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Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education in an Arab Country: The Case of Lebanon

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to explore the perceptions of teachers in private and public higher education institutions about Teaching Excellence in an Arab country, more specifically Lebanon. Teachers' perceptions are explored in terms of Skelton's (2005) four Understandings of Teaching Excellence, which form the theoretical framework that guides this research study. These four Understandings are the Traditional, Psychologized, Performative, and Critical understandings of Teaching Excellence.

To fulfill the purpose of this research study, the researcher adopted an interpretive-qualitative approach, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the sole means of data collection. Accordingly, participant teachers were selected from five higher education institutions, four private and one public, and interviewed on a one-on-one basis. The adoption of a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore faculty members' perceptions of teaching excellence and the means through which they think it can best be attained. The use of in-depth interviews was an effective research method since the participant interviewees, as adults and educators, have the courage and ability to speak up, express their thoughts, identify the challenges they face in teaching, and communicate their ideas freely (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to hear the perceptions and views of faculty members about teaching excellence one at a time, explicitly, and in their own words (Lichtman, 2006; Wildy, &Wallace, 1998).

The findings of this research study reveal that the teachers in the selected higher education institutions hold Psychologized and Performative Understandings of teaching excellence. Therefore, it can be concluded that the teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence belong to more than one of Skelton's four Understandings of Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, the researcher suggests formulating a new Understanding of

Teaching Excellence, the Psycho-performative Understanding, to describe the perceptions of teachers in higher education institutions in Lebanon.

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At the end of this journey, I would like to express my utmost appreciation and thanks to my advisor, Dr. Alan Skelton, who has been a wonderful coach and mentor to me. Dr. Alan, I would like to thank you for encouraging my research and allowing me to grow both as a researcher and teacher on the path to excellence! Your guidance and recommendations have been invaluable throughout all stages of this journey. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you a speedy recovery so that you can to return to where you belong: with your students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> "…in any discipline excellence is the result of a compelling desire for one to realize his or her own fullest potential at the maximum level of effort, creative thought, and skill capability. Excellence has many variables, but its constant is always that special striving to do one's best" (Lynn, 1984: 5).

Teaching excellence is increasingly becoming an important and contested issue in higher education institutions (HEIs) in developed as well as in developing countries. Teaching excellence invites a range of definitions by educators who tend to consider Teaching Excellence as a *concept* that people understand or perceive differently rather than considering it as a *term* that can be simply defined to acquire a common or unified definition. In light of this, the way educators think of Teaching Excellence as a concept and practice varies based on a lot of factors the most important of which is their educational values. The absence of a unified definition on the one hand, and the existence, on the other, of various factors and values that educators may have, based on their different underlying economic, cultural, political, social or pedagogical perspectives, has led Teaching Excellence to be considered a contestable concept. This also concurs with the relevant literature which neither agrees on nor presents a universal definition of Teaching Excellence. Moreover, since teaching is one of the major functions of HEIs which, in turn, have a significant role in the society, this makes Teaching Excellence a challenging concept. Teaching Excellence becomes challenging because it uncovers a tension between the notion that the *term* 'excellence' in relation to teaching may hold and the role of higher education in society (Little, Locke, Parker &Richardson, 2007).

Furthermore, the way educators, teachers and policy makers think of Teaching

Excellence and of the practices that they think are *best* employed to provide the quality of teaching they are striving for vary across HEIs. Teaching Excellence for certain HEIs may be linked to the international standards of teaching set by policy makers or by leaders of these HEIs. These standards may even vary from one HEI to another based on several factors including the institution's vision, mission, and philosophy. In this case, the attainment of Teaching Excellence is measured by meeting these standards. For other HEIs, Teaching Excellence could be related to the contribution that these institutions make to the national economy; accordingly, Teaching Excellence is attained when the HEI's contribution to the national economy meets or exceeds the set target (Kennedy, 2011; Servage, 2009; Muhanna, 2010). Still, for other HEIs, Teaching Excellence may be linked to the efforts made by these institutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning which are contested terms as well, measured over a specific period of time. In this case, Teaching Excellence is attained when the indicators of improvement in the quality of teaching and learning are clear and continuous.

The extensive literature review that the researcher conducted for this research study, revealed that Teaching Excellence is not researched in Lebanon, the context of this study. Moreover, the literature review revealed that teachers and policy makers in HEIs in Lebanon are still uncertain about Teaching Excellence and the related practices although seeking "excellence" is becoming central to the mission statements of many HEIs in Lebanon, whether seeking excellence in academics, education, research or scholarship. For example, the mission statement of the American University of Beirut (Aub.edu.lb,2016) emphasizes the attainment of 'excellence in education', the Lebanese American University (Lau.edu.lb,2016) seeks 'excellence in academics' while Beirut Arab University seeks 'excellence in research' (Bau.edu.lb,2016), and the Notre Dame University seeks

'excellence in scholarship' (Ndu.edu.lb,2016).

Nevertheless, discourses which refer to the *"good"* or *"excellent"* practices and characteristics in general and the *"good"* or *"excellent"* teaching in particular do exist among policy makers, administrators and teachers in HEIs in Lebanon. Moreover, policy makers, administrators and even teachers in HEIs are highly aware of the fierce competition that exist at the local, regional and international level. Accordingly, the "*good"* or the "*excellence"* is a goal that teachers share, and attaining this goal should be guiding all their efforts and practices to promote the highest quality of teaching and learning.

At the national level, policy makers in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) believe that *"excellence"* is equivalent to providing *"quality"* teaching while meeting students' needs and interests (Jammal, Loutfi, Abou Chahine, 2008). Moreover, policy makers in MEHE think that providing *"quality"* or *"excellent"* teaching can best be attained and maintained through establishing a quality assurance system at the national level to monitor the quality of teaching provided in HEIs in Lebanon, monitor the performance of the teachers, and ensure meeting pre-identified standards set by MEHE. The intended quality assurance system adopts the quality enhancement or improvement approach rather than the accountability approach to enhance continuous improvement of the quality of teaching provided (Tempus, 2012; Muhanna, 2010). This serious intention of MEHE to improve the quality of teaching to attain "*excellence"* seems to be guided by a managerialistic perspective that sees the possibility and plausibility of achieving excellence mainly through the windows of efficiency, effectiveness and economy (Skelton, 2005). However, there exist other perspectives of excellence that research studies are trying to find.

At the institutional level, administrators in HEIs tend to show a similar manageralistic perspective to that of MEHE. This is evident first through the serious efforts that they exert through either signing affiliation agreements or via obtaining accreditation from international or national accrediting bodies to document and communicate the excellent teaching they are providing. Second, it is revealed through the attempts of some HEIs to evaluate teaching and teachers' performance to ensure providing excellent teaching. So, this is the perspective of the "excellence" and the possible means that lead to it at national and institutional levels; nevertheless, teachers might have different perspectives and this is what this research study is about. Accordingly, the central questions emerge here are: how do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think about "excellence" in teaching? How do they think about the practices that can lead to excellent teaching? How do they think about Teaching Excellence? Whilst the administrators' perceptions at the institutional level, which seem to concur with the policy makers' perceptions at the national level, are communicated, (this will be comprehensively explained in the context of the study section of this thesis), the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon are still not known or not communicated.

Although Lebanon is a developing country, education is highly valued in this country at the government or national level as well as at the individual or citizen level. Further to that, the HEI that was established in Lebanon in 1866 was not only the first HEI established in Lebanon but was the first in the region. Since that date, Lebanon has occupied a leading academic role in the region. Since that date, Lebanon built a reputation both domestically and regionally for its high standards of higher education, attracting students from all over the Middle East. This value that is awarded to education by the Lebanese people made them highly selective seekers and providers of education at the same time. However, the situation

has changed drastically in recent decades. In the period from 1975-1989 when Lebanon was ravaged by civil war, the percentage of foreign students enrolled in HEIs in Lebanon dropped from 54.4% in 1972 (CERD 1973) to 29.5% in 1992 (CERD 1993). After the civil war, Lebanon witnessed an uncontrolled expansion of private higher education institutions and the establishment of branches of HEIs all over the country, especially in remote villages, many of which did not meet the criteria for HEIs set by MEHE (Muhanna, 2010). The diversification of HEIs in terms of structure, content and mode of delivery has led to increasing concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in these institutions. According to many observers, the chaotic expansion of the post-civil war period led to an overall deterioration in the quality of teaching in HEIs (Meguerditchian, 2011; Muhanna, 2010; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2009). This deterioration was revealed in the complaints that were received from different countries about the quality of the graduates who finished their studies, especially the doctorate degree level from Lebanese HEIs. This concern was voiced by the Director General of MEHE who declared that "several countries have passed to us their complaints over the quality of graduate and doctoral education received by Lebanese students, but the ministry has decided to remain silent in order to preserve educational ethics" (Meguerditchian, 2011). During a workshop at a HEI in Lebanon in 2011, the Director General of MEHE alerted stakeholders in higher education to the deterioration in the quality of teaching in HEIs and announced that the competency of HEIs was under scrutiny (Meguerditchian, 2011). This situation has grown to be of great concern to policymakers who are striving to re-establish Lebanon's leading academic role in the region, as well as to Lebanese citizens who are eager to regain their trust in their country's higher education system. As a result, there are increasing calls for Lebanese

HEI's to adhere to international standards that can be used to promote improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. The concept of Teaching Excellence is increasingly being put forward as an example of a standard that HEIs can use to compete to establish themselves as high-quality institutions.

At this point, it can be declared here that the perceptions of policy makers in MEHE and of administrators in HEIs in Lebanon about *excellence in teaching* have been communicated to a certain extent, whilst the perceptions of teachers in these HEIs of Teaching Excellence as a concept and practice, and who might have different perceptions about Teaching Excellence and how it can be attained and maintained, are not yet explored and communicated.

Therefore, any effort to study Teaching Excellence must consider teachers' own understanding/s of this concept. This will help to inform all stakeholders about the way teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of *excellence* in teaching through their practices which they think are *excellent* which have not been communicated due to lack of research in this area. Teachers are the primary point of contact with students and they are the ones who support students in making meaning out of knowledge. Teachers in higher education are in a direct relationship with knowledge and with students. The roles they take on in the classroom, whether acting as the main imparters of knowledge or acting as mediators between students and knowledge, vary according to their own understanding/s of teaching and excellence in teaching. Since teachers are the ones doing the actual teaching, their understandings of Teaching Excellence may centre on different issues from the issues prioritized by policymakers in HEIs. These issues are likely to be related to the values and pedagogical theories that underpin teachers' practices (Skelton, 2007). In this thesis, the

words ‘perception’, ‘understanding’, and the way teachers think of Teaching Excellence, will be used interchangeably.

As a consequence of this, this research study explores the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon regarding Teaching Excellence: it explores how teachers think of Teaching Excellence and how they think excellence-related practices and characteristics would be. Moreover, this research study explores other Teaching Excellence-related issues that could be of more interest to teachers and explores how teachers’ perceptions may differ from those of policy makers, stakeholders, or leaders in HEIs in the context of this study. Further to that, this study explores how the daily discourse about the *good* or *excellence* in teaching in HEIs in the context of this study, may challenge, confirm or resist the evolving discourse about Teaching Excellence. The assumption of this study is that exploring the way teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence and its related practices can help stakeholders and policymakers in the context of this study question the main features of Teaching Excellence and the means that lead to it. Moreover, exploring teachers’ perceptions of their teaching has an immediate and great impact on their teaching practices and on improving the quality of teaching and learning (Delvin, 2006; Ho, et al., 2001) and thereby leading to Teaching Excellence.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

The quality of teaching in HEIs in Lebanon is deteriorating especially in the institutions which expanded chaotically during and after the civil war in all the Lebanese regions (Meguerditchian, 2011; Muhanna, 2010; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2009). During a workshop in a HEI in Lebanon in 2011, the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) alerted HEIs’ stakeholders in Lebanon about the deterioration of the quality of teaching in HEIs and announced that the competency of HEIs

is under scrutiny (Meguerditchian, 2011). This situation has grown to be of great concern to Lebanese educators including but not limited to Frayha (2009), Meguerditchian, (2011), Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal (2009) and Muhanna (2010) as well as to the Lebanese citizens who are eager to regain their trust in the education of HEIs in their own country and helping Lebanon in retrieving its leading academic role in the region.

Because the level of teaching and learning is going down (Meguerditchian, 2011; Muhanna, 2010; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2009), the researcher feels urgency in exploring the perceptions of those who are in direct relation with students, of those who operate at the micro level; the perceptions of teachers. These perceptions of Teaching Excellence which may vary among the stakeholders and specifically among teachers in HEIs and the impact of these perceptions on the quality of teaching and learning in these universities will vary as well. Being a classroom teacher will have valuable in-put of teaching-related issues like the essential features of teaching excellence, the difficulties of teaching, the challenges that teachers face, the factors that may enhance or hinder the improvement of the teaching quality, and the role of the institution in improving teaching to attain Teaching Excellence.

Concepts or issues related to higher education are best defined in terms of the way the people of higher education define or understand these concepts (Barnett, 1990). Teaching Excellence in higher education is one of the concepts that can be better defined and explained through the lens of the teachers who constitute one of the most significant components of HEIs along with the students. Dunkin (1995) declared that attaining Teaching Excellence are highly related to the teachers' perceptions about their teaching and what they do in teaching. Accordingly, he concludes that the "knowing" about teaching and the "doing" of teaching are two interrelated concepts whereby teachers express in their

teaching practices what they think about teaching. Consequently, if teachers believe in Teaching Excellence and the importance to attain it in order to provide "excellent" quality of teaching, their practices would be improved and implemented in light of their beliefs and in alignment with the different perceptions they have of Teaching Excellence and the means that lead to it.

Hillier (2002) emphasizes the influence of teachers' own perceptions of Teaching Excellence on their performance in general and on the instructional practices they choose to employ in their classes in particular. Accordingly, to provide high quality of teaching and attain Teaching Excellence, teachers would perform in accordance with their understanding of Teaching Excellence.

