free to ask me or your teacher or the head of the English department.

1-What is the purpose of the research?

The purposes of my research are:

- 1 exploring the effect of classroom context (environment) on students' participation
- 2 exploring students' perception of classroom participation
- 3 exploring the role of teachers on students' classroom participation

2-Why have I been chosen?

Your class has been chosen as one sample of two classes of the foundation year program which will be observed for the purpose of the study. You are one of the students in the class but there will be no direct focus on you in particular as the study aims at observing the whole class. There will be another class also participating in the study.

3-What do I have to do? What will happen if I take part?

Since your class has been chosen by the head of the English department with negotiation with your teacher, you will be automatically involved in classroom observation but you can negotiate your participation with your teacher. However, you may choose to participate or not in the interviews and students' writing diaries. The table below tells you what is expected from you if you choose to participate.

	Activities	What is expected from you	Notes
1	Classroom observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sit in your normal class and behave normally. You do not need to do anything specific for the purpose of the observation.</li> <li>- I am observing the whole class and not paying attention to you in person. However, I will make some comments about what happens in the class.</li> </ul>	
2	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviews are voluntary. If you choose to take part,</li> <li>- you will be in one group (male or female)</li> <li>- There will be 5-6 students in each group</li> <li>- Each interview lasts from 30-40 minutes.</li> <li>- It is an informal discussion about some of the comments I made from the class.</li> <li>- You can talk about what you think about the comments</li> <li>- You can also comment about the lesson, your participation, the organization of the classroom, you like it, enjoy it, anything important you want to mention.</li> <li>- Interview will be recorded using tape recorder.</li> </ul>	Interviews are in Arabic
3	Students' writing diaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is voluntary.</li> <li>- It is an informal writing that you can do at home in your free time</li> <li>- You write about your learning and participation in the class.</li> <li>- You can choose any form of writing. You can write</li> </ul>	<p>I will provide you with more details on how to write diaries</p> <p>Writing is done in Arabic</p>

		<p>in a paragraph form or just some points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I may ask you to talk about it with me in the interview. If you agree, you can bring other students to come with you so that you feel more comfortable. This is again optional.</li> </ul>	
--	--	---	--

#### 4-Will I be recorded, and how will the recording be used?

With your teacher and your permission, I will use voice recorder to record what happens in the class so that I can listen to it later. I am also going to make notes on classroom interaction and participation in the class. With your permission, I will also record the interviews, so that I can get a record of what we have talked about. The recording will help me listen to the talk many times. I can assure you that I will be the only person who will listen to the recording of both the classroom observation and the interviews. However, I will only transcribe some of the talk so that my supervisors can read it if they need to. Your name and your teacher's name will not be mentioned anywhere in the research as I will be using imaginary (different) names. In the recording of the interview, you have full freedom to ask me to stop the recording if you want to share something that you prefer not to be recorded. The recording and all information gathered from the class will be kept confidentially in a save place in the university files. All the information will only be used for the purpose of this study and no one else will look at them without your permission.

#### 5-What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is no risk in taking part in the research. Your participation is completely voluntary and it has no effect on your grades or assessment in the classroom. Also your teacher will not be informed about anything you mentioned either in the interviews or in your diaries, if you wish to participate. It is your voluntary support to take part and help us in achieving the study.

#### 6-Who is organizing and funding the research?

This research is being organized by me, Mohammed Al-Ghafri, under the supervisor of Dr. Jean Conteh from school of Education and Dr. Radia Kesseiri -Dalgamo from the school of Modern Languages and Cultures at University of Leeds. The research is funded and i am sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman.

#### **Contact for further information:**

If you wish to speak to me, please reply by email:

**Email:** [edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your time to read this information. I hope that you will find it interesting to take part in this study. I am happy to work with you. Thank you again in advance.

### Appendix (E) Students' Participant Consent form



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

University of Leeds, School of Education

#### Participant Consent form

##### The title of the research:

Exploring the Factors that Influence Students' participation in English classes at college of Applied Sciences in Oman

Dear participant (student),

1- Please, tick the box ( X ) if you want to participate in the following:

- Note: before you tick your answers, you can refer to the table in the student's information sheet ( question 3 ) for more information

	Statement	Yes	No
1	I want to participate in the <u>focused group interview</u> .		
2	I want to participate in <u>writing student's diaries</u> .		
3	I want to participate in the classroom observation done in my class		

	<p>2- Please read the following statements carefully and write your initial letters of your name in the box provided next to the statement you agree with</p>	<p>Add your initials next to the statements you agree with</p>
--	---	--

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet dated ( / / / 2012) explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences	
3	I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.  I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential at the university of Leeds.	
4	I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
5	I understand that my class will be tape-recorded and that I have been told by the researcher that it will be used only for the research purpose and no other people will listen to the recording without my permission.	
6	I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Name of lead researcher	Mr. Mohammed Sloum Al-Ghafri
Signature	

Date*	
-------	--

\*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

## Appendix (f) Students' information sheet in Arabic



جامعة ليدز بالمملكة المتحدة / كلية التربية

بطاقة معلومات الطالب حول مشاركته في الدراسة

مشروع البحث :

استكشاف العوامل المؤثرة في مشاركة الطلاب في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية العلوم التطبيقية بعبري في سلطنة عمان

عزيزي الطالب:

أود أن أدعوكم للمشاركة في هذا المشروع البحثي كطالب في برنامج السنة التأسيسية في كلية العلوم التطبيقية في عبري.

قبل أن تقرر، من المهم والضروري أن تعرف الهدف من مشاركتك في هذا البحث وعلى ماذا يشمل. الرجاء الاطلاع على هذه المعلومات بعناية لمعرفة هدف البحث ونوعية مشاركتك فيه وإذا كان لديك أية استفسارات يمكنك التواصل معي على قنوات الاتصال الموضحة ادناه

1- ما هو الغرض من هذا البحث؟

أغراض البحث هي:

- 1 - استكشاف أثر بيئة الغرفة الصفية (classroom context) على مشاركة الطلاب
- 2 - استطلاع آراء ومعتقدات الطلاب حول المشاركة في الفصل والعوامل المؤثرة في ذلك
- 3 - استكشاف دور المعلم في مشاركة الطلاب في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية

## 2- لماذا تم اختياري؟

لقد تم اختيار مجموعة فصلك الدراسي لتكون احد الفصول المشاركة في مشروع الدراسة . ولكن لن يكون هناك تركيز مباشر عليك حيث ان الدراسة تشمل مشاهدة ما يدور في الغرفة الصفية وما يقوم به المعلم والطلاب من تفاعل وانشطة. وبالإضافة الى فصلك الدراسي سيكون هناك فصل اخر مشارك في الدراسة.