This research study aims at exploring the perceptions of teachers in the Lebanese HEIs about teaching, Teaching Excellence, significance of Teaching Excellence, and the strategies or means through which Teaching Excellence can be achieved. Moreover, this study aims to explore whether the different understandings of Teaching Excellence that teachers may have influence the quality of teaching they provide, the quality of learning occurs, the quality of students produced, and the knowledge being delivered to students or constructed by them. In addition, the study discusses the implications of teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence on their practices in regard to the way they engage students in their learning, the extent of meeting their students' needs, the way they guide and prepare students for their future careers, and the ways they give students the opportunity to discuss sensitive societal or political related issues. This aim will be viewed from the perspectives of teachers in public and private higher education institutions in Lebanon.

Understanding the perceptions of teachers of Teaching Excellence in HEIs in Lebanon has multi-fold purpose. First, it helps in revealing teachers' underlying educational values, and gives them the chance to think about Teaching Excellence and how it is expressed or reflected in their teaching, and provides the teachers an opportunity to articulate and clarify their practices. Second, exploring the perceptions of the teachers of TE can help shape the policies that guide the improvement of the teaching quality at the national and institutional level to attain Teaching Excellence. Teachers' perceptions may inform policy and the reform movement that MEHE is calling for in regard to providing guidelines for institutional quality improvement strategies that can be developed and utilized within quality improvement or quality enhancement programs to improve the quality of teaching in HEIs to attain Teaching Excellence. Third, teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence may give insights on how the policies developed by policy makers are being interpreted and implemented by teachers. Teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence would support MEHE's in promoting the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs by giving guidelines on the nature and strategies of the reform movement that MEHE is calling for (Hasrouny, 2011; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2009; Tempus program, 2010).

This bottom-up process is an inductive way to inform policies, whereby the findings from the data collected at the micro level- teachers' perceptions- can be insightful to policy makers at the institutional or national level (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Fullan (2000) suggests that a reform movement cannot be successful without the active engagement or the actual contribution of the teachers who need to participate in establishing the reform policies in order to accept them, transform them, and be willing to professionally develop in order to undertake the changes that these policies dictate. In the

same regard, Goodlad (1990) states that any reform movement or regeneration of strategies or policies in any institution cannot be successful without the active engagement of teachers.

This study will attempt to identify the various perceptions of teachers in the Lebanese HEIs which differ in identity (religious or sectarian) and origin (system adopted: Lebanese, American, French, or Egyptian). It will concentrate on the analysis of the influence of these perceptions of Teaching Excellence on teachers' underlying educational values, and the way the difference in perception of Teaching Excellence is reflected in their teaching practices, in addition to the influence on how the different systems of higher education support Teaching Excellence.

This research study will add to the literature by describing and analysing teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence and the implications of their perceptions on improving teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Lebanon. There have been studies on topics related to higher education in Lebanon (Osta, 2012); however, no study was identified to explore the perceptions of teachers on excellent teaching in higher education institutions in a context where there is still uncertainty about the concept of Teaching Excellence.

Research Questions

The main research question that guides this study is:

How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon understand Teaching Excellence?

To answer this research question, the following sub-questions, need to be answered:

1) How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think can best lead to TE?

3) What are the characteristics that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to lead to Teaching Excellence?
    - How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think about the significance of meeting the labour market demands?
    - How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think about the significance of professional development programmes?
    - What are the challenges that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think would hinder the attainment of TE?

Background of the Researcher

My interest in conducting this research study stems from two personal experiences. The first experience was working as a lecturer, first at the Lebanese University, a public university in Lebanon, and subsequently at Dar Al-Hekma University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a 15-year old private university striving to establish a leading position within a competitive national and regional market. The second experience that ignited my interest in researching Teaching Excellence was conducting workshops for teachers, especially new teachers at Dar Al-Hekma University and local school teachers, to enhance their quality of teaching. These workshops have mainly focused on strategies to enhance student-centred learning.

During my work in HEIs, several pertinent questions were always in my mind: Am I a good teacher? What are the characteristics of a good teacher? What is teaching excellence? Why is Teaching Excellence important? How do teachers perceive Teaching Excellence? How do teachers think Teaching Excellence can be attained? How do the different systems of HEIs support Teaching Excellence?

Theoretical Framework of this Study

This study is based on the two domains of research put forward by Trochim (2006): theory and observation. The theoretical framework that guides this research study is based on Alan Skelton (2005)'s conception of teaching excellence as discussed in his book *Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: Towards a Critical Approach.* Skelton proposes four ways of understanding TE: Traditional, Performative, Psychologized, and Critical Understandings. Skelton's approach does more than simply offer a definition of TE.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter one includes an overview of the status of teaching and learning in higher education institutions in Lebanon. It also includes the purpose of the study and the research questions that are answered by this study. It is followed by a description of the researcher's background and a discussion of the theoretical framework that shapes this research study.

Chapter two provides a contextual background to the research study with details about the higher education system in Lebanon as well as the quality assurance system and the forces driving HEIs in Lebanon to pursue Teaching Excellence, which would make Lebanon distinguished within the Arab context.

Chapter three comprises a literature review of topics related to teaching, teaching quality, and teaching excellence. The literature review presents an argument about the various definitions of teaching excellence and investigates the rationale behind seeking to attain Teaching Excellence. Particular consideration is given to the significance of exploring teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence. The literature review also includes a discussion of the four understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005). Chapter three continues by examining quality assurance and quality enhancement

strategies, teachers' professional development, and student-centred learning in higher education as possible means to attain teaching excellence. Then, special attention is given to the origin, nature, and role of higher education institutions with emphasis on the two roles of teaching and research.

Chapter Four presents the ethical issues that were considered in this study and a comprehensive description of the methods adopted. The methodology of this research study includes the research questions that guided this research study, research design, sample and sampling procedure, data collection, and data analysis. Then, possible limitations of the study are discussed and the findings are presented.

Chapter Five critically discusses the data collected through interviews and provides answers to the research questions and sub-questions based on the data. The chapter also presents the findings of this research study in relation to Skelton's (2005) four understandings of Teaching Excellence. The findings of this study will either fit within the proposed four understanding of Teaching Excellence by Skelton (2005) or produce a new understanding that better suits the Lebanese context.

Chapter Six includes the researcher's own reflections on the results obtained, how they can inform practice and reform, and how they can benefit other higher education institutions and policymakers at both the macro and micro levels in Lebanon.

Chapter 2: Context of the Study

The Higher Education System in Lebanon: A Historical Overview

As a country, Lebanon is known for its human capital rather than its natural resources (Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2008). Education in Lebanon has a high social value and is vital to the development of the economic and political sectors. When higher

education was first established, it contributed to the development of an elite class in Lebanese society due to the "prestige" attached to earning a higher education degree (Nahas, 2009). Elites had the financial ability to enrol in HEIs and therefore to gain higher learning and better jobs. However, the situation has changed now due to two historical factors. The first was the establishment of the public Lebanese University, in the year 1951 which gave the opportunity for every Lebanese citizen to obtain tertiary education. The second was the massive increase in HEIs in the post-civil war period, beginning in 1989 and continuing to the present.

Since the establishment of the first HEIs, Lebanese education has acquired a distinguished reputation in the Middle East and attracted students from all over the region and beyond (Frayha, 2009; Ghezaoui 2001). According to the Global Information Technology Report 2013, Lebanon occupied the fourth best place in math and science education in the world, and occupied the tenth place in regard to the overall quality of education in 2013.

Although Lebanon is an Arab country, it has a unique structure with respect to other Arab countries in the region due to its diverse religious composition. Since it was created in the 18th century, Mount Lebanon, now known simply as Lebanon, was mostly inhabited by the Christian Maronites. Accordingly, in 1736 the Maronite College in Rome established Maronite schools in Mount Lebanon. After 1861, Mount Lebanon became an independent homeland for the Maronites under the European umbrella. The Christian Maronites of Mount Lebanon attracted missionaries who established schools for the Catholic, Maronite and Protestant communities since they believed that providing education supported their religious communities (Nahas, 2009).

Lebanon's higher education system, the oldest in the region, developed in four distinct historical stages. The first stage extended from 1866 till 1950. In 1866, the American Evangelical Mission established the Syrian Evangelical College as the first HEI in Lebanon, which became the American University of Beirut in 1920. In 1883, the University of St. Joseph was established by the Society of Jesus to oppose Protestant power. Later, in 1885, the Protestant missionaries founded Beirut University College as a higher education institution for women. In 1970s, this college became co-educational and in 1994 it was renamed the Lebanese American University. The only HEIs that did not have foreign affiliations during that time were the Near East School of Theology and the Lebanese Academy for Fine Arts (ALBA), which was established in 1937.

The second stage extended from 1950 till 1975 and witnessed major developments in the education system. The first was the establishment of the Lebanese University (LU) in the year 1951 with the goal of preparing teachers to teach in high schools. The LU grew gradually and today it encompasses 50 branches that are spread across the various regions of Lebanon. In the same period, the Beirut Arab University was established as a private HEI operating under the patronage of the Muslim Philanthropic and Benevolent Society of Beirut, bringing the total number of HEIs in Lebanon to twelve. The third major event related to education during this stage was the establishment of the first Ministry of Education in 1955.

The third stage extended from 1975 till 1989, coinciding with the dates of the civil war in Lebanon during which the development of the education sector slowed down. After the civil war, political fragmentation led to privatization and decentralization of the higher education system (Buckner, 2011). During the fourth stage, from 1989 until present, the educational system witnessed a drastic increase in the number of private HEIs as a response

to the increase in the number of students eligible for higher education. However, public universities did not experience a similar expansion. There is currently only one public university and 45 private universities in Lebanon, 26 of which were established after the civil war (Lebanon Universities Guide, http://lebanonuniversities.blogspot.com). This private-based model of higher education makes Lebanon, together with Palestine, an exception in the Arab world. Decentralization is a strong indicator of enrolment expansion (Schofer & Meyer, 2005), and accordingly Lebanon has the highest gross enrolment rate in higher education in the region along with Palestine (Buckner, 2011).

The best-known higher education institutions in Lebanon are the USJ and The AUB. The AUB is now among the top 250 universities in the world (http://www. topuniversities.com/ university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2012) and is considered as the first American university outside the United States of America in regard to the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of research conducted. This is evident in the various research centres that exist in the university and in the number of research studies that are conducted only in comparison to other HEIs in Lebanon and in the Arab region (Bashshur, 1997; QS World University Rankings, 2012; www.aub.edu.lb).

The higher education sector in Lebanon can best be described as pragmatic (Hasrouny, 2011). Like any other sector in Lebanon, it is highly affected by Lebanese politics. Political pragmatism has always been essential in Lebanon due to the multi-faith makeup of the population, whereby religion constitutes the source of power and authority. Since independence in 1943, successive Lebanese governments have failed to eradicate the sectarian roots of the political system. This led to “confessionalism” manifested by the sharing of power according to religious communities, allowing the sects to dominate political decisions before, during, and after the civil war. This failure to reform the political

system led Lebanese leaders to render HEIs accountable for not preparing students to lead changes in their country in general and in the political system in particular. Frayha (2009) moves a step further by holding the educational system in Lebanon responsible for reproducing social and sectarian conflicts among Lebanese citizens.

Together with concerns of quality of teaching and learning, the dominance of religion and sect is one of the greatest challenges currently facing the educational system in Lebanon. Religious leaders in Lebanon have always played a major role in opposing national decisions, including educational ones. For example, educational decisions have been taken in view of placating the interests of certain religious groups, compromising the development of the curriculum. Religious groups have also prevented books containing content contrary to their beliefs from being published. In this regard, it is significant to mention that during the main curriculum review that took place in 1997, the national curriculum committee was not able to agree and issue a unified national History Textbook to be used in public and private schools. This is because there is still major dispute on the historical content to be included due to disagreement on political and religious related issues and how every political or religious party perceives the Lebanese history (Daher, 2009). This, as Frayha (2009) argues, constitutes a real obstruction towards change and a clear violation of the freedom of belief.

In particular, private schools in Lebanon have a clear religious group identity based on the religious and educational philosophy of their founders. In contrast, the public Lebanese University, according to Frayha (2010), does not have any founding philosophy. Nevertheless, as a public university, it supposedly follows a secular philosophy to respect the multi-religious context of Lebanon. However, due to confessionalism, the different

branches of this University follow the philosophy of the sect that dominates in the region or city where the branch is situated (www.oocities.org/sherifa_zuhur/text/Lebanon. doc).

Lebanese HEIs vary in origin (national or foreign), identity (secular or religious), and age (newly established or long-established). The patterns of HEIs in Lebanon are defined by the system they adopt and by the policies their founders established. HEIs in Lebanon adopt either the Lebanese, American, French, or Egyptian patterns. These universities offer a variety of programs wherein Arabic, French, or English is the language of instruction. Certain institutions use more than one language; the language of instruction in LU is Arabic and French, while certain branches in the LU use English as a second language of instruction instead of French (www.higher-edu.gov.lb).

HEIs in Lebanon offer thirteen degrees: three at the undergraduate level and twelve at the postgraduate level. The titles of these degrees vary according to the system adopted. Below is a chart that shows the various degrees offered in HEIs in Lebanon with their years needed to complete each degree. The most common specializations offered by universities are education, business, and religious studies. The second most popular specialization is architecture. Other specializations are less likely to be offered by the majority of institutions. Generally, the academic programs that are offered in the different Universities in Lebanon are communication arts, engineering, education, design, humanities, medicine, pharmacy, health sciences, social work, teaching diploma agriculture, food sciences, urban planning and policy, arts and sciences, environmental sciences, political studies, and pharmaceutical studies.