## 3- ماذا يجب علي أن أفعل؟ وماذا سيحدث إذا شاركت في المشروع ؟

لقد تم اختيار فصلك من ضمن الفصول التي ستشملها الدراسة وذلك بعد التشاور مع رئيس قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ومدرس الفصل أو المادة الخاص بك. بإمكانك المشاركة اذا رغبت في المقابلات الشخصية الجماعية و كتابة مدونة الطالب أو أحدهن . الجدول التالي يوضح لك ما يطلب اليك فعله اذا رغبت في المشاركة و اتمني ان تجد البحث ممتعا للمشاركة

م	الأنشطة أدوات البحث	ما هو دورك وماذا يجب عليك فعله	ملاحظات
1	المشاهدة الصفية	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- لا تحتاج إلى القيام بأي شيء محدد في الفصل لغرض الدراسة. فقط أجلس في صفك كعادتك.</li> <li>- سوف اقوم بمشاهدة الفصل بشكل عام ولن يكون هناك تركيز عليك انت بصفة خاصة</li> <li>- سأقوم بتدوين ملاحظات حول ما يحدث من تفاعل صفي بين المعلم والطلاب في الغرفة الصفية</li> <li>- كما وسأشاهد الجو العام للبيئة الصفية وما يدور فيها من أنشطة</li> </ul>	
2	المقابلة الشخصية ( الجماعية )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- مشاركتك في المقابلة الشخصية تطوعية</li> <li>- هناك مجموعتان للمقابلة ( مجموعة للذكور ومجموعة للأولاد)</li> <li>- ستتكون المجموعة الواحدة من 5-6 اشخاص</li> </ul>	المقابلات الشخصية ستكون باللغة العربية

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- مدة المقابلة تتراوح بين 30-40 دقيقة</li> <li>- الهدف من المقابلة هو مناقشة بعض النقاط التي دونتها في الغرفة الصفية كما وتستطيع التحدث بأريحية تامة حول اهمية المشاركة الطلابية في الفصل من وجهة نظرك.</li> <li>- يمكنك التعليق على الجو العام للغرفة الصفية ودور المعلم واثره في مشاركتك في الفصل</li> <li>- كما يمكنك التحدث عن اية نقطة تراها مفيدة ومرتبطة بموضوع البحث.</li> </ul>		
<p>الكتابة ستكون باللغة العربية وبالطريقة التي ترغب بها</p> <p>سأقدم لك شرحا مفصلا يتعلق بكتابة المدونة قبل البدء في البحث.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- مشاركتك في كتابة مدونة أو مذكرة الطالب</li> <li>- وهي كتابة ما يدور في خاطرك عن الدرس بطريقة عفوية وبدون تكلف.</li> <li>- تستطيع كتابة مدونتك في المنزل وفي اوقات فراغك وبالطريقة التي ترغب بها.</li> <li>- تستطيع كتابة ما تتعلمه وتستفيد من حصة اللغة الإنجليزية وتبرز من خلالها اهمية مشاركتك في الفصل وما هي الاشياء التي تؤثر على مشاركتك ايجابا وسلبا</li> <li>- قد اطلب منكم التحدث عن مدونتك في مقابلة خاصة اذا رغبت في ذلك وتستطيع استضافة من تريد من زملاؤك للحضور.</li> </ul>	<p>3 كتابة المدونة او مذكرة الطالب</p>	

## - هل سيتم استخدام تسجيل ما يدور في الفصل وكيف سيتم استخدام التسجيل؟

بعد موافقتك وموافقة معلمك، سوف أقوم باستخدام مسجل صوت لتسجيل ما يحدث في الغرفة الصفية حتى أستطيع الاستماع إليها في وقت لاحق. كما وسيتم تسجيل المقابلات الشخصية بعد اخذ موافقة جميع الطلاب المشاركين في المقابلات وذلك من اجل مساعدتي للرجوع اليها في المرات القادمة. وأحب ان أؤكد لكم أنني سوف يكون الشخص الوحيد الذي يستمع إلى تسجيل كل من الملاحظة الصفية والمقابلات. وربما أقوم بتوثيق بعض ما تم تسجيله كتابيا بغرض عرضه للمشرف الذي يشرف على مشروع الدراسة اذا رغب في ذلك. وأؤكد لك بان اسمك لن يتم ذكره مطلقا في اي وثيقة في البحث وانما سأقوم باستخدام اسماء وهمية.

بإمكانك الطلب مني في ايقاف التسجيل اثناء المقابلة اذا رغبت في قول اي شيء ولا ترغب في ان يتم تسجيله. ستبقى جميع المعلومات التي اجمعها من الفصل او المقابلة او المدونة محفوظة بطريقة سرية آمنة في ملفات الجامعة ولن يطلع عليها احد بدون اذن مسبق منك. كما وان المعلومات التي سيتم جمعها لن تستخدم الا لأغراض البحث فقط

### 5- ما هي المساوئ المحتملة والمخاطر المرتبطة بالمشاركة؟

لا يوجد أي خطر في المشاركة في البحث. مشاركتكم هو عمل تطوعي تماما وليس لها تأثير على الدرجات الخاصة بك أو التقييم في الفصول الدراسية. كما وان المعلومات التي تدلي بها وتجمع منك لن تصل الى معلمك او اي جهة بالكلية وانما ستكون في حوزة الباحث بطريقة سرية آمنة. مشاركتك تطوعية وسوف تساعدني في الحصول على معلومات لغرض البحث الذي أقوم به.

### 6- ما الجهة المنظمة والداعمة للمشروع

يقوم بالبحث الباحث محمد سلوم الغافري تحت اشراف د. جين كونته من كلية التربية و د. رضية كاسيري من كلية اللغات الحديثة والثقافات في جامعة ليدز ويتم تمويل البحث من قبل وزارة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان

### 7- قنوات الاتصال:

إذا كنت ترغب في التواصل معي للاستفسار، الرجاء التواصل عبر الهاتف أو البريد الإلكتروني: [edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edu1msra@leeds.ac.uk)

شكرا جزيلاً لك على وقتك لقراءة هذه المعلومات. وأمل أن تجد انه من الممتع المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. أنا سعيد للعمل معكم. أشكركم مرة أخرى على تعاونكم مقدما وانا سعيد بالعمل معكم من اجل نجاح هذا مشروع الدراسة.