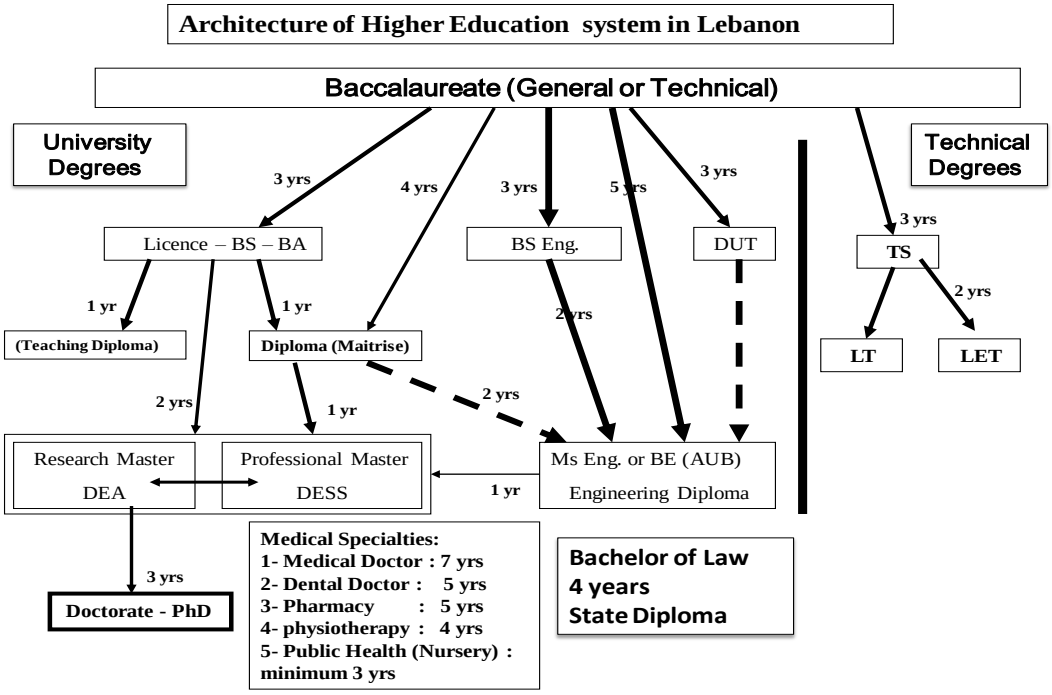

Figure 1: Architecture of Higher Education System in Lebanon (MEHE)

Table 1

Certificates are Named after the French Education System Adopted in Lebanon

TS	*The Diplôme de Technicien Supérieur (TS – Higher Technicians' Diploma) for senior technicians and middle managers, of a post-secondary level;*	LT	*Technical diploma; for teachers for technical education*
LET	*Technical education diploma; for skilled and highly qualified managers and technicians*	DUT	*Diplôme universitaire de technologie; National Diploma Level: Bac +2 (two years of university studies)*
DEA	*The Diplôme d'études approfondies or DEA (Diploma of Advanced Studies)*	DESS	*Master degree; Diplôme d'études superiéures spécialisées*
BE	*Bachelor of Engineering or Engineering Diploma*		

HEIs in Lebanon follow the annual, semester, or quarter-year system. The semester system, or what is generally known as the credit system, is applied in all HEIs that adopt the American system, such as the AUB and LAU. In this system, the year is divided into three semesters: Fall, Spring and Summer, whereby the Fall and Spring semesters are four months long while the Summer semester is two months long. The annual system is applied

in HEIs that adopt the French system, including the LU, USJ. In this system, courses extend along the whole year and the year is not divided into semesters. The quarter-year system, in which the year is divided into four semesters and the semester is three months long, is applied only in one HEI in Lebanon, Middle East College.

The BAU is a University that was originally founded by the "Association of Al Birr & Ihsan" with the support of Egypt. Based on this support, this University had the Egyptian influence and accordingly the University followed the Egyptian educational system at many levels including the time structure through which the courses are offered during any academic year. Accordingly, the courses at BAU used to follow school based structure of offering the courses whereby the courses used to be offered on annual basis as they used to extend along the whole year. However, recently, the University went through a review whereby it changed into a credit system that is mainly followed by American Universities. Accordingly, this University is now following a blend between the American system in terms of calculating the credits earned by a student while maintaining the Egyptian spirit and its influence as well as the cooperation that still exists between this university and the University of Alexandria in terms of exchange of faculty members.

In the American system, courses are measured in credit hours, which correspond to the number of teaching hours in the course; for example, a 3-credit hour course is offered to students three hours per week. However, in the annual system, courses are valued at either half a credit or two credits, with each credit hour equivalent to fifty teaching hours in a year (www.higher-edu.gov.lb; Frayha, 2010).

The identity of HEIs is related to the religious philosophy they follow. For instance, the USJ is a private Catholic higher institute of education, while the AUB, BAU, LU and LAU are secular universities. This variation reflects the openness and the freedom of

education that Lebanon enjoys. Many Lebanese citizens prefer to attend a university that corresponds to their religious affiliation. For example, many Christians prefer the USJ because of the institution's Catholic Christian identity, and also because French is the language of instruction. French is the language of choice for 40% of the Lebanese population, making Lebanon a francophone country (Tschentscher, 2013). The interest in the French language and educational system originates in the support that France gave the Christians during and after the French mandate period in Lebanon from 1918 till 1943. However, the USJ also attracts many non-Christian Lebanese citizens, due to their partiality towards the French language as a preferred second language to their native Arabic.

Higher education in Lebanon encompasses technical and vocational institutes, university colleges, university institutes and universities. The Lebanese University is the only public institution with 50 branches spread across the country. The private and public sectors fall under the administration of MEHE while the technical and vocational institutes are governed by the Directorate General of Technical and Vocational Education. The Directorate General of Higher Education governs the University Colleges, University Institutes and Universities.

Research is not the emphasis in all HEIs in Lebanon. Only some HEIs in Lebanon, such as the AUB (www.aub.edu.lb), LAU (www.lau.edu.lb) and USJ (www.usj.edu.lb), encourage their teachers to conduct research by linking teachers' promotion to the quality and quantity of research studies they conduct on yearly basis. In this regard, Nauffal and Nasser (2007) have concluded that the research conducted by universities in Lebanon is minimal. As a result, there are no research-intensive universities.

The educational system in Lebanon is living major challenges that constitute obstacles for improvement and change in the Lebanese societies. The most significant

challenge is manifested in the impact of religion or the sect in particular, on education. In Lebanon, the sects and religious leaders of these sects have great influence on the society in general and on education in particular. The uneven role and significance that sects and especially their leaders do exert on a range of sensitive societal issues; these issues that range from the resistance they display against the legalization and implementation of civil marriage to their efforts to oppose the improvements in curricula which are intended to make a positive change at educational institutions as well as in the whole society. More importantly, the dispute between the religious and political parties over the freedoms that are secured by the Lebanese constitution increases their impacts on the whole (Frayha, 2009).

Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Lebanon: MEHE's Road Towards Teaching Excellence?

"The key to system-wide success is to place educators and students at the centre. This means aligning the goals of reform and the intrinsic motivation of participants" (Fullan, 2011, P.1). In these terms Fullan (2011) emphasizes the importance of positioning the teachers and the students at the heart of any reform movement. This in turn supports the efforts made to get the perceptions of teachers as one of the major components of HEIs about the objectives and means of improvements in HEIs. In support of this, Kreber (2002) contends that because teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence vary within individual institutions as well as between them, teachers' perceptions must be considered when policymakers or academic administrators intend to make a change in teaching-related issues (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Serow, Brawner, & Demery, 1999; Tang & Chamberlain, 1997).

After 1992, higher education in Lebanon began to suffer from many challenges that were mainly manifested in the increasing demand for higher education. This has led to the uncontrolled expansion of private HEIs, as well as an increase in the number of programs offered in these institutions. This expansion has been accompanied by disorganized licensing on the part of MEHE for a large number of new institutions all over Lebanon. After MEHE licensing, there was no follow-up to monitor the quality of educational services, including faculty, staff, libraries, landscape, and buildings. These educational services, in fact, constitute only the basic framework required to legally establish a higher education institution and do not in themselves guarantee high-quality teaching (Muhanna, 2010; Hasrouny, 2011). It is significant to mention here that these institutions are mostly related in philosophy or backed up by the various political parties that exist in Lebanon. Consequently, this situation constitutes an expression of the role and influence that the various political (religious) parties play in influencing the education and the education sector in Lebanon. Nevertheless, although this situation has always been criticized by the Lebanese educators and even by the MEHE itself (Hasrouny, 2011; Meguerditchian, 2011), but this criticism has no effect due to the power that these political parties have over Lebanon.

Lebanon does not have a quality assurance system at the national level (Hasrouny, 2011; Jammal, 2012). Instead, private HEIs establish their own quality assurance systems as a way to thrive amongst fierce local and regional competition. Consequently, some private HEIs in Lebanon have started to explore the possibilities of international partnerships as a way to improve their academic programs. Others have taken the initiative of consulting external educational agencies in the USA or Europe to act as external auditors to review their programs and performance. In the process, they acquire accreditation from

an international accrediting body and thereby gain the trust needed to attract national, regional and even international students.

However, not all HEIs have embarked on this process, especially the ones that opened after the civil war. Still fewer HEIs have established their own internal quality control centres to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and promote excellence in teaching (Tempus, 2012). Private HEIs have the freedom to seek international affiliation or accreditation and to choose the accrediting body or charter that monitors their curricula and the certificates and degrees awarded to students. This freedom is bestowed on private HEIs by the Lebanese constitution, which was written at the time of Lebanon's independence in 1943 and renewed by the Ta'if agreement in 1989. Article 10 of the constitution "establishes the principle of freedom of education, acts as a safeguard, and ensures institutional autonomy" (Hasrouny, 2011).

Based on the principle of freedom of education, MEHE is encouraging private HEIs in Lebanon to acquire accreditation in order to maintain quality and integrity and lead the university towards excellence. In accreditation, the accrediting body provides the institutions with well-defined standards that they must attain in order to be accredited. Meeting these standards signifies high quality work for these institutions. Establishing a QA system is a high priority for MEHE, which believes that such a system is key to improving the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs and thereby helping Lebanon to regain its leading academic role. MEHE also promotes responsibility and accountability towards society and monitors the performance of all HEIs in the country in line with the objectives it has set for the higher education sector: namely, to produce knowledge, transfer knowledge, and serve the community.

For MEHE, the goal is to assist the institutions in making appropriate decisions that enhance quality and promote future performance. The quality of teaching and learning is considered a competitive weapon with which HEIs can compete to earn or maintain their reputation (Jammal, Loutfi, AbouChahine, 2008). For this reason, MEHE encourages HEIs to adopt quality improvement-oriented quality assurance rather than accountability-oriented quality assurance (Center for Mediterranean Integration World Bank, October 2012). Favouring the quality improvement-oriented quality assurance system by the MEHE over the accountability-oriented quality assurance is due to the improvement processes that the former system includes versus the judgemental nature of the latter system. The quality improvement-oriented quality assurance system is intended for improvement purposes and involves formative kind of assessment to enhance the future performance. However, the accountability-oriented quality assurance involves a summative kind of assessment that is intended to give a final feedback on the overall performance.

The term ‘quality’ is a contestable term as it has multiple definitions. For MEHE, “quality” is used to indicate “excellence” of a product or service, and it signifies meeting students’ present and future needs (Jammal, Loutfi, AbouChahine, 2008). For this reason, MEHE is striving to establish a QA system at the national level that monitors the improvement of teaching and ensures its “excellent” quality. The approach towards “excellence” that MEHE adopts expresses a managerialistic perspective that relies on the three Es that Skelton (2005) identifies as ‘efficiency’, ‘effectiveness’, and ‘economy’.. Considering these three Es is evident in the strategies that MEHE aims to practise by monitoring the performance of the teachers to ensure meeting those standards that MEHE has identified, in alignment with the international ones, to promote the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs. This approach is envisioned by MEHE to regain the leading academic

role that Lebanon had previously occupied on the one hand, and to satisfy the needs and expectations of the Lebanese citizens on the other hand, as well as contributing to the national economy of Lebanon. It is significant at this point to relate the contribution to the economy to meeting the labour market demands and prepare new generations in HEIs for the new professions in the market (Skelton, 2005). This managerialistic perspective is dictated by the policy makers at the national level as well as at the institutional level which is not necessarily shared with the teachers in HEIs. This reveals a top-down process of reform movement which does not concur with Fullan's (2011) recommendations in regard to engaging teachers and students who constitute the heart of any education institution.

For MEHE quality assurance could constitute the infrastructure that provides a solid ground for quality enhancement. Accordingly, MEHE has taken serious steps in developing a proposal for initiating a quality assurance system that monitors the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs, identifying standards for its effectiveness, and developing procedures for improving the overall performance of these institutions. The proposal to establish a quality assurance system was funded and approved with the coordination of a European educational agency. Both the President of the Lebanese Republic and the Council of Ministers approved this proposal on 12/06/2012, but until now it is waiting to be signed by the parliament in order to be implemented. The first aim of this proposal is to establish a Lebanese Commission for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which would be accountable for ensuring quality in HEIs (TLQAA Project, 2012).

To develop the quality assurance proposal, MEHE created a guide called "Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Lebanon." In this guide, MEHE provides clear definitions of quality and quality assurance and identifies the philosophies and frameworks that shape MEHE's perceptions of quality assurance. MEHE has taken these serious steps

in response to its belief that the establishment of a quality assurance system could help the HEIs to provide quality teaching whereby "quality" is attaining MEHE's "excellence" in the intended product of HEIs on the one hand, and meeting the needs and expectations of their clients who are represented by the students, their parents or guardians, and their prospective employers on the other hand.

Kaissi (2008) considers that through MEHE's strategy of establishing a quality assurance system, achieving excellence is still challenging, but not impossible. This strategy is therefore crucial for the survival of HEIs and their managers as stated by the Director General of Higher Education in Lebanon (Kaissi, 2008). This strategy includes a self-evaluation proposal and guide, which were proposed to complete the process of establishing the system of quality assurance. Self-evaluation is a system through which HEIs can internally assess their performance to ensure high quality. A self-evaluation system incorporates on-going processes of reviewing and agreeing on the identified standards, collecting related data, obtaining feedback, and committing to implementing the changes necessary to lead the institution to excellence. Through the self-evaluation system, HEIs and MEHE can monitor, and most importantly, improve the quality of teaching and learning (Abou Chahine, 2008).

For MEHE, the competition that higher education in Lebanon is facing, together with the autonomy that institutions have enjoyed since the expansion in higher education during the post-civil war period, make the need for quality assurance more explicit. To fulfil this need, MEHE has coordinated with European agencies, which have funded projects allowing MEHE to implement its intended system of quality assurance. Tempus (the Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) supported three projects for MEHE: the first project was the "Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Lebanon" (QAHEL) which was conducted in 2005 and focused

on establishing internal quality assurance systems and offering Lebanese experts in higher education the needed training in quality assurance. The second project was the "Creation of the Lebanese Engineering Programs Accreditation Commission" (LEPAC) which was conducted in 2006 and focused on defining and describing standards, procedures, and regulations needed in order for engineering programs to undergo external evaluation. Currently, MEHE is working on a third project supported by Tempus called "Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency" (TLQAA). This project aims at configuring the essential constituents needed to establish an external quality assurance system at the national level. The main purpose of participating in the Tempus program is for Lebanon to benefit from the experiences of the developed European countries about various improvement models that can be adopted to help Lebanon meet European standards and practices (www.etf.europa.eu). The main objectives of the Tempus projects include assisting MEHE in Lebanon to train teachers in HEIs and encouraging HEIs to found their own centres of quality assurance to attain teaching excellence (Meguerditchian, 2011; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 2009; Tempus, 2012).

"Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning" (EQAIP) was another project that HEIs participated in with UNDP from 2002 till 2007. This project focused on assessing 73 programs in Computer Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Engineering throughout the Arab region. In 2009, the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES) conducted a project with the active contribution of the Tempus-HERE (Higher Education Reform Experts) and sponsorship from AMIDEAST. This project prepared a draft law to establish a quality assurance agency, which was submitted by the Minister of MEHE to the Council of Ministers in Lebanon for approval. This proposal involves twelve Lebanese and six European HEIs coordinating with two European quality assurance agencies (Jammal, 2012).

The participation in western programs may bring into the discussion several issues related to the consequences of borrowing western education into the East. This includes issues like the degree or the extent to which these reform policies consider teachers' needs and qualifications, the power relationship between the developed and the developing countries (Thi Phan, 2010), and the potential of these reform policies to succeed in Lebanon.

In conclusion, it can be clearly understood that MEHE believes that the best way to improve and monitor the quality of teaching and learning is through the establishment of a quality assurance system based on standards set by MEHE. Nevertheless, teachers in HEIs in Lebanon may not have the same perceptions that MEHE has in regard to the role of quality assurance and in regard to their focus on the overall performance of their institutions. Moreover, teachers may have different views on the function of the quality assurance system in their institutions and the effectiveness of quality assurance systems in improving their teaching. If teachers and MEHE are not on the same page, it is doubtful whether an externally imposed quality assurance system will be effective. For this reason, taking teachers' perceptions into account will be a crucial component of the success of quality assurance.

Globalization: A Driving Force for Teaching Excellence in Lebanon

The concept of Teaching Excellence is increasingly becoming a universal movement, concerning both developed and developing countries (Skelton et al., 2007; Nixon, 2004). This movement is mainly driven by globalization, which continues to shape education in general and higher education in particular. Globalization is mainly manifested in the rapid, though uneven, increase in the exchange of goods, knowledge, financial flows, technology, and human capital among countries (Tomlinson, 2003). Globalization has

greatly impacted the economic and communications sectors and is impacting the higher education sector as well. Competition between HEIs has become more intense and is expected to become even more ferocious in the future.

The concept, nature, role and purpose of higher education have also changed with globalization due to the increase in the number of HEIs in the world, the increase in the ways that courses are offered within or outside the walls of universities, and the diversification of market demands. When universities were first established, they were perceived as physical settings where students directly engaged with teachers. Lately, this definition has changed as technological advancements have allowed the emergence of distance and online learning. It is crucial to note at this point, however, that although teaching and learning are occurring anywhere, anytime, and in any form, these processes still need to be moderated and led by teachers. Therefore, technological advancements have neither abolished the role of teachers nor the need for Teaching Excellence.

Globalization has guided educational reforms in many countries, and according to Hasrouny (2011), it has created an urgent need for reform in the higher education sector in Lebanon. Kaissi, Abou Chahine, and Jammal (2008) have likewise pointed to the increasing effect of globalization, technological advancements, and massification on the Lebanese higher education sector. From a managerial perspective, MEHE and the stakeholders of private HEIs in Lebanon have started to construct a more explicit and stronger relationship between HEIs and the market. This is manifested in the proliferation of HEIs over a short time period and in the new disciplines that were introduced to HEIs to satisfy the diverse interests of the rising numbers of new students as well as the needs of the labour market (personal interview with Jammal, 2014). The number of students enrolling in HEIs in Lebanon increased from 115,000 in 1995 to 173,000 in 2008, which led to a

significant increase in the number of HEIs (Muhanna, 2010; Hasrouny, 2011). This study will explore and engage critically with these recent market-led developments in the literature review chapter.

Globalization and technology, which are mainly manifested by the easy and fast exchange of resources, ideas and assets, have a great impact on the structure, content and mode of delivery of the higher education system in Lebanon and have raised the importance of meeting international standards and satisfying the labour market (Kaissi et al., 2008). As a result of this development, MEHE is charged with maintaining Lebanon's leading academic role in the region by monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs as well as measuring their contribution to the national economy. Demands for Lebanese HEIs to meet international standards, maintain high academic reputations, satisfy the labour market, and gain the trust of citizens were behind the initiative to reform and modernize the higher education system in Lebanon and push it on its journey towards excellence (Tempus Lebanon, 2012).

This chapter has explored the emergence of the higher education system in Lebanon, the challenges it is currently facing, and the factors that have driven policymakers in HEIs and MEHE to focus on quality assurance as a way of improving the higher education system. It should be noted here that the term "Teaching Excellence" is not commonly used by MEHE or in related research. Rather, quality assurance is used to signify all improvement opportunities and development practices in HEIs in Lebanon. It can be concluded that Teaching Excellence is still in its early stages in Lebanon and perceptions of Teaching Excellence likely vary widely. The following chapter will discuss the concept of Teaching Excellence in more details by examining how it is conceived in the literature, with an emphasis on the importance of addressing teachers' perceptions of the

concept. This will pave the way for the Findings chapter of the main study, which explores the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon about Teaching Excellence.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Since they were first established, teaching was the single most important function of higher education institutions. With time, this has changed and research has become a significant competitor to teaching to the extent that research has turned out to be considered of more value than teaching. This has made universities show greater interest in research and strive to adopt a "research-intensive university" stigma to improve their reputation, enhance their image and occupy a higher step in the ranking ladder. The relationship between research and teaching in universities will be explored more in a later section of this literature review. Interestingly, defining research, identifying the components or elements that are related to research, setting criteria to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of research work were clear to all policy makers, educators and teachers in HEIs. Accordingly, it is clearer for any policy maker at institutional or national level to evaluate any research work based on clear criteria including well-defined purpose, appropriate methodology, analytical interpretation of results, number of citations of this work, and other criteria which are not only clear but easy to measure. Unfortunately, this is not the case for teaching! The discourse about *good* or *excellent* teaching has always been central to teachers, educators and policy makers. Nevertheless, till the date of writing this research study, there is no universal consensus on the features or components of *excellent teaching*, the way of measuring it and means of providing *excellent teaching*. This discourse about *good* or *excellent* teaching is increasingly becoming more focused with research-based attempts to explore its features as well as the possible means or strategies to achieve the

intended excellence in teaching. Eventually, the literature review of this research study includes a considerable number of research works about the various attempts that have been done by educators for this purpose. Based on this, in a research study "Improving College and University Teaching" conducted under the title "Teaching Excellence", Hartung (1972) used *teaching excellence* and *excellence in teaching* interchangeably indicating no intended differentiation between them at any level.

For this reason, the main focus of this literature review is to discuss Teaching Excellence from different perspectives at different levels. From the perspectives of educators and policy makers, and in regard to how they think of Teaching Excellence, educators have involved in multiple attempts to define Teaching Excellence, to identify the attributes they think Teaching Excellence has, and the characteristics they think teachers in HE should have. These attempts are intended to employ the practices that they think are best to lead to Teaching Excellence based on research work and their own experiences in the field of education. This is to bear in mind all the complexities that exist around the various definitions, perceptions, characteristics and plausible means that lead to Teaching Excellence. Moreover, this overview will be followed by a discussion about the rising interest in Teaching Excellence and the significance of Teaching Excellence to policy makers at institutional and national levels. Then, a discussion of the significance of teachers' perceptions will be presented followed by analytical discussion of what the literature says about the four understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005). Then the researcher will examine the various approaches of quality assurance, professional development and student-centred learning as means to attaining Teaching Excellence.

Defining Teaching Excellence

Teaching Excellence is increasingly becoming the catchword of this century in higher education, to the extent that it has become a central part of most HEIs' missions. Nevertheless, the concept of excellence is subject to considerable debate between different political, social and academic standpoints. As Gardner has written, "I find that 'excellence' is a curiously powerful word about which people feel strongly and deeply. But it is a word that means different things to different people" (Gardner, 1961, p. xii.). In this quote Gardner highlights a fundamental issue about 'excellence' which supports the lack of a universal definition of Teaching Excellence. Different groups, including academic administrators, teachers and students, have different understandings of the concept based on factors including their educational values, traditions, culture, degree of the country's development, age, experience, and even personality.

Accordingly, the literature is rich in serious attempts to offer relevant definitions and identify the key components of Teaching Excellence. This section attempts to categorize these diverse approaches in terms of some of the main elements most commonly suggested by educators and academics when conceptualizing Teaching Excellence.

Teaching Excellence vs. Teaching Quality

As Barr and Clark (2011) have argued, the quality of the future in any society depends on the *quality of teaching* provided in HEIs. Providing *high* quality teaching to students has become one of the main concerns of policy makers, academic administrators and teachers in HEIs, which has led to an interest in the notion of excellence. However, although the concept of teaching excellence is very closely related to teaching quality, the two notions are still distinct.

Bleiklie (2011) observes that “excellence” and “quality” converge at points and diverge at others. Both “excellence” and “quality” comprise the two core characteristics of the academic work in any academic institution; and here is where they converge. However, unlike “excellence” which denotes the “maximum”, the “best” or the “highest” level of quality work that an institution needs to attain in order to be distinguished, “quality” indicates the minimum quality level or the minimum quality standards that a HEI needs to attain in order to be licensed and operate. This suggested difference between “quality” and “excellence” diverges from the suggested definition of MEHE which considers that “quality” is an indication of “excellence”. In this same regard, Sallis (1997) affirms that “*quality”* does not automatically indicate *“high standards”* as he states that HEIs should primarily focus on both of them as two distinct factors.

Teaching Excellence and Teachers’ Characteristics

Teaching Excellence can be perceived in terms of certain characteristics that teachers possess, such as knowledge of the subject matter, teaching experience, enthusiasm, and knowledge about teaching strategies (Dunkin & Precians, 1992). Kreber (2002) points out that Teaching Excellence is related to the quality and quantity of knowledge conveyed and transferred to students. Sherman et al. (1987) identify five characteristics of Teaching Excellence while emphasizing the ability of teachers to stimulate interest and thinking about the subject matter being taught, and reflecting the love of knowledge. In a similar manner, Ramsden (1993) proposes that teaching and learning can be enhanced, and teachers in HEIs can pursue excellence through the “imaginative” acquisition of knowledge.

Educators including Anderson (1990), Lefrancois, 1997, Ornstein (1995), and Santrock (2001) agree that Teaching Excellence is related to effective teaching, the

characteristics that teachers should have, and the strategies they employ in their teaching, and highlight the need to find ways to measure teaching effectiveness. Horan (1991) also relates Teaching Excellence to effective teaching, the content knowledge and the way this knowledge is conveyed. Horan (1991) believes that being knowledgeable about the subject matter and about the ways this knowledge is conveyed are both related to the main characteristics teachers need to have in order to provide high quality teaching.

In line with the emphasis on teachers' characteristics, several academics raise the importance of on-going teacher training as necessary to Teaching Excellence. In this regard, Darling-Hammond & Youngs (2002), NCATE (2004), and Resnick (2005) declare that Teaching Excellence can best be attained and maintained through the quality and quantity of professional development programs teachers engage in as they pursuit of excellence. Cooper & Robinson (2000) and Smith (2000) believe that teachers in HEIs are in need of advanced training embodied within professional development programs to help improve their teaching strategies and help them employ the ones that best suit their students' needs and interests in their pursuit of excellence. Others argue that teachers' life experiences beyond the classroom have an important influence on their teaching. Macfarlane (2007) asserts that the offstage work that teachers engage in before and after teaching has more potential to inform and judge teaching excellence than the act of teaching that takes place on stage.

Teaching Excellence and the Teacher-Student Relationship

Many educators, including McDaniel (1985) identify the student-teacher relationship as a core element of Teaching Excellence. Elton (1998) asserts that Teaching Excellence has multiple dimensions and contends that the ability of teachers to relate to their students and satisfy their interests and needs is one of the competencies that teachers

need to have in order to pursue excellence. Horan (1991) also emphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship, maintaining that having an interest in students and meeting their needs are essential to provide high quality teaching. Yates (2005) proposes differentiating between "good" and "effective" teaching whereby the first is indexed by profession-related criteria while the second is indexed by student-related criteria. This means that the effectiveness of teaching can be enhanced through building relationships between the teacher and their respective students.