## Appendix (G) Students Consent Form in Arabic



## UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

جامعة ليدز بالمملكة المتحدة / كلية التربية

استمارة موافقة مشاركة الطالب في البحث

عنوان بحث الدراسة:

استكشاف العوامل المؤثرة في مشاركة الطلاب في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية العلوم التطبيقية بعبري في سلطنة عمان

عزيزي الطالب المشارك:

١- الرجاء وضع علامة ( x ) مقابل العبارات التالية إذا ترغب في المشاركة في المقابلة الشخصية و كتابة مدونة الطالب. بإمكانك المشاركة في الخيارين أو اختيار احدهما . مشاركتك مهمة والمعلومات التي ستقدمها ستعامل بكل سرية تامة. بإمكانك الرجوع إلى البطاقة التعريفية للمشارك (السؤال الثالث) لمزيد من المعلومات قبل اتخاذ قرار المشاركة لمعرفة ما يجب عليك فعله في حالة المشاركة.

م	العبارة	نعم	لا
١	أوافق وأرغب في المشاركة في المقابلة الشخصية الجماعية		
٢	أوافق وأرغب في المشاركة في كتابة مدونة الطالب		
3			

٢- الرجاء قراءة العبارات التالية بدقة وكتابة الحروف الأولية من اسمك الاول والقبيلة في المربع مقابل العبارات التي توافق عليها. مثال ( محمد الغافري - م غ )

م	العبارة	الرمز
١	أكد بانني قرأت وفهمت البطاقة التعريفية للمشاركة في البحث المؤرخة بتاريخ / / ٢٠١٢م والتي شرحت هدف الدراسة ونوعية مشاركتي في البحث. كذلك اعطيت الفرصة لطرح أسئلة استيضاحيه عن البحث .	
٢	اعرف بأن مشاركتي هي تطوعية ولدي الحرية في الانسحاب من الدراسة إذا رغبت في ذلك دون تقديم اية اسباب ، ولن يترتب على انسحابي اي جوانب سلبية تتعلق بي او بدراستي.	
٣	اعطي موافقتي للباحث بأن يستخدم المعلومات التي ادليت بها للاستفادة بها في البحث شريطة ان لا يذكر اسمي في أي مستندات او أوراق تتعلق بالبحث وانما يتم استخدام اسم مستعار دون أية دلالة على هويتي. كما وانه لن يتم ذكر اسمي او اي شيء يشير اليه في نتائج البحث او التقارير التي تستخرج منه. واعرف بان المعلومات سيتم حفظها بسرية تامة في جامعة ليدز.	
٤	وافق بان يتم استخدام المعلومات التي جمعها الباحث مني للاستفادة منها في البحوث القادمة شريطة ان لا يتم ذكر اسمي .	
٥	اعلم بان الباحث سوف يقوم بتسجيل الدروس في الفصل الذي ادرس فيه وذلك لغرض الدراسة فقط وان هذا التسجيل لن يستمع اليه اي شخص اخر سوى الباحث وأعلم بأنه لن يستخدم هذا التسجيل من قبل اشخاص اخرين إلا بعد موافقتي .	
٦	وافق على المشاركة في البحث المشار اليه أعلاه وسأقوم بإخطار الباحث في حالة اي تغيير للبيانات الخاصة بي .	

	اسم الطالب/ الطالبة
	توقيع الطالب / الطالبة
	اسم الباحث :
	توقيع الباحث
	التاريخ :

يتم التوقيع على الاستمارة بحضور الباحث والمشارك / المشاركة

ملاحظة:

بعد قيام الباحث والمشارك بالتوقيع على هذه الاستمارة ، يتم اعطاء المشارك نسخة من استمارة الموافقة في المشاركة في البحث ونسخة من البطاقة التعريفية لمشروع البحث, ونسخة من أية اوراق تحتوي على بيانات تتعلق بالبحث وتم اعطائها للطالب. كما تحفظ نسخ من استمارة موافقة المشارك موقعة من جميع الاطراف في مكان سري وامن في ملف البحث الأساسي بالجامعة

**Appendix (I) Classroom Observation Schedule**

**Classroom Observation Sheet**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class/ group:** \_\_\_\_\_ **NO. of students ( ) M/F ( )**

**lecture time and duration:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Seating**

**Topic :** \_\_\_\_\_ **Objective of the lesson :** \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom context: (seating, organization, equipment )	
Teacher's behavior: (dealing with students, answering questions, giving feedback, helping students etc)	
Students' behavior : (Responding to T's questions, Responding to each other, interacting, talking to each other, on/off task, etc)	

Other comments:

(any other notes that can't be included in the above categories)

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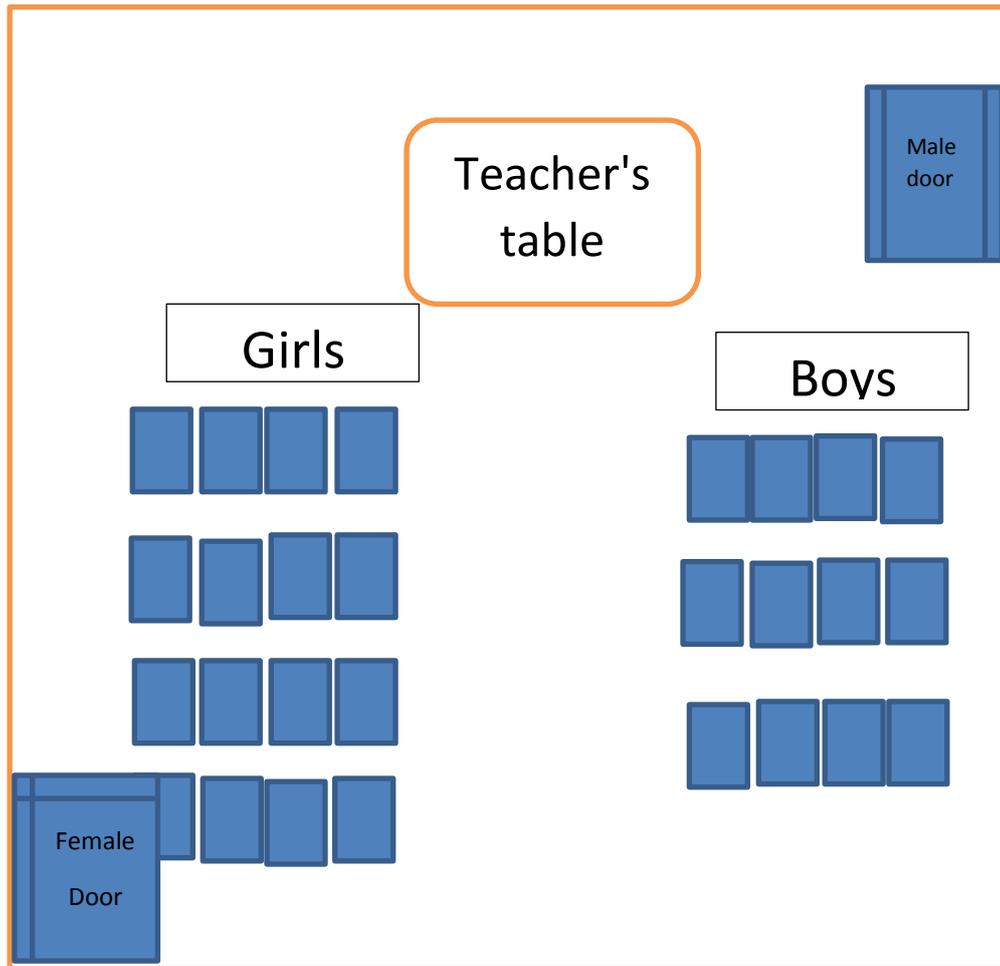