In a similar vein, many educators view Teaching Excellence as a social practice or an interactive behaviour between teachers and their students on stage – in the classroom (Arreola, 2007; Burgess, 2000; Chism, 1999; Duff, 2003; Macfarlane, 2007; Pekarsky, 2009). At this point it is highly significant to expand the boundaries of this "stage" beyond the classroom walls to include the platforms that online education has created in response to technologization. This kind of interaction can be enhanced by employing teaching strategies that best provide opportunities for such kind of interaction between teachers and students. Kane et al. (2004), through a research study on university science teachers, produced a model that includes five attributes of excellent university lecturers. These attributes commonly appeared in the participants' responses and include the interpersonal relationships in addition to teacher's personality, research-teaching nexus, skills that teachers have, and being knowledgeable in the subject matter being taught.

Teaching Excellence and the Needs of the Economy

From another point of view, McDaniel (1985) states that Teaching Excellence is related to the extent to which HEIs contribute to the national economy. Harrison (2002) argues that the economy, worldwide, is placing new expectations on their employees, to which HEIs need to respond by producing new generations with new skills and new

capabilities. By extension, this requires policy makers and teachers in HEIs to modify the ways of teaching and the means of assessing students to meet the economy's demands. By the same token, Little, Locke, Parker & Richardson (2007), in a literature review about the "excellence in teaching and learning", observed that HEIs are using work-based curricula to meet the needs of the national economy in an attempt to attain teaching excellence.

Teaching Excellence as Reflection

Kennelly and McCormack (2014) relate Teaching Excellence to the quality and quantity of time teachers devote to thinking about or reflecting on their teaching (Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Terenzini, 1999). Kember (2002) and Schon (1983) emphasize that Teaching Excellence is related to the quality of reflection that teachers do during or after teaching. Rogers (2001) defined reflection in terms of the intellectual and emotional process that teachers engage in after teaching to examine specific beliefs or premises related to existing or emerging situations. Reflection can lead to a new understanding of these beliefs and situations, which teachers can incorporate in their teaching. Discussing the quality of reflection, Kennelly & McCormack (2014) argue that although reflecting on one's own work is of value, practicing reflection collaboratively and investing in different viewpoints is of higher value (Brookfield, 1995).

Although Kraft (2000) asserts the importance of reflection that teachers do during and after teaching, he concludes that the idea and process of reflection renders Teaching Excellence a "personal" issue. Lefrancois (1997) supports this claim as he notes that Teaching Excellence is something "private" since it is highly related and influenced by the personal teaching experience of teachers, and by the way and time they devote for teaching. Opposing this idea, Nixon (2007) criticized the notion of considering excellence as personal or private. Rather, he argues that the concept of excellence should revolve around

the public good and not personal choice. This leads him to argue that morality should have a primary influence on the major decisions taken in HEIs.

Teaching Excellence as an Outcome

Since the notion of excellence is expressed by using terms like “best”, “top”, and “perfect” (Little, Locke, Parker & Richardson, 2007) which denote distinguishing features, some educators believe that Teaching Excellence can be viewed as an outcome rather than a process, whereby Teaching Excellence constitutes a goal which teachers in HEIs need to continuously work on to achieve (Bogue & Saunders, 1992; Davenport & Hayward, 2004; Palerm-Ferri, 2004). Teaching Excellence can be related to the degree to which teachers achieve intended learning outcomes and the various competencies students acquire during their study in HEIs, which can be partially measured by using test scores attained by students. In this light, Skelton (2007) states that many academic administrators connect the quality of teaching to the extent to which student learning outcomes are achieved in a HEI. This brings into discussion the issue of whether Teaching Excellence is imposed by policy makers or aimed at by teachers themselves (Mentkowski & Associates, 2000). This issue of imposing Teaching Excellence or of keeping it a matter of choice for teachers is of high importance and vital to this research study.

Berliner (2005) also believes that effective teaching entails the achievement of intended learning out comes or predetermined objectives and goals. In this regard, Kreber (2002) declares that academic administrators in HEIs tend to identify the attainment of Teaching Excellence in terms of measuring teachers’ performance relying on students’ judgments via their evaluation of instruction to a great extent and on peer evaluation to a lesser one. This reveals the managerialist perspective of these academic administrators towards Teaching Excellence and its means of attainment.

In conclusion, defining Teaching Excellence has proven to be challenging to educators, although there have been many attempts to propose a unified definition. The array of dimensions or attributes of Teaching Excellence explains the lack of a universal or a widely accepted definition of Teaching Excellence (McLean, 2001; Trigwell, 2001), and supports the claim that different people perceive Teaching Excellence differently (Gardner, 1985). Starting from the premise that Teaching Excellence has no universal definition among HEIs and even within the same institution (McLean, 2001; Gibbs, 1995), and from the premise that teachers act the way they think (Dunkin, 1995), it becomes important to explore the perceptions of teachers of Teaching Excellence and how they think Teaching Excellence is best achieved.

Why Teaching Excellence?

The increasing interest in Teaching Excellence has been driven by two sets of factors: horizontal factors and vertical factors. Horizontally, the phenomenon of massification (Trow, 1973) has made increasing numbers of students eligible for higher education and led to a growing number of HEIs being established. This represents a shift from the elitism that was dominant before the 20th century, during which time only a small number of students were able to access HEIs (Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Scott 1995; Trow, 2000). The move to mass provision has raised concerns about the quality of higher education and impressed the need for teachers to update and improve their teaching methods to cope with this influx of students.

Another horizontal trend is the diversification in the types of HEIs, especially the tendency for universities to characterize themselves as either teaching-intensive or research-intensive universities. Stakeholders and policymakers often encourage research, especially because of the funds that it generates (Nixon, 2007). The favouring of research

over teaching in HEIs in general, and in research-intensive universities in particular (Kennelly & McCormack, 2014), has led to deterioration in the quality of teaching due to the increased time and funding allocated to research activity (Harrison, 2002). Moreover, in research-intensive universities, tenure and promotion of faculty members is no longer based on teaching (Boyer, 1990; Knapper & Rogers, 1994; Martin & Ramsden, 2000; Smith, 1991; Mayson & Schapper, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2011; Kennelly & McCormack, 2014) but rather on the research they engage in and publish on yearly basis (Gray, 1999).

Vertically, changes have taken place in the political culture of the university and society as a whole, leading to a new emphasis on managing and professionalizing teaching practices. In the UK and other countries, the government began to see universities as uncompetitive and over reliant on government funding (Morley, 1997). Universities were seen as lagging behind technological and other advances, and there were concerns that teaching was not keeping up with changes taking place at the societal level (Skelton, 2005). These concerns among policymakers led to the rise of new managerial practices intended to make universities more competitive and cost-efficient and to "professionalize" teaching (Morley, 1997; Skelton, 2005). This "new managerialism" has manifested itself in the imposition of quality assurance and quality enhancement processes designed to promote Teaching Excellence. As an example of a quality enhancement measure, HEIs have started to design and offer Teaching Excellence awards to teachers who can "*prove"* they have attained excellence in their teaching. Professional development programs are also being mandated to ensure that teachers develop the skills needed to become successful professionals especially in regard to updating their knowledge and improving their skills in response to the changes occurring at various levels and affecting the higher education sector.

Little, Locke, Parker and Richardson (2007) observed that attention to teaching and learning increased during the 1990s, which increased interest in Teaching Excellence as well. However, as early as 1972, Hartung declared that HEIs in general and Community and Junior Colleges in particular were showing increasing interest in teaching excellence (Hartung, 1972). Based on a research study involving teachers, administrators and students in Community Colleges in North Carolina, Hartung (1972) came up with a set of essential characteristics that teachers in higher education need to have in order to provide excellent teaching. He grouped these characteristics under six categories: characteristics as teachers, as scholars, as faculty members, as citizens, as counsellors, and as persons. Hartung (1972) recommended that academic administrators hire teachers possessing these characteristics and that existing teachers strive to strengthen these characteristics in order to attain Teaching Excellence. Hartung (1972) concluded that the nine most important characteristics for high-quality teaching fell under the category of characteristics as teachers. Other important characteristics include being knowledgeable in the taught subject matter, being able to provide clear explanations, and making the subject matter interesting.

There is much evidence to prove that interest in Teaching Excellence is growing in HEIs. One of the most obvious indications of this interest is the fierce competition among HEIs to occupy the highest positions in world university rankings. University rankings constitute clear evidence that Teaching Excellence has become a global concern affecting HEIs in developed as well as developing countries. Nevertheless, the weight accorded to the teaching criterion with respect to the research criterion differs from one ranking institution to another. This directly impacts an institution's ranking which in turn affects the decisions the institution makes concerning the place of teaching and research in its mission. The influence of university rankings has disturbed the teaching-research balance and

widened the gap between universities (Harrison, 2002), leading policymakers worldwide to undertake reforms to improve the educational system qualitatively and quantitatively (Ball, 2003). This improvement is directly linked to the development of the whole community and to its national economy (AkhavanKazemi, 2005).

Another clear indication of the increasing interest in improving the quality of teaching is the awards that are given to teachers on annual basis in certain countries like the USA and the UK for Teaching Excellence (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001; Mclean, 2001; Little, Locke, Parker & Richardson, 2007; Skelton, 2005). Policymakers introduced Teaching Excellence awards to act as incentives to encourage teachers in HEIs to think about their teaching. Although the impact of teaching awards on promoting Teaching Excellence and improving the quality of teaching is still debatable, Teaching Excellence awards are meant to

convey an explicit message to teachers that the awarding body values teaching as the major professional activity teachers engage in (Harrison, 2002; Dunkin & Precians, 1992).

One more indicator of the increasing interest in Teaching Excellence is the growing body of research and literature about Teaching Excellence, its meaning, its features, the way it is perceived by those concerned with it, and the means to attain it. Nevertheless, Palmer & Collins (2006) argue that this kind of work about Teaching Excellence does not constitute satisfactory evidence, as this kind of work, at both the qualitative and quantitative levels, is still far from the real life of academics.

It must be noted here that the growing emphasis on Teaching Excellence that has taken place in recent decades has not been uniformly well received by all those within the academy. According to Morley (1997), the emphasis on quality, accountability and meeting the needs of the consumer represents the rise of market-centric ideology, which reinforces

systems of privilege and downplays the importance of values related to social justice. Measures such as quality assurance systems designed to promote Teaching Excellence have allowed conservative governments to impose their values and control on the education system while appearing to be distant and passive observers (Morley, 1997). According to Skelton (2005), the new emphasis on adhering to standards and developing required competencies is a superficial response to real concerns about teaching quality, which does not address the fundamental epistemological and ontological questions at the heart of these concerns. As I will discuss further on, many of the policy changes in recent years have been driven by a Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence, which is only one of many possible understandings of Teaching Excellence.

Importance of Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Excellence

"We view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world" (Pratt, 1992, p. 204). Farrell and Lim (2005) say "as one thinks, one does," thereby emphasizing the influence of teachers' perceptions on their teaching and therefore on the way students learn. By nature, teaching is based on the theoretical as well as practical knowledge that teachers possess and make use of while teaching. Practical knowledge is closely related to teachers' perceptions, which influence the teaching or learning theories from which they choose to derive their practices. As Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2004) have argued, the relationship between the way teachers think of their teaching and the strategies they use in practice should be analysed in order to determine the effects of this relationship on teaching quality.

This takes us back to the question of whether Teaching Excellence should be a top-bottom or bottom-up process. Barnett (2000) believes that everyone can buy into their own excellence in their own way, according to their own interest and based on choice (Nixon,

2007). Therefore, he concludes that the notion of Teaching Excellence should not scare anyone, as long as those asked to work towards it are permitted to do so in their own way. Based on that, Barnett (2000) warns educators from being obsessed in the notion of Teaching Excellence because he considers it an "empty" concept that depends on the perception of its owner. Therefore, Teaching Excellence can be attained by anyone and thus it is not an outstanding criterion that is restricted to an *elite* group.

Kember (1997) categorizes the conceptions of teachers under two main themes: teacher-centred or content- oriented and student-centred or learning-oriented. These two themes constitute the two ends of a continuum between which intermediate conceptions exist. Ho et al. (2001) explain that teachers who perceive that students learn better when they are guided to develop their unique understanding of a certain concept tend to use student-centred learning strategies in their teaching. In an empirical study, Trigwell and Prosser (1996) concluded that a relationship exists between teachers' perceptions and their actual teaching; however, this study has been subject to criticism due to its methodology and conclusions. This brings to light an important question raised by Delvin (2006), which is: should changes in conceptions precede changes in practices, or the other way round? In other words, do conceptions influence practices or vice versa?

A number of studies have been conducted previously which focus on teacher perceptions. A study conducted with 24 teachers' focus groups in Emory University, a private research-intensive university in USA, about teachers' perceptions of the means to establish a balance between research and teaching in order to improve the quality of teaching in the University, produced recommendations on eleven themes (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001). Another research study conducted on 30 teachers who were recognized to have outstanding teaching potential in Metrobank Foundation Inc. in the Philippines

focused on the aspects that teachers consider to be the "yardsticks" of Teaching Excellence (SM de la Rosa, 2005). The study concluded that teachers perceive the establishment of a positive learning environment to be the key measure of Teaching Excellence, manifested in a respectful and caring student-teacher relationship in which the teacher has an everlasting influence on students' "learning life" and maximizes students' potential. Kember and Kwan (2000) conducted a study on 17 teachers in three departments in a university in which they concluded that any intended change in the performance of teachers is unlikely to happen without changing in the perceptions of teachers.

Recognizing the complexity of the notion of Teaching Excellence, due mainly to the absence of a respective universal definition, along with the existence of different perceptions of Teaching Excellence, Alan Skelton has adopted a critical stance and addressed Teaching Excellence as an "informed personal perspective" (Skelton, 2005; p. 3). Skelton (2005) in his book *"Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: A critical Approach"* proposed four understandings that inform individuals' perceptions of Teaching Excellence. Through these it is proposed that teachers' thinking about Teaching Excellence and their respective practices can be explained.

The Theoretical Framework

The researcher has chosen to use Skelton's four Understandings of TE: Traditional, Psychologized, Performative and Critical Understanding as the theoretical framework of this study to inform her research. This theoretical framework has been chosen to guide this research study and act as a frame of reference for its research design, interpretation of the findings, and possible generalization. Therefore, this theoretical framework will help the researcher to relate the findings of this research study to the existing knowledge included or given by these four understandings of Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, the researcher

will use this theoretical frame work to frame the discussion of the participant teachers' responses and interpretation of the findings on the assumption that the teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence belongs to one of the understandings of Skelton's framework. Moreover, these four Understandings constitute a unique attempt whereby Skelton (2005) categorized the various perceptions or understandings that teachers in HEIs may have of Teaching Excellence into four categories which he called the four understandings of Teaching Excellence. Skelton's attempt is considered unique because it was the only, up to the date of writing this research study, and based on an extensive research that the researcher did, proposal that encompasses the various perceptions that teachers may have of Teaching Excellence and, most importantly, relates these perceptions to the teachers' practices. This issue is crucial to this research study as it is tightly aligned with the research questions of this study, whereby this research study is intended to explore the perceptions of teachers in HEIs of Teaching Excellence and how these perceptions inform their practices.

Accordingly, this theoretical framework can provide a solid opportunity for the researcher to relate the findings of this research study, which is conducted in HEIs in a developing country such as Lebanon, to the findings that were generated from a research study that was conducted in HEIs in developed country such as the UK (Skelton, 2005). This aspect could be promising for coming up with potential generalizations of the perceptions and related practices that teachers have of Teaching Excellence in HEIs in developed countries with the perceptions that teachers may have of Teaching Excellence in HEIs in a developing country like Lebanon, the context of this study. Added to this, as the name "framework" means or signifies, this theoretical framework will help the researcher

to identify any limits to the generalizations that are expected between what is included in Skelton's Understandings of Teaching Excellence and the findings of this study.

The next section will provide a description of the four understandings of Teaching Excellence as proposed by Skelton (2005) with related literature.

The Four Understandings of Teaching Excellence

Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence

According to Skelton (2005), the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence is generally linked to three main issues: elitism, mastery of the subject matter, and "lecturing" as the main teaching strategy employed in classrooms to transfer knowledge. Accordingly, attaining Teaching Excellence is considered to be related to teachers when they demonstrate a high level of knowledge about the subject matter they teach and use lecturing as the sole teaching strategy to deliver knowledge to students from the elite classes.

Over time, the elitist bases of Teaching Excellence have lost their sway as policymakers, educators and societies at large have criticized the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence. After World War II, the USA witnessed an expansion in its higher education system while the UK witnessed similar growth from 1962 onwards. This expansion was not restricted to developed countries only, but affected developing countries such as China and India as well (Ashcroft, 2004). Elitism and inequality could not persist given the growing number of students eligible for higher education in increasingly modernized and super complex societies. Massification was followed by huge expansion in the number and types of HEIs to accommodate the increasing number of students on the one hand and meet students' diversified needs and interests on the other hand. Guri (1986) has noted that the elitist premises of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence

contradict the increasing interest in lifelong learning, whereby the number of adult students seeking higher education outside the traditional walls and times of the HEIs is increasing steadily.

Nevertheless, Guri (1986) raises a valid concern about maintaining high quality of teaching and learning when HEIs that open their doors to everyone. He concludes that excellence and equality cannot coexist because excellence means high standards, if not the highest standards, that not every individual who is eligible for higher education can attain. This same concern was also raised in (1986): “Excellence” vis-à-vis “Equity”, Equity & Excellence in Education, 22:4-6, 10-11) which argues that excellence is more likely to be attained under the umbrella of elitism than under massification, where equality is guaranteed. Furthermore, in (1986): “Excellence” vis-à-vis “Equity”, Equity & Excellence in Education, 22:4-6, 10-11) argues that it is difficult to attain Teaching Excellence in multicultural classrooms while maintaining ethical considerations. For that reason, he recommends changing the teaching strategies employed in classrooms from teacher-centred to student-centred in order to provide authentic opportunities for students to invest in and share their real life experiences with their classmates and thereby better understand the values and traditions of other cultures. This contradicts with the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence which relies on lecturing as the sole teaching strategy without regard to differences among students in terms of learning styles, needs and interests (Henderson, Antelo & Norman, 2010).

Away from elitism, massification, and lecturing, a different traditional concept of excellence is expounded by Astin (1986). Astin (1986) contends that people traditionally evaluate excellence according to four dimensions: the reputation that HEIs have, their resources, their outcomes, and their curriculum. Astin attempted to evaluate these four

dimensions with respect to the ability of HEI to develop the talents of their students and teachers. Interestingly, he concludes that none of the four conceptions can be considered enough to inform the development of the talents of students and teachers.

Like most developing countries, Lebanon lived through the era of elitism. HEIs in Lebanon were restricted to the upper classes from the time they were established until the beginning of the civil war. After the civil war (1975-1989) the number of HEIs increased, making enrolment possible for individuals from different social classes. After the civil war, the peace that was announced in Lebanon after the Taif agreement enhanced the openness among the cities of the country and in turn encouraged investors to seek profitable investments. Unfortunately, establishing education institutions was on top of these investments that were intended for profit or commercial reasons (Muhanna, 2010). This led to drastic increase in the number of HEIs of different entry requirements at all academic and financial levels. This allowed more opportunities for students from different social classes and who are eligible for higher education to find seats in a HEI. Therefore, elitism in higher education almost vanished (Muhanna, 2010; Kaissi, Abou Chahine, Jammal, 20089. However, this was short-lasted since the chaotic increase in the number of HEIs rendered MEHE in Lebanon unable to monitor the quality of teaching, learning, and services offered in these institutions (Muhanna, 2010). Moreover, Nauffal and Nasser (2007) assert that inadequate financial resources and negligible research also hindered the Lebanese government from monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs across the country. Therefore, a tension developed between maintaining the good reputation of the academic system on the one hand and promoting equity among students from all social classes on the other hand. To maintain their reputations, many growing HEIs have strived for accreditation or affiliation with notable international HEIs to endorse their academic

programs and attest to the quality of their teaching (Nauffal & Nasser, 2007). However, acquiring international accreditation or affiliation allows HEIs to justify raising student fees considerably. This has the effect of restricting students' enrolment to the wealthy classes, renewing the tension between equity and good reputation to a certain degree.

The teaching strategies favoured in the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence have also been subject to attack. In the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, "talking at the student" or passive learning through lecturing is the main teaching approach adopted. During lectures, students are not given the opportunity to construct their own understanding of knowledge, nor to think critically about the given knowledge, nor to control their own learning. This challenges the constructivist epistemological position, which assumes that learners are active builders of their own knowledge and calls for learners to be selective and critical thinkers (Skelton, 2005). In lecturing, teachers position themselves at the centre of the teaching-learning process and render students the passive receivers of knowledge. According to one analogy, teachers treat students as bankers where knowledge is deposited with no active interaction (Sacchetti, & Barnett, 2009). Teachers who employ lecturing as their only teaching strategy have been criticized for not appreciating individual differences among students with respect to their needs, interests or learning styles. Moreover, teachers who rely on lecturing tend not to appreciate the significance of a student's prior knowledge and its effect on forming new and unique understandings of the information being presented. This does not generate autonomous learners, as students are not given the opportunity to have ownership of their own learning. Servage (2009), while acknowledging the importance of teachers being highly knowledgeable in subject they are teaching, does not support the use of lecturing as

the main or sole instructional strategy. Instead, he relates teaching excellence to the ability to employ multiple teaching strategies.

Because of the criticisms of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, this understanding has transformed from being dominant in the past era to almost vanishing in the current times (Skelton, 2005). However, some voices in the academics have cautioned against disposing with traditional teaching methods altogether. Northedge (2003) argues that it is crucial for teachers to be experts in their subject matter so that they can introduce students to the frames of meaning used within the discipline, help them to navigate unfamiliar discourse, and eventually coach them to engage in specialist discourse themselves. Some portion of the teaching exercise has to involve the transfer of subject-specific knowledge from teachers to students, since subject disciplines provide the epistemological structure for academic enquiry without which students would not be able to participate in academic debates (Skelton, 2005). Accordingly, scholars like Northedge emphasize the need for a balanced approach that uses student-centred methods without neglecting the central and important role played by the teacher in the learning process.

Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence

Skelton (2005) explains the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence in terms of forming a respectful, productive relationship with the students based on appreciating their needs and tailoring feedback and advice based on students' individual differences, learning styles, and interests. In the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, teachers are more concerned about the individual student and his or her personal and academic development. Accordingly, the quality of interaction and the relationship between the teachers and students is essential feature of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Barr and Clark (2012) emphasize the importance of the teacher-student relationship and in specific relate teaching excellence to the ability of teachers to meet their students' needs. Meeting students' needs and satisfying their interests is closely linked to the perceptions that teachers have about the way to achieve that satisfaction. Accordingly, teachers who believe in a learning-oriented approach tend to employ active learning and student-centred learning strategies in their classrooms, while those who are content-oriented utilize lecturing as the main or sole teaching strategy. Many educators agree with the assumption that teachers act as they think, or in other words, that their conceptions about their teaching influence the way and the strategies they employ in teaching (Dunkin, 1995; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Pratt, 1992).

Many researchers argue that student-centred learning strategies produce deeper learning than teacher-centred teaching strategies (Ho et al. 2001; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999). This argument is based on the premise that in student-centred learning, students engage actively in their own learning and in the process become critical thinkers. Students also acquire a deep understanding of the subject by sharing their ideas with peers and exploring different points of view. Student-centred learning converts the teaching approach from a teaching-learning process into a learning-teaching process in which the students are at the centre, and what is learned by students is valued more highly than what is taught or delivered by teachers (Light, Calkins, Luna, & Drane, 2009; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylanne & Nevgi, 2007 & Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999). This entails that students actively interact with the information by searching, selecting, thinking, analysing, evaluating, and synthesizing new and unique understandings of the information, thus taking ownership of their learning and becoming autonomous learners.

For teachers to establish and maintain excellent relationships with their students and their colleagues, they need to have excellent interpersonal skills that allow them facilitate the active engagement of students with them on the one hand and with the information on the other hand. The quality of these relationships has a great impact on students' growth and development. The importance of interpersonal skills is supported by several educators who perceive Teaching Excellence as a social practice or interactive behaviour between teachers and their students and whose main stage is the classroom (Arreola, 2007; Burgess, 2000; Chism, 1999; Duff, 2003; Macfarlane, 2007 & Pekarsky, 2009).

The Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence concurs with the main assumption of the constructivist theory, which holds that learners construct their own unique understanding of knowledge based on their prior knowledge and previous experiences (Ormord, 2012; Skelton, 2005). However, the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence should not be confined only to emphasize the multidimensional relationship between teachers and their students as Skelton (2005) suggests, but also should consider the relationship between the student and the information itself, whereby students need to actively interact with the information in order to be able to synthesize novel and unique understandings based on their prior knowledge and previous experiences. Although Skelton (2005) did not explicitly express the existence of relationship between learners and the information, he nevertheless acknowledges the construction of new information by learners based on students' prior knowledge as the main manifestation of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005).

This interaction with the information needs to be facilitated or guided by the teacher or the "expert other" as Vygotsky explained. Vygotsky emphasizes the role of the "expert other" who is able to support his or her students to perform challenging tasks within the

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD.) The assistance received from the expert other within the ZPD helps in promoting students' cognitive development (Oakley, 2004). The role of the expert other is crucial to student-centred learning whereby teachers act as facilitators of the learning-teaching process and guide students to actively construct knowledge instead of passively receiving it (Kember and Kwan, 2009).

How can Teaching Excellence conceived according to the Psychologized Understanding best be measured? Some research argues that effective teaching can best be measured through student learning outcomes, the way teachers create an environment conducive to learning, and the way students rate the learning they acquire in relation to the quality of teaching provided. This kind of research shows that students' evaluation of instruction is the most valid and reliable tool to measure the effectiveness of teaching (Kreber, 2002).

However, it should be noted that the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence is significantly challenged in large-size classes. This challenge is manifested in the difficulty of designing and applying teaching strategies to suit the different learning styles of students, the impracticability of tailoring feedback according to the needs of every student, and the challenge of building productive relationships with every student to identify his/her needs and interests. To face these challenges, HEIs need to provide faculty members with professional development programs to help them move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2000). This depends on the availability of resources in HEIs and the attitudes of faculty members and their readiness to enrol such programs.

Unfortunately, little research exists that shows how HEIs in Lebanon perceive the kind of relationship that exists or should exist between the teacher and students and

between students and the information in hand. Also, as mentioned earlier, there is no research that investigates the teaching strategies that are employed in classrooms in the Lebanese HEIs. Therefore, interviewing faculty members in HEIs in Lebanon is important in order to explore their perceptions of the kind of the relationship that they have or they try to develop with their students, the importance of this relationship, the teaching approaches they adopt, and their perceptions about the existing challenges and possible means to overcome them.

Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence

The Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence is increasingly acquiring dominance over HEIs in both developed and developing countries due to marketization. This understanding is mainly manifested by the modifications that these institutions are making in order to satisfy the labour market demands. This change in perceptions of the role of higher education is mainly due to the drastic and rapid advancements in technology, which have secured easy and fast communication, rendering the world more and more interdependent at the cultural, societal, political and even the economic level. Students in higher education are the future generations who will face the new realities of globalization and technolization, and as a result teaching and learning in HEIs has become more challenging. To face these challenges and cope with these changes, administrators in HEIs are becoming more concerned about designing market-related curricula that will prepare graduates for the labour market (Becher & Trowler, 1996).