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**Appendix (J) Seating Chart**

**Appendix (J A) Seating Chart ( sampled filled by the researcher)**

Sheeting chart: a typical classroom of the college classes



## Appendix (K) Ethical Review Approval



Performance, Governance and Operations

Research & Innovation Service

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101 Clarendon Road

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Mohammed Al-Ghafri

School of Education

University of Leeds

Leeds, LS2 9JT

**AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee**

**University of Leeds**

5 May 2018

Dear Mohammed

**Title of study:** Exploring the Factors that Influence Students' participation in English classes  
at College OF Applied Sciences In Oman

**Ethics reference: AREA 12-004**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
AREA 12-004 Ethical Review (Mohammed Al-Ghafri.pdf	2	10/09/12
AREA 12-004 summary of the points for the ethical review.docx	1	16/10/12

The Committee made the following recommendations:

- There is a section on the consent form noting that the class is being observed and recorded (it should make clear that this is audio recording). There is no explicit option for students to decline to be part of the observed class. Although this is a fairly unlikely thing to happen students still should be given the option for this. Perhaps section 2 could be amended to show that the participant gives consent to each part of the research - observation, interview, diary.
- With both the consent and participant info sheet there are errors of language and/ or grammar. These may not be present in the Arabic version, but you should check these before use.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at

[http://researchsupport.leeds.ac.uk/index.php/academic\\_staff/good\\_practice/managing\\_approved\\_projects-1/applying\\_for\\_an\\_amendment-1](http://researchsupport.leeds.ac.uk/index.php/academic_staff/good_practice/managing_approved_projects-1/applying_for_an_amendment-1).

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other documents relating to the study. This should be

kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at

[http://researchsupport.leeds.ac.uk/index.php/academic\\_staff/good\\_practice/managing\\_approved\\_projects-1/ethics\\_audits-1](http://researchsupport.leeds.ac.uk/index.php/academic_staff/good_practice/managing_approved_projects-1/ethics_audits-1).

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie

Senior Research Ethics Administrator

Research & Innovation Service

On behalf of Dr Emma Cave

Chair, [AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee](#)

CC: Student's supervisor(s)

**Appendixes (L) students diaries****Students' diaries translated version from Arabic (C level)**

Codes of the students

C1 female

I am ....., I studied the first semester in Sohar college of Applied Sciences and moved to the Ibril college in the second semester. I do not know much about the college but I loved being in college after few days. I was a bit scared since the first hour I was in the class as i was not used to be with boys in the class. The worries about being with boys became less as time passed and now I see the boys like my brothers who were going through the same experiences in the classroom. My teachers who taught me in the semester were really very good and I have benefited a lot from them. My teachers were from different nationalities and they did not speak Arabic. This was good as encouraged us to speak English with them most of the time. I planned to keep word list of new vocabulary and I think my English will get better.  
(CMO C1)

C2 female

When I joined the college, I knew that there were some differences between school and college. In schools, we used to study with friends we know and have been with each other before. The teachers were also familiar to us and they were not new comers to school. Nothing to worry about in school, only the fear of exam but that was ok and can't be compared to the worries that we will have in the college.

Anyway, I entered the female dormitory and I felt the environment of the dormitory and I was not comfortable at all. In the first semester, I was much happy as I was with only girls. No boys were with us in the class. I felt comfortable and I enjoyed my study.

Now, I am in the second semester with a complete different mixed-gender group. I knew nobody. However, after sometimes, I began to like the group and made friendship with other girls. To me, they were like my sisters. Regarding the boys, they caused us no trouble. They worked with themselves and we work with ourselves. We have no contact in class and that make me little comfortable.

Another reason that makes me a bit uncomfortable was being away from home. I missed my family because I was so attached to them. Also, I was afraid because of the teachers, they were foreigners, unlike the first semester where I was taught by an Omani teacher.

The teachers in this semester also make me a bit uncomfortable as they were foreigners

C M female

Thanks to Allah that the foundation year was very important to us. We have learned a lot and improved English language better than when we were in the school.

I live like many other students in the female dormitory. What we missed in the dormitory and the college was the lack of practicing English. This is for many reasons. First, English was only used in the classroom and rarely used outside the class in the college. My English was weak and I tried using English in the dormitory with other girls but some girls started mocking us and making comments about it. They said that we want to show off that we can speak English. I stopped talking in English since then. Also, in the class, many girls discussed tasks in Arabic and rarely speak English. This limited our participation in the class and we lack confidence and we were afraid of making mistake in the class. But, Arabic helps us to understand the words better and we can answer the question when we understand

C4 female

I was very excited when accepted in the college as I always wished to continue my education. I met many girls from different regions of Oman and I made friendship with them. This was good so that I can learn about the regions of Oman and share knowledge. What I did not like in the college were coeducation and the assessment system in the college. I have never studied with boys and I really felt unhappy and uncomfortable. I felt shy to participate in the classroom. Sometimes, the teacher asked a question but I felt shy to put up my hand to answer, though I knew the answer.

We were not used to be with boys in the classroom and I wished that we study the foundation year course with girls only because we need to learn English and practice which we feel embarrassed to do when the boys with us in the same class. I wish you discuss this with the college administration.

## Appendix (M) samples of interviews:

### Tany interviews

This interview is with Tany class (A10).

**Mohammed:** This is interview with Tany . She's a teacher teaching A Level. So teacher, would you like to introduce yourself. Tell me something about your background, where you come from and something.

**Tany :** Yes. As Dr. Mohammed stated my name is Tany Thompson. I'm from United States. I have a Bachelor's degree in Modern Languages and Literature with the concentration on Spanish. I have a Master's degree in International Education with the concentration on International Students and Study Abroad Programs.

Within that Masters, I've taken nine credits of teaching English as a Second Language; specifically focusing on curriculum and development. As far as my teaching career I've taught on and off for the past five years. My first teaching experience was teaching the third grade in Tampa, Florida. In subsequent years, I've taught high school English and Spanish and in my latter years I have taught adults English as a Second Language.

**(15) Mohammed:** That's in the U.S.A.?

**Tany :** In the U.S. All in the U.S.

**Mohammed:** Okay. When you apply to ... in joining Oman, do you have any idea about their education background or something?