Accordingly, the curricula necessitated by the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence are work-based curricula that offer students the knowledge and experiences directly related to their future careers, thus ensuring students' employability in the highly competitive local or international market. The goal is to produce "flexible and

work-related" students who are interested in new disciplines that are competitive in the global higher education marketplace (Skelton, 2005). Marketization has not only meant the introduction of new disciplines, but it has also affected the ideology of policymakers and teachers. In 1983, Clark could portray a triangular relationship among the three "authorities" with the real say in higher education: the academic oligarchy, the state authorities, and the market.

Dill & Sporn (1995) argue that this kind of marketization constitutes a real threat to HEIs at the level of intellectual property and the knowledge intended to be produced and communicated with the public. Moreover, work-based curricula and marketization have led Trowler (1998) to view HEIs as factories that produce and sell chunks of knowledge that suit the market. This change in curricula has caused teachers to modify the knowledge to be communicated and tailor the corresponding student learning outcomes to suit the curricula. In this way, teachers become more concerned about meeting learning outcomes rather than becoming specialists in the subject matter they teach.

Arrow (1993) also considers the market to be a threat from which universities need to be protected. Arrow believes that as the competitive market will change the whole university, including the knowledge offered to students, the focus will shift from the core courses to more "popular" courses required by the market, thus influencing the perception of excellence in higher education. Becher & Trowler (1996) note that policymakers used to always protect higher education, as a public body, from the market and its changing demands. However, nowadays, public bodies are perceived as better serving the communities through their engagement in "commercial activities" which renders higher education the servant of the market. Dill (1992), Eustace (1994), and Dearlove (1999) went as far as saying that the higher education system moved from being governed by the

"academic oligarchy" to being governed by market demands. Similarly, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) talk about the higher education system's loss of autonomy due to bureaucratization and the transfer of power to policymakers and academic administrators

Becher & Trowler (1996) describe the influence of marketization as a move towards managerialism. Skelton (2005) describes managerialism as an approach guided by the pursuit of the three E's: efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. For Clark (1998), this manageralism has put teachers under real pressure due mainly to the increase in workload and the diversification in the type of work to be done, like spending extensive time on paper work. This led teachers to become dissatisfied with their jobs and has impacted the quality of their teaching and academic work. For this reason, policymakers at the national and institutional level became concerned with evaluating teachers' performance in order to ensure that HEIs are attaining the three Es.

Therefore, according to the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence, higher education is governed by the criteria of the market and Teaching Excellence is viewed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. The influence of the market on HEIs is evident in the introduction of new disciplines such as Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Banking and Finance, Hotel Management, and others. HEIs in Lebanon have introduced new disciplines and new modes of teaching, such as e-learning, to face competition in the regional and global higher education market place and meet the needs of their students (Mayberry et al., 2012).

This issue raises several important ethical questions related to HEIs, equality and justice: firstly, do all people who enter these disciplines show real enthusiasm towards them? Secondly, do all people have the same opportunity to access all introduced disciplines? Sandel (1998) warns of two dangers that come into play when the market is

allowed a heavy influence on the higher education system: coercion and corruption. Students entering higher education may choose certain disciplines because of "coercion" or due to the necessity of the situation, because those disciplines are needed by the market and will ensure a future career. The idea of corruption stems from the view that education is a value- laden profession that should not, and cannot, be sold in the market. This reveals a tension between the market and education as a moral value.

The relationship between education and the market was also questioned by McMurtry (1991) who argues that no relationship should be allowed to exist between education and the market since they not only differ but contradict each other in all aspects. This contradiction, according to McMurtry, ranges from the basic goals of each, to motivations, methods, and standards of excellence. Accordingly, education cannot be made to serve the market and therefore the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence cannot promote high quality teaching.

These issues constitute the main challenges that the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence faces. Nevertheless, and in spite of these challenges, the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence still has some value in supporting the national economy and satisfying the needs of students by ensuring their employment in the market.

Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence

The Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence involves giving students the freedom and opportunity to access knowledge and discuss it in addition to debating and questioning serious societal, political and moral issues. In the Critical Understanding of teaching excellence, students are given the opportunity to make decisions in the selection of content that relates to their real life experiences. The major goal of adopting such an approach is to give students ownership of their leaning, render them responsible for it, and

most importantly, empower them to lead major changes in their societies (Skelton, 2005; Searle and McKenna, 2007).

Talking about the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence in higher education entails considering the theories that underpin the critical pedagogy in education. Both, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence and critical pedagogy, focus on the change that education is intended to lead in anyone society. McArthur (2010) observes that there is a tight relationship between education and society. This claim is supported by Walker and Nixon (2004) who declare that any change in education should lead to a change in the respective society. Fischman and McLaren (2005) recommend that educators and students are entitled to critically engage in education in a way that is not only based on accepting the knowledge as is, but incite transforming it.

At this point it is important to mention that all critical theories, including the critical race theory, the critical literacy and critical discourse analysis did not only lead to a major change in societies, but led to an even revolution in that society whether at the micro or macro levels (McArthur, 2010; Trowler 2008). Moreover, the critical pedagogy underpinned by these critical theories, focuses on positioning power at the heart of education and social justice. This supports the aim educators or their attempts to allow discussions and debates about sensitive social or political issues while understanding and respecting the postmodern perspectives and the different identities that exist among individual or groups in HEIs (Tierney, 1993). This understanding is promising to lead the intended change in anyone society (Hooks, 1990) and could be strengthened by listening to the others' points of views (Skelton, 2005).

However, it can be quite challenging for HEIs in general and for teachers in particular to adopt such an approach due to the impact of globalization and

technologization. McRoy and Gibbs (2009) emphasize the challenges that HEIs are facing and stress the pressure that rapid changes at the societal, contextual, economical, cultural and especially technological levels exert on these institutions. Globalization and technologization are the two major factors that contributed to neoliberalism, neo-managerialism, and marketisation, which in turn, led to massification, sub-fractioning of disciplines, institutional differentiation and stratification (Archer, 2008). All this has led Barnett (2000) to declare that all these factors situate higher education and all its institutions in a *supercomplex* age.

Admitting that HEIs are witnessing an age of supercomplexity calls for a supercomplex way of communicating knowledge. This entails adopting a way of teaching that can survive the rapid and wide-ranging changes that have occurred at all levels and enable students to manage and take advantage of these changes. In this regard, Gale (2007) stresses the benefits of using scholarly inquiry in teaching to contribute to a deeper knowledge of student learning in a way that enables students to wisely relate the information to each other at different levels; relate new information to relevant existing one; relate new pertinent information to each other; and wisely predict the significance of any change in the information. Through this way of instruction, students become more aware of significant educational issues and more aware of their role in their learning experience.

Brew (2007) does not fully agree with Gale about the outcome of deep learning, as he believes that deep learning is not enough to build knowledge and communities. For this reason, he calls for approaching Teaching Excellence critically, as Skelton did, especially with regard to the student-teacher relationship. Brew (2007) criticizes the tendency of teachers to treat students as “kids” and calls for redefining this relationship by

engaging undergraduate students in research, Moreover, Brew (2007) argues that both teachers and students should be given opportunities to critically engage and collaboratively reflect on the two processes of teaching and learning. Through research, students can engage critically in various topics of their interest; this will empower the students who will become, through their research, one of the sources of knowledge provided. This is very crucial change in the student-teacher relationship whereby students are not anymore knowledge recipients from their teachers; they have changed into knowledge producers on which they reflect. During reflection about teaching and learning, teachers or students tend to think out loud which allows them to recognize their values and engage critically in questioning them, which makes attaining Teaching Excellence more possible.

From another angle, Searle and McKenna (2007) believe that defining Teaching Excellence is context related and is driven by the political interest of any one context, and cannot be attained without considering equity and diversity. Searle and McKenna (2007) believe that HEIs should aim to empower their students and enable them to critically engage in their societies in order to lead wise changes. However, writing in the context of South Africa, Searle and McKenna (2007) consider adopting a Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence in HEIs to be highly challenging due to the politically volatile context within which these institutions are located. Due to the new managerial style, audit processes are being used as a “threatening lever” over teachers and the accreditation process is isolated from the discourse about defining and perceiving Teaching Excellence.

Atkinson (2001) claims that the existing trend of stratification in HEIs is being challenged by the concept of scholarship of teaching and learning with all its implications. Scholarship of teaching and learning can play an active and effective role in producing an “intellectually liberating force in society” (Atkinson, 2001). This agrees with the Critical

Understanding of Teaching Excellence's aim of empowering students to lead changes in their society.

The Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence holds that the quality of student learning in HEIs can be enhanced by giving students the opportunity to access knowledge, discuss, debate and question serious societal, political and moral issues. However, this is very challenging to put into practice given the restrictions of marketisation, neomanagerialism, and auditing which control teachers' academic freedom and make them servants to predetermined learning outcomes and performance indicators. Teachers in HEIs, especially veterans, are facing a dilemma between following the guidelines informed by their own conceptualizations of teaching, on the one hand, and following the new missions and goals of their respective HEIs which are informed by marketization. Living in this dilemma is increasingly impacting the identities of teachers and affecting their teaching.

As mentioned above, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence focuses on empowering students by allowing them to debate critical social issues such as inequality and justice, and giving them the power to steer the helm of the class through creating their own groups, class rules, and policies for sharing ideas. For this to happen, teachers need to help students to free themselves from all existing constraints and encourage them to bring sensitive topics to the discussion, which can pave the way for them to lead changes in their societies. A good example of the changes that students might be able to lead is the pro-democracy protests organized by youth in what is now called the Arab Spring (A[-Momani, 2011). Looking for equal and fair opportunities to survive within oppressive socio-economic and political situations, the youth, or what Al-Momani (2011) calls the "youth bulge," was a driving force behind the Arab Spring which led to the fall of several Arab regimes and continues to threaten the rest (Al-Momani, 2011). Given the impact of the

Arab Spring and the major role played by the youth, it is important to consider what role higher education played in shaping the outlook of youth and their involvement in the movement.

HEIs and teachers play an important role in providing the ground for students to access knowledge irrespective of sex, race, ethnicity, or any cultural aspect. However, according to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, accessing knowledge should be accompanied by giving students the opportunity to integrate their thoughts and perceptions in light of their values, beliefs and contexts to construct new and unique understandings that allow them to make wiser decisions in their societies. This integration opens the students to divergent and critical thinking and allows them to listen and discuss others' assumptions that may challenge or contradict their own.

It is important to emphasize here the role of teachers in employing teaching strategies that give students the opportunities to question, listen to alternative viewpoints, discuss, research and debate critical social, economical or political issues. Providing these kinds of opportunities requires resources such as lower teacher-student ratios, reduced workloads allowing more time for planning, knowledge of learning and teaching strategies, and time for reflection.

Nowadays, given the two "mega-trends" of globalization and technologization (Brennan, 2008), a Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence would ground learning in light of existing political ideologies like democracy and their impact on the society. Moreover, from a Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, HEIs should not be confined only to the elite class, but be open to everybody. This is related to empowering students by giving them equal opportunities to access knowledge in light of their individual needs and interests.

Tabak, Adi & Eherenfeld (2003), in an article entitled "A philosophy underlying excellence in teaching," tackled the critical approach in teaching from another angle. The authors argue that the teacher-student relationship is a "potential source of injustice and inequality" which can better be resolved through assuming that neither the student nor the teacher has the complete knowledge; everyone learns from the other as long as both of them work to achieve the same objective (Jewell, 1994; Gaines & Baldwin, 1996). In this article, Tabak, Adi & Eherenfeld (2003) conclude that attaining Teaching Excellence entails adopting a critical approach in teaching whereby teachers and students share the same goal of enhancing students' learning. Ignoring the relationship between power and knowledge hinders the development of critical thinking skills in students and prevents them from exploring their competencies and making effective use of their previous knowledge and prior experiences.

However, who will empower these students? Students need to be provided with the context and tools to judge or evaluate knowledge in light of their needs, interests and potentials. They need to be encouraged to assess their own learning, identify their own weaknesses and strengths, and reflect on the acquired knowledge. According to the Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development, students need to be empowered to reach the postconventional stage at which point they become able to question all knowledge regarding any issue and offered by any figure in society (Rice, & Dolgin, 2008). Teachers can empower students within the context of HEIs through free speech and democratic debates that give students the opportunity to discuss important social and moral topics. This can be related to the role that HEIs can play in accessing knowledge, in the knowledge produced, and in turn to the relationship between the knowledge produced and Teaching

Excellence. The need to access and evaluate knowledge impacts the changes that these students, the future generations, need to make at different levels like the societal level.

Given the rapid speed of technological change, universities are playing an influential role in providing graduates with the education and certifications needed by the industrial world. In industrialized education, students are treated as objects that are expected to reproduce what is taught to them without thinking, analysis or scrutiny. The human mind is turned into a box where more and more information is crammed. However, now we are living in an era that is witnessing a major transition from the wheels and gears of the industrial world to the nodes and networks of a digitized world. Furthermore, we are witnessing the rise of a new educational outreach mode manifested through e-learning, an example of which is the massive online open classes (MOOC) that are increasingly being offered by a large number of HEIs, even top-ranking institutions such as Harvard University. Therefore, it seems that a paradigm shift in teaching in tertiary education needs to take place to accommodate these changes and the existing challenges.