**(19) Tany :** No. I had no expectations. I had no knowledge about Oman in terms of being a country. I didn't have any idea about the education system. I'm learning as I go along as to how the education system set up, which in my background because I do have a masters in international education. This is what we do as we study educational systems as a whole. So it's very intriguing to me.

**(25) Mohammed:** So when you started teaching here ... anything that strikes you, anything that you find a bit surprising or unexpected?

**Tany :** Not anything surprising. What I've been doing is doing a comparative observation.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**(30) Tany :** Looking at the Omani education system compared to the U.S. education system. Because as I've travelled around and looked at different education systems, for the higher education level it seems to me like U.S. is a model.

- Mohammed:** Mm-hmm.
- (35) Tany :** For a lot of education systems, for their higher education.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** Which is, I think a good thing. In the U.S., I cannot speak for K-12 but I can speak for higher education and our system is pretty diverse and is a very good higher education systems.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** So ...
- Mohammed:** Okay. When you joined here you started teaching in foundation here with that particular context where you got, boys and girls, in principle together.
- (45) Tany :** Mm-hmm.
- Mohammed:** In reality,, I do not know,, what is your comment?
- Tany :** Well, I think that is a ... it's kind of a ... like you said, a principle ...
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** A principle ...
- (50) Mohammed:** Co-education.
- Tany :** Co-education system. I think that in terms of what we experienced as a classroom in reality is very different. I think you can see that as the two different doors ...
- Mohammed:** Yeah.
- (55) Tany :** Girls door, boys' door, two different size of classroom. The classes are structured so that you have this kind of dual ...
- Mohammed:** Yeah. Does that have any ... going back on ... the ways you think you teach or the way students comprehend ...
- Tany :** Yes. I do think it's an impact. I think that we have to adjust a kind of ... it's almost like sometimes you have to balance from one side of the classroom to the other. For many reasons not just gender but also for abilities.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** You have to ... But at the same time that is a clear distinction because of the gender issue. But I think that's in any classroom, when you have different levels of ability, you are always bouncing ...

- Mohammed:** Yeah.
- Tany :** Around.
- Mohammed:** Okay. How do you think of your students' learning so far?
- (70) Tany :** I think that my students [Insha'Allah] are learning (Laughs). I must say for this particular class because they are still in the foundation year, they're eager to learn.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** Particularly speaking gender wise, my group of boys are ... compared to the boys that I had last semester, are more willing to get things correct ...
- Mohammed:** You mean this group?
- Tany :** Yes.
- Mohammed:** Okay. And the last group that you taught last semester was it level A or level B or C?
- (80) Tany :** Level A.
- Mohammed:** Level A.
- Tany:** Level A had a lot more boys.
- Mohammed:** So do you think this is somehow better?
- Tany:** I think these boys are ... they have more of an ambition. There's a reason why they are in foundation level A. They have goals. They want to achieve those goals. They're a little bit more concerned about their work, about getting things done, getting things right.
- Mohammed:** Beginning again on the centre we're talking about gender and the way the classroom is organised. Do you think this, in a way; affect the way students participate in the classroom?
- (91) Tany:** Yes. It does. It does. I think that particularly for this foundation level A, they are, I think ...some of the... I feel like gender-wise some of the girls are more apprehensive than the boys. But overall in that classroom I think that this will be a test for them when they go to year one that will make them stronger and I think more open.
- Mohammed:** Mm-hmm. Okay.
- Tany:** So I think it's ... I guess up to us as faculty to encourage them to be a little bit more confident and comfortable with each other in the classroom.

- Mohammed:** Okay. Well, talking about confident I think ... in the classroom I saw you're calling students to come forward to classroom to write them.
- (101) Tany :** Yeah.
- Mohammed:** and use the "grab the bag"?
- Tany :** Yeah.
- Mohammed:** Can you comment on that? Why you use that?
- (105) Tany :** I use that ... It's a technique that I learned to use while teaching English in high school. I use it in order to make sure that everybody participates and to make sure that everybody is paying attention.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** So if they know that I have their name in a bag, they have to pay attention because they do not know (crosstalk).
- (111) Mohammed:** Like a sudden death.
- Tany :** Yes. They do not know when they are going to be called. At the same time it gives everybody a chance to participate without having the same people who are always willing to participate and give the answers.
- Mohammed:** Yeah. So you think this is better so that you'll make sure that everybody is participating.
- Tany :** Yes. I like to use a variety. Sometimes I allow volunteers but other times I use the names in the bag.
- Mohammed:** Do you think the students like it?
- (120) Tany :** Some students do not like it. Some students are just indifferent they could care less about what was going on. But considering the students, they do not really complain about it, they just accept that that's what it is. And then I tell them, this is the classroom; this is the way it is. You have to get used to being in front of people and talking to people. Even if you're shy, these are some things that you just have to do in life.
- (126) Mohammed:** Yeah.
- Tany :** It's a life lesson too.
- Mohammed:** Oh, yeah. To be honest with you I was kind of ... not surprised but I was rather happy to see that boys and girls come forward and write. I was not expecting that students, females as well go write in front of the boys but may be they're used to it or ...

- Tany :** Yes. I think they've gotten ... especially foundation level. It's kind of easier to get them to ... They're more eager and willing to do things as opposed to year one, year two.
- (135) Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** In the case of my year two class, you probably would have seen ... I mean my year one class. You probably would have seen my girls like ... ah...! (Laughs).
- Mohammed:** I'd love to see that.
- (140) Tany :** It's always a struggle to get them to do something.
- Mohammed:** I know-I know. Looking at that particular class, what do you think will encourage students to participate more? What do you think would help students to ...
- Tany :** To participate more?
- (145) Mohammed:** ... to participate or ...
- Tany :** I wish that they can do more ... It would be helpful I think if we could, during the beginning of the semester, to kind of have more warm up games that are co-ed so that they can get used to being with each other. Being around each other and not having all of those societal issues in the classroom. Kind of allow them to get to know each other ...
- Mohammed:** Yeah.
- Tany :** ... as people first.
- Mohammed:** Yeah. Yeah.
- Tany :** I think that would be the best thing. And then overtime they'll realise that they keep seeing the same people over and over again. The more they keep seeing the same people the less their self-conscious, the less that they worry.
- Mohammed:** Okay. You said something interesting about students, self-motivation, you said they have a reason to study and to participate. What do you think [inaudible 00:11:06] thing that would discourage students from participating in the classroom?
- (162) Tany :** Probably what would discourage them from participating? I guess maybe I would say from the instructors' point of view, I guess maybe the lack of organisation.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- (165) Tany :** Not having proper classroom management. Not establishing a relationship ...

- Mohammed:** Mm-hmm.
- Tany :** ... with your students I think ...
- Mohammed:** So you are referring to the teacher's role ...
- (170) Tany :** Yeah.
- Mohammed:** ... or instructor's role in classroom.
- Tany :** Yes. I mean I think that you want to make it a student-centred classroom. But in this particular unique situation where that type of technique is changing because they come from a teacher-centred ...
- (175) Mohammed:** Yeah, yeah.
- Tany :** ... classroom and now it's ... they're trying to change it to a student-centred classroom so they do not really know what to do or how to perform. So they're still not taking in that self-awareness.
- Mohammed:** I see.
- (180) Tany :** They still want people to tell them what to do.
- Mohammed:** Yeah. I see. How do you share this knowledge? Have they talk about ... I mean this as an issue?
- Tany :** Department level, I mean ... I can say from us as an expat instructors looking in, we cannot take in a "hands-off" approach. I mean, we listen to what's going on but at the same time kind of do not know when to say and what not to say kind of. I mean, I know for me personally I just do not challenge whatever the culture is saying. Whatever the culture says that's what ...
- Mohammed:** Yeah, yeah. I understand. Yeah, yeah.
- I enjoy the lesson a lot of time. At the beginning [inaudible 00:13:23] a skeleton of what is going on in the classroom right from ...
- (192) Tany :** Yeah.
- Mohammed:** Eight o'clock to ...
- Tany :** Mm-hmm.
- Mohammed:** ... 10:00-ish or something.
- Tany :** It is a skeleton. We never follow. (Laughs)
- Mohammed:** Did you find that useful? Why you are ... I think does not. It that time consuming or you think it's ...

- (199) Tany :** It does take time but at the same time you want kids to know that there is a certain structure or an attempt at playing at a structure. Yeah, the whole idea is for students to kind of know what's coming.
- Mohammed:** Okay.
- Tany :** So that they know what to expect, they know what is **expected** of them.
- Mohammed:** Okay. Yeah. That's good. That's good.
- (205) Tany :** Yeah. I mean it's more of a K-12 technique.
- Mohammed:** No, I think it's good. Even students commented on this and they said we like it, we know (crosstalk)
- Tany :** Yeah. They know specifically ... If we do not get through everything they know what our goals are for the day. (Laughs)
- (210) Mohammed:** Yeah, you are right. Okay, I think this is for today. Actually, we'll be seeing each other quite often this semester. I hope we still have time I think maybe less than [inaudible 00:14:36] exactly.
- Tany :** Yes.
- Mohammed:** I hope we manage to see each other in classroom [like interviews 00:14:39].
- Tany :** Okay.
- Mohammed:** So thank you very much.
- Tany :** You're welcome.
- Mohammed:** Thank you.
- Tany :** Okay.
- Mohammed:** Thanks.
- Tany :** [Inaudible 00:14:46].
- (223) Mohammed:** Well, I should use this actually but ... (laughs).

**(End of interview)**

**Rashid interview:**

This interview is with Richard class (C20)

**Mohammed:** Hello again, this is Mohammed and this is the first interview with Mr. Richard who is teaching C11, I guess. So Richard, could you start...

**Richard:** Foundation year is C.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, foundation ... Oh yeah. Could you please introduce yourself and tell me something about your educational background.

**(6) Richard:** Sure. I'm Richard Branson from the USA. I hold the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of South Florida in the United States.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** Graduated in 2004. I've since gone on to earn the TESOL teaching English to speakers of other languages, the 144-hour classroom course. TESOL I was learning Cambodia in 2009.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** I have many years of experience teaching ESL from the Persian Gulf, South Korea, in Cambodia, Taiwan, also in Saudi Arabia and Oman.

**(15) Mohammed:** Okay. So, you've taught in Oman before?

**Richard:** This is my second semester. Yeah. This is the final part of my one-year contract.

**Mohammed:** Okay. I thought you worked before in Oman in other colleges or institutions.

**Richard:** No. I worked in several institutions in Saudi Arabia, King Saud University. I worked in the institute for public administration. I taught junior officers in the Royal Saudi Air Force base at Jeddah offered English for specific purposes. I know a lot of aviation and military stuff.

**Mohammed:** Okay. But, I'm not specialist in that as well.

Before you come to Oman, do you have any sort of expectations? Do you know anything about the education system here? How the college works and students?

**(26) Richard:** I knew what life was like in Saudi but I knew that Oman have a more liberal society, a little more relaxed and is not quite ... a little more freedom ... even having mix genders in the same classroom or in the same school is a big difference from Saudi with it.

**Mohammed:** Saudi is not [inaudible 00:02:36].

**Richard:** There is one school in Jeddah that is co-educational and that's a very controlled experiment. Yeah. But otherwise the schools are still strictly gender segregated.

**Mohammed:** Do you consider this kind of seating arrangement in Oman in this college where students both male and female sit in one classroom. Are they really ... is it really co-education or

is it just physically co-education and practically it's not co-education. I do not know what you think of...

**(37) Richard:** There is practically zero interaction between the students intellectually; verbally they do not even look at each other. In fact, they're very ... they're not comfortable with each other in the room. Because I think when they get to this level of their life there most of them are around 18, 19, 20 years old. They come from large families, many of them with a lot of brothers and sisters but this is the first time they're in the same room with a lot of people. Some of them would prefer, I think, going back to segregated education. That's just ... as far as their comfort level. I want to ask that the boy ... actually this class we're in now, he was for a long time the sole male in the class and you could tell the poor guy he was ... he was really uncomfortable.

**Mohammed:** I know how frustrating it is.

**Richard:** He wouldn't say anything. He wouldn't participate. The only thing I could get him to do is to read paragraphs during our reading days.

**(50) Mohammed:** Okay. But later are there other males ...

**Richard:** Other males have shown, three other males have showed up ... He's not Omani, he turns out ... he's got an Arabic file there but he's actually born in Tanzania, I didn't find that out. He was ... I do not know what his family is doing in Tanzania but that's where he was born and raised.

**(55) Mohammed:** Well, we have lots of connection I mean, [inaudible 00:04:42].

**Richard:** I have one student, female student last semester who was from the Comoros Islands.

**Mohammed:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We got a few in the Oman.

Talking about this kind of classroom atmosphere or seating arrangement, do you think it has any influence up on students' participation in classroom?

**Richard:** I think by the time they're in the first year they're pretty well used to it.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** By second year, there's still some tension between them. For example, I had my second year research students in English 2111 or 21-111. They have to give their research presentations. Some students, the female students prefer to do their 10-minute oral presentations with slides and PowerPoint. They preferred to do this without the male students in the room.

**Mohammed:** Okay. Yeah, yes.

**(69) Richard:** And then I have one student who was a Design Major named Khaled ... He did a presentation in his major field of study about the house of Versace which is the famous design house. In his presentation he had a few slides where the ... the women perhaps were not as covered as much as they could be. There was one, I think, student whose brother ... quick to anger sort of a person and she was so upset that she stormed out of the classroom. Later on she calmed down but I said to ... when this situation came up

again this semester I said “Make sure in your presentation that everything you have is appropriate under this class. It’s not going to make anyone upset.