Means to Attain Teaching Excellence

Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement Strategies as a Means to Attain Teaching Excellence

Many universities and colleges view their main goal as offering high quality education to their students. Accordingly, the institution's services are designed to support and improve students' learning experience. Throughout the previous decade, and in attempt to respond to the occurring changes on top of which are the globalization and technolozation, learning and teaching started to make a shift in their approaches towards cooperative learning. This kind of change entailed monitoring of teachers' performance and their quality of teaching (DeRijdta, Tiquetb, Dochyb, & Devolderc, 2006). Furthermore,

HEIs are ranked based on different criteria whereby the quality of teaching offered and learning occurs is one of the most important criteria. This is reason enough to make the upper management and policymakers concerned not only with monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in their institutions, but also continuously improving this quality to meet students' needs and satisfy their interests.

The way HEIs choose to monitor the quality of teaching is related to their understanding of quality management and the ideology that underpins this understanding. In this regard, certain HEIs tend to monitor their teaching and learning standards through quality assurance system that aims at providing control over the standards set by anyone university; thus adopting a neoliberal ideology that supports a Perforamtive Understanding of quality. On the other hand, other HEIs, chose quality enhancement kind of management to ensure the improvement of teaching by focusing on the practices of teachers to lead to Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2012).

Many HEIs choose the top-down model whereby they dictate the strategies to teachers. However, other HEIs prefer to adopt the bottom-up model in an attempt to take the views of teachers into consideration. It is interesting to differentiate between the two perceptions of quality enhancement that QAA came up with in their project in June 2008, in which they indicate that some HEIs define quality enhancement as the continuous improvement of existing practices, while others perceive quality enhancement as a means employed to fix what is not good (The Higher Education Academy, 2008).

Since there is no consensus among educators on the definition of quality, policymakers tend to seek a measurable description based on specific standards. At a later stage, educators translate these standards into "SMART" objectives and key performance indicators that can be measured at different levels: the institution, program, and course

level. For that reason, policy makers or administrators in HEIs tend to spell out *high* standards for their performance whereby they can describe the quality of their work more precisely in terms of meeting these standards through achieving the related objectives. If not linked to standards, defining quality would be subjective since definitions of quality differ from context to context.

Harvey (2005) in his article "A history and critique of quality evaluation in the UK" presented a historical summary of the development of monitoring the quality of teaching in UK. This summary describes the transformation from adopting a quality assurance system that focuses on accountability and compliance, into a quality enhancement system that focuses on a continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and the learning experience of students.

Those who advocate for a Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence encourage the setting of standards as part of a quality assurance system, since standards constitute the measurable items that describe the performance of a certain institution. This is intended to help the higher education institution better measure the quality of work being offered and more importantly to inform the institutions of where they are and where to go. At this point, it is essential to think of the processes or means to bridge the gap between "where a HEI is" and "where [this HEI] wants to be." Closing the gap entails designing and implementing quality improvement or enhancement strategies. Therefore, closing or bridging the gap is the crucial part of quality assurance and constitutes the quality enhancement or quality improvement strategies that are adopted to meet the set standards.

According to the main assumption of quality assurance advocates, which is that meeting predetermined objectives indicates the attainment of Teaching Excellence, a direct relationship exists between the three components of quality: quality assurance, quality

enhancement and Teaching Excellence; Teaching Excellence from the performative perspective. Consequently, quality enhancement or improvement operates under the umbrella of the quality assurance system, which oversees or manages all quality enhancement strategies followed in an HEI.

For Gibbs (2001), quality assurance can take one of three forms. HEIs can adopt a "quality model" if they want to monitor the conformance of teaching practices employed with the teaching theory adopted. This model, which is derived from the constructivist school of thought, is directly related to student-centred learning whereby teachers guide students to construct their own unique understandings. Accordingly, although quality assurance is related to performativity, nevertheless, in this model it seems to be related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Alternatively, HEIs can adopt a "quality enhancement model" if they want to monitor the strategies employed by teachers to improve their teaching strategies. This model involves professional development programs to help teachers improve their teaching. Finally, HEIs can adopt the "quality feasibility" model if they want to focus on identifying and then removing all the obstacles that hinder the improvement of teaching. HEIs tend to choose the model of quality that best matches their purpose.

According to Guest & Duhs (2003), the need to establish quality assurance agencies at the national level or quality assurance systems at the institutional level was a response to the increase in the number of students eligible to enrol in HEIs and the cut in the funding allocated for HEIs. Therefore, quality assurance systems or agencies are intended to serve students' learning by monitoring the quality of teaching and all university support services and activities. This is done by identifying student learning outcomes and setting criteria to measure them. Accordingly, establishing a quality assurance system is not a goal in itself,

but a means to attain the goal of providing quality teaching and learning. Quality assurance systems or agencies provide the upper management at the institutional or national levels with the data necessary to make educated decisions on how to best meet predetermined standards.

For Brittingham (2009) quality assurance encompasses what a HEI must do in order to accomplish high quality, while quality improvement constitutes the structure or map of institutional enhancement and self-evaluation. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) considers quality assurance to include all the practices employed by a HEI to maintain and enhance teaching, learning and all available services that are made to serve the chief goal of an educational institution (FINHEEC, 2008).

The definition of quality assurance provided by NAAC and Col (2007) is one of the strongest definitions available. NAAC and Col define quality assurance in terms of three components. The first component is all the strategies used in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The second component is all the processes and procedures employed in monitoring the quality attained. The third component includes all the types of support received from the upper management to improve and maintain the validity and workability of the quality assurance system.

From another perspective, Biggs (2001) asserts that quality can be perceived in two ways: retrospectively or prospectively. The retrospective perception of quality is manifested in terms of meeting the economical requirements, which aligns with the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Prospective quality involves meeting the purpose of the university in terms of transforming students' perceptions of the world and their ability to utilize their acquired knowledge to make decisions and solve their real life problems, which aligns with the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Hénard (2010) seems to agree with Biggs' (2001) retrospective perception of quality assurance since he considers quality to be a dynamic concept that varies with contextual needs and environmental changes. This means that policymakers should not set fixed criteria and rigid standards for teachers to simply follow and attain. All criteria and standards, according to Biggs (2001), should be flexible enough to change in line with changes in the surroundings. Filippakou (2011) went further in this regard by offering a conceptual approach rather than a definition to explore understandings of quality of work in HEIs in general, and quality of teaching and learning in particular, by different stakeholders, including teachers. Accordingly, he considers the concept of quality an "ideological" construct that lies at the heart of the "discourses" that educators undertake (Filippakou, 2011).

Taking the prospective and retrospective definitions of quality assurance system into account and the means of engaging with the performative and critical discussions or understandings of this system, the quality assurance and quality enhancement are in harmony with performativity or the retrospective perception of quality. This is evident in the basics of quality assurance systems that mainly depend on measuring the performance of HEIs and the teaching quality in terms of meeting the pre-set standards. However, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence supports the prospective definition of quality, both of which are pursued in order to help students in HEIs to lead wiser changes in their societies. The Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence concurs with Filippakou's (2011) perception of quality as an ideological construct that should be in teachers' hearts, guide their practices from inside, and enrich their academic freedom. Critical research deconstructs current quality assurance and quality enhancement practices and reveals the assumptions and values underpinning them. For example, Skelton (2012)

believes that the growing trend of QA and QE is connected to neo-liberalism and marketization and was brought to the education sector from the commercial sector. He argues that the emphasis on quality assurance and quality enhancement is harming the identities of teachers in HEIs, who are becoming responsible for two additional tasks other than teaching: research and administrative work. Quality assurance and quality enhancement practices are threatening the academic freedom that teachers in HEIs have always had, which has led teachers to resist these practices (Archer, 2008).

Barnett (2003) declares that quality assurance systems and practices that depend on measuring student learning tend to paralyze teachers, hinder the development of their academic culture, and discourage them from acting on their intuition. Taking this argument further, Morley (2003) considers that governments use quality assurance as a means to impose more control on HEIs and on their performance. This kind of control influences the academic freedom of teachers, which in turn impacts their teaching. Zukas & Malcolm (2002) believe that this control will adversely affect the identity of teachers as well as their values and beliefs about teaching. They are mainly concerned about novice teachers who start their teaching journey within the system of assurance and enhancement and whose teaching values and identity are developed and adapted accordingly. Archer (2008) expresses the same worries regarding the development of novice teachers' identity within performative systems of quality assurance and neoliberalism.

As quality assurance and quality enhancement are both based on setting criteria and measuring standards, some argue this does not suit the complexities of the educational enterprise. HEIs, like other educational institutions, are based on the inevitable interaction between the two chief components of educational institutions: the teacher and the student.

As a result, proponents of the psychologized conception of Teaching Excellence focus on the student-teacher relationship as a means to attain Teaching Excellence.

Student-Centred Learning as a Means to Attain Teaching Excellence

What teaching strategies do teachers employ in their classrooms? How do they think about these strategies? Do they think of any connection between the strategies they use and Teaching Excellence? Discussing Teaching Excellence makes discussing the instructional strategies employed to attain it pertinent. This was emphasized by Skelton (2005) who noted that lecturing is the main teaching strategy employed by teachers who adopt the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence while student-centred learning is the main instructional strategy employed by teachers who adopt a Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

In a similar vein, Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse (1999), Postareff, Lindblom-Ylanne & Nevgi (2007), and Light, Calkins, Luna, & Drane (2009) distinguish between two approaches of teaching and learning: the "teacher-focused" approach and the "student-focused" approach. In the teacher-focused approach, students are considered to be passive recipients of knowledge and teachers position themselves in the centre of the teaching-learning process. In this approach, students acquire a "surface approach" to learning and the focus is on knowledge reproduction. This approach corresponds to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence in which lecturing is the main instructional strategy used. Considering learners as passive receivers challenges the constructivist epistemological position, which views learners as active builders of their own knowledge.

On the other hand, in the student-focused approach, students become active players and critical thinkers in the leaning-teaching process. Critical thinking is considered an essential practice to improve teaching whereby students are taught and enabled to relate

existing and new information effectively and wisely. In the student-focused approach, students acquire a deeper understanding of the subject and are engaged in the active construction of knowledge. This approach to teaching and learning is supported by the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Baeten, Struyven, & Dochy (2013) identify three main features of student-centred learning: the active engagement of students in their learning to construct their own knowledge; the coaching role of the teacher to facilitate students' learning; and the employment of real life experiences and tasks to discuss and work on in the classroom.

"Learning is not a spectator sport … [students] must make what they learn part of themselves" (Whipple, 1987, p. 4). This statement describes the learning process as well as the objective of active learning. Active learning converts the teaching approach into a *learning- teaching* process in which students are positioned at the centre and student learning is valued more than what is taught or delivered by teachers. This means that students need to actively interact with the information: search, select, think, analyse, evaluate, and synthesize new and unique understandings of the information. Providing learners with chances to engage with the information in this way reveals the transactions that take place between the learner and the information itself, facilitated by the teacher.

Group work is one example of an active learning strategy favoured by proponents of student-centred learning. Feldner and Brent (1996) argue that group work motivates students to learn, deepens their understanding of information, reinforces the knowledge acquired, and promotes their appreciation of the subject matter. Hillyard et al. (2010) conducted a survey on the attitudes of students towards participation in group work. In this study, most student participants agreed that group work was effective in enhancing their learning. Johnson et al. (2000) consider group work a useful strategy for incorporating

active learning into large classrooms. Working within groups involves working together to achieve one definite goal, which requires members to develop "social interdependence." The role of social interdependence was investigated by Onwuegbuzie, Collins, and Jiao (2009) who conducted a research study on 26 cooperative learning groups taking a postgraduate research methodology course. During their work, they concluded that cooperative learning best occurs within groups that are driven by positive interdependence. In these kinds of groups, every member in the group supports the achievement of other members. However, in competitive groups, where members do not encourage the work and achievement of other members, negative interdependence prevails and little learning occurs. Still another kind of cooperative group exists which is the individualistic group, wherein every member works independently to achieve the pre-set goals. Cooperative learning groups enhance student learning and improve their achievement.

Snyder (2003) considers moving from traditional, passive learning to active learning pedagogic techniques to be "risky"; however, there is increasing evidence to show that the "cultural environment" in higher education institutions is ready to accept this shift. Since 1987, educators have started to appreciate the role of active learning in improving teaching and learning in higher education institutions (Whipple, 1987). The American Association for Higher Education produced seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education, the third of which is to encourage active learning. Therefore, active learning is increasingly considered a principle of good practice to improve teaching and learning.

Greeson (1988) believes that educators in higher education institutions are divided between favouring traditional lecture-based teaching and student-focused learning. He claims that in spite of the existence of many empirical studies that have revealed the effectiveness of traditional lecture-based teaching, especially when educators apply it in an

inventive and exciting way, many other new studies have proved that student- focused active learning is even more effective. On the same wave, and based on a study of 17 university faculty members, Kember and Kwan (as cited in Light et. al., 2009) concluded that faculty members should change their perception of their role from that of knowledge transmitters to that of facilitators of knowledge construction. This kind of change is called "conceptual change" and is vital for the development of teaching quality (Light et al., 2009).

In a similar way, Sacchetti, and Barnett (2009) have reported that it is significant to be conscious of the fact that learners should not be perceived as "banks" where "bankers," or educators, deposit their information. The authors add that based on this passive notion about teaching and learning, deans and directors of many colleges and universities expect educators to become skilled at the "successful traditional" teaching strategies instead of calling on educators – especially novices – to think about new, effective, and active strategies. Sacchetti & Barnett (2009) argue that this attitude towards the teaching and learning process negatively influences the learner's capability to be inventive and pioneering.

Therefore, active learning and student-centred learning in this aspect can be perceived in light of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. The Critical Understanding is also evident in the opportunities that are provided to students to think and debate various topics and social issues in order to construct new understandings and lead changes in society.

Skelton (2009) has moved beyond the instructional practices inside the classrooms in higher education to engage in a debate about Teaching Excellence which he has tackled from his own personal perspective. Skeleton (2009) claims that due to the new set of

management and evaluation processes in higher education institutions, Teaching Excellence has become an essential component that supports faculty and administrators in their development and growth as well as in achieving their goals. In his debate, Skeleton (2009) emphasizes that educators should formulate their own "teaching