**Mohammed:** Okay. Okay. How does a male student feel presenting in front of the female? Do they also feel the same ... the girls?

**(80) Richard:** I’m not sure how this batch feels but ... in a way they’re not all that different from when I was that age. There’s a lot of peer pressure. It’s always with teenage boys; you’re more cool if you do not take school so seriously.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** Still that attitude is probably ... even here.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** When I was in high school, the bad boys sat at the back of the class, the ones who thought themselves too cool for school. The students that they beat up would sit in the front of the class.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, that’s right. Maybe in Oman, when I was also a student, I know this as well, good ones will be in front.

**(91) Richard:** There’s been research done on that topic, that very topic. In that, students who sit in the front of the class tend to get higher marks than the students who sit at the back. Because a lot of students who sit in the ... especially ... I was at major state university. My school had nearly 40,000 students on campus.

**Mohammed:** Oh, wow!

**Richard:** It was like a small city. And had it’s own police force and everything. Right? It’s own post office. It was like a small city. We had lecture halls ... This wasn’t the classroom environment, we have two lectures a week or one to two lectures a week in each of our courses where one instructor and 300 students, there’s no ... very little interaction unless the instructor is comfortable. It’s more like come, listen, watch, take notes...

**(102) Mohammed:** Yeah, yeah, I see.

**Richard:** Right? It’s kind of one way from the instructor to the crowd.

**Mohammed:** I understand.

**Richard:** The students who sat at the back sometimes did so-so they could just quietly leave when they wanted. No attendance was taken. It was strictly ... you come or you do not come, it’s your responsibility.

**Mohammed:** Okay. How do you see your students learning in general? Are they doing well?

**Richard:** They learn just by being here by osmosis. Some days when their excitement energised by the topic and there ... just a momentum gets going in the class then they’ll volunteer to read. They’ll answer questions. Sometimes I teach them like its pulling teeth to get them to speak English. I say, “I am the dentist, you are the student and I’ll ...” like they’re pulling their teeth from the mouth and yank out a tooth. They understand that ...

**(115) Mohammed:** You talked already about being interested in the topic so that they can [inaudible 00:10:08]. What other facts do you think might boost the students or encourage them to participate in the classroom?

**Richard:** I do not think. I honestly do not think these students know what's on the other side of this education. I know that top graduates in Oman can face a two or three-year job hunt after they get out and they'll still be living with mom and dad. There's a certain amount, I believe, of apathy on the part of ... Some students have hope and they want, they have this latent desire for career but they do not quite have an understanding of what's really out there for them. It's not that all kids in the USA have this either because we don't.

**(125) Mohammed:** Yes.

**Richard:** It depends on who your parents are and how much they push you towards education; the culture or attitudes. I try to explain what research is to them and what it does. I'm not quite sure they all understand it.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**(130) Richard:** [Inaudible 00:11:25], our first year coordinator here [inaudible 00:11:28], she brought this up in our last English department meeting and that we should take examples of fine work. Every semester, each class there's a couple or three students in each class who actually ... they do quite a good job. They stand out above the others, right? Which is normal and to show them that [inaudible 00:11:57] said it's good that they should know, that they can be published and it goes on their CV.

**Mohammed:** This might ...

**Richard:** Motivate them. Motivation is the major ... it's the key to learning. Even to learning English language, all this scientific research they do it, Oxford and Cambridge. Of course it's valid and their ... it adds to the body of knowledge that what research does. But in the real world, when you're learning another language, motivation is the key, the religion. If you're teaching students who lack this motivation, the best teacher in the world armed with the best materials, the best experience is not going ... they're not going to learn English ...

**(145) Mohammed:** Unless ...

**Richard:** Unless they are bound to put in that work.

**Mohammed:** Yeah.

**Richard:** In order to put in that work they have to ... there's a variety issues. Not knowing what kind of life is on the other side of school.

**(150) Mohammed:** Yeah.

**Richard:** They do not have the world view. They do not have the experience of what's really out there in the international community.

**Mohammed:** And they are not sure why they are doing this, why they are ...

**Richard:** Exactly. Again, the states in the Western world we have this same issue. I think it would be a wonderful, it would be money well spent in Oman if they sent ... if each student met a certain criteria with the grades and recommendation so the teachers for instance. They would get at least one semester or possibly two if the money was there to study abroad.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, I see that.

**(160) Richard:** If there were no object ... I couldn't see why. I mean I know that the government of Oman is very pro-education, very pro-Western. They're pro English.

**Mohammed:** They do send some people, some students in their final years. For example from the [inaudible 00:14:03] one student went to do [inaudible 00:14:08] University in the state. You're right, very, very, very few.

**(165) Richard:** For example my time spent in Saudi Arabia and the government there ... of course does not have any problem with cash.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, I see.

**Richard:** They're one of the wealthier spots in the world. If a student there graduates with good marks, I do not know what the threshold is. They're all pretty much guaranteed to be able just take their masters abroad with a full ride. Meaning tuition expenses are stipend for their expenses. Skills...

**Mohammed:** Yeah, I know there is a lot of funds in education and students there. What do you think of the materials that you are using?

**Richard:** I like all the materials I'm using. There's one book ...

**(175) Mohammed:** By the way, which one are you using now?

**Richard:** For my foundation here we're using *Headway*.

**Mohammed:** *Headways*, okay.

**Richard:** We are also supplementing it with a book called *Weaving It Together*.

**Mohammed:** Oh yeah, I've seen that.

**(180) Richard:** Series. Which I like *Weaving It Together* because it's simple, it's linear, it's easy to understand. The information comes in digestible portions.

**Mohammed:** Okay, okay.

**Richard:** Now this other one they are using for first and second year is called EAP or *Effective Academic Writing*.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Richard:** This book got good material in it for native speakers. I personally feel that that book is confusing. It's even confusing to me as an instructor because it jumps all over the place. The format where they ... you know how they design textbooks, it's done by committee. Every person once they're ...

**(190) Mohammed:** Input.

**Richard:** ... or to sell it, the publishers have request, well, we want this, we want it comprehensive. Has to have ... and so it has to tick the boxes pretty much of the people who buy textbooks.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**(195) Richard:** Their response to this marketing pressure, the publishers try to put this many features ...

**Mohammed:** [Inaudible 00:16:30].

**Richard:** Just like BMW has all these gadgets in it because that's an extra 2,000 pounds weight because people want these features in their cars, same with the book. I feel it's too confusing and it jumps all over the place. When you try to get through one chapter it's just ... I do not like the book, not for this environment. Luckily, they told me after the semester it already been in its sixth week. They told me, "Oh, we're not using this." I said, "You know what? You'll get no complaints from me because I do not like it." It's not that it's not a fine book, it is but it's not appropriate for these [inaudible 00:17:15].

**(206) Mohammed:** Yes, I understand. Yeah. All right, regarding assessment ... assessing students. I know the ... for foundation they have to finish their final exam. Any other assessment that you think might help students?

**Richard:** Part of the four areas: reading, speaking, listening, writing for core subjects in teaching ESL in an academic setting. I'm not talking business English or conversation classes.

**Mohammed:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Richard:** The hardest skill for students to learn is writing. I have a writing background.

**Mohammed:** Okay.

**(215) Richard:** It's difficult because they do not learn the skills in their younger years. They come here not knowing how to write proper sentence without proper vocabulary, their grammar is insufficient to write at an academic level. What we're doing is remedial. I remember this from my college days, we had all these fine high professors and that they would take each year of the incoming freshman class and they would ... the aghast that how bad their writing was and then they have to go back and teach what they should have taught them in high school.

**Mohammed:** Okay, yes.

**Richard:** So it's not a problem confine to the Persian Gulf or ... it's this problem we have in the last two. If they would start younger with English grammar, some of my students cannot speak ... their English level is quite low. We said how long have you been learning English? This is part of our speaking test. Some students say seven years, 11 years, ten years ...

**Mohammed:** [Inaudible 00:19:28].

**Richard:** Questioning why if you've been learning that long are you still at such a low level. Right?

**(231) Mohammed:** There is something needs to be done actually. There is a big gap between schools and college when they come.

**Richard:** Perhaps it's separate worlds and the people who are ... I have no idea what's down at the grade school level in Oman. I really don't. I know that in the Gulf ... I've been teaching ESL around the world, in Asia and in the Middle East. It's easier to teach a language, it's easier to acquire the language when you are young.

**Mohammed:** Yeah.

**Richard:** And it's also easier to acquire it when the parents speak it at home. In Korea they really ... Arabic speaking students have an easier time with English because it's so close. Arabic and English are not all that far apart, phonetically, to speak it.

**Mohammed:** Yeah, yeah.

**Richard:** All right? Even though we use a different alphabet and everything like that. My students aren't really all that bad of speakers. We can communicate with each other.

**(246) Mohammed:** Okay.

**Richard:** But Korean students, in spite of how much money and technology the Korean government lavishes on English training, the students have harder time with it. They try to enforce it as English only zones. You're never supposed to speak Korean in these zones. And English summer camps where English is the only language and we have all foreign teachers. But in reality, every time you turn around they're speaking Korean. And you can't stop it.

**Mohammed:** I know, I know, I know.

**Richard:** It's a rule but no one follows it.

**(255) Mohammed:** Yeah. As you said this is an advantage that Arabic and English are quite ...

**Richard:** Speaking-wise, it's not that different.

**Mohammed:** Yeah. Okay Richard, I think this is for today actually because we'll be meeting again, Insha'Allah hopefully ...

**Richard:** Okay.

**(260) Mohammed:** ... [inaudible 00:21:44]. Thank you very much for this information. Have a nice weekend. [Inaudible 00:21:51] enjoying their weekend I think. They started early.

**(263) Richard:** I've been sick with previous weekend.

**(End of interview)**

## Appendix (N) students' interviews

### 1- (C 20) female students' interviews

Analysis of female students' interview shanty group (C)

	Student's name and code	Name of place in Oman
1	(Z S)	Al-Dakhiliya - Nizwa
2	(IS)	Dhahira –Ibri
3	(ZG)	Dhahira –Ibri
4	(MB)	Batinah- Al-Mussnah
5	(HD)	Batinah- Al-Mussnah
6	(AA)	Batinah- Al-Mussnah
7	(AH)	Dhahira –Ibri

First, I welcomed the students to the interviews and asked them to introduce themselves. So students introduced their names and where they came from as shown on the table above.

75	T	Yeah, I think you need time to get familiar with the system. Is this your second month in the college?	
76	Z S	Yes, almost 2 months.	

78	T	Ok, does anyone wanna add something?	
79	A A	Yes, I have one point to add	
80		Ok, yes go ahead.	
81		You know we are in the foundation year and we came new to the college and our level of English is low. We need to communicate with the teacher and because of our limited English we can't communicate with them. So I suggest to the college administration that they bring very good English teachers who know the system and can speak some Arabic.	
82	T	Uha,	
83 09:37	A A	Yes, because the teacher we have now does not speak Arabic and he is new as she told us. He said I am new to the college and the system. Therefore, he does not understand our family circumstances. For example, one day one of the boys was 5 minutes late to the class and when he told him. You are from Ibri and Ibri does not have traffic jam. He marked him absent because he is hard and does not know about the different places in Ibri that could be far from the college.	The student was talking about her IT teacher.
84	T	I see, it is really a good point. I think you need to raise this point with Dr. .... and talk to him about it. He might explain to you something about it. Of course, I cannot talk about it. You know I promised you confidentiality and I am an outsider now. I do not talk about whatever you say to anybody in the college or outside.	The students know that I was working in the college in the college administration.

(end of interview)

**(A10) female interview**

## A10 female students' interviews on 11/3/2013

8 female students attended the interviews. The interviews lasted 16:42 minutes. I began the interview by welcoming the students and thanking them for their willingness to take part in the research. Then I told the students about the aim of the interview and how the interview will run.

I asked students to introduce themselves by saying their names and from which part of Oman where they come. The students came from different parts of Oman.

- 1- AH- Sharqiah
- 2- MS Batinah, Rustaq
- 3- AN Batinah, Suwaiq
- 4- AG, Batinah Rustaq
- 5- A , BAtinah
- 6- MM Dhakhilia , Buhla
- 7- EA, Dhakhilia , Al-Hamra
- 8- SJ, Muscat

47	AH	We feel shy too. You know it is better that we study alone, only with girls. We will work better and benefit more. We have been with only girls for 12 years. It is not easy to get us mixed now after those years. Really it is hard for us. They have more courage to talk in class than us. We did not dare to comment on what they said as they did. We just keep silent. We do nothave that comfortable atmosphere in the class to participate.	
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		We will participate more when we are with girls. We feel more comfortable. To be honest, sometimes I know the answer but prefer to say it to the teacher to avoid boys comments	
48	T	I see. Ok, what kind of comments they give?	
49	AN	When one girl say no, they will say yes and vice versa.	
50	MS	Yes, they laugh at some of our answers	
51	AH	They try to challenge us and give opposite answer	
52	EA	Yes, they try to be funny and create ...	
53	A	Yes but you know we are kind and lovely girls and do not make fun of them.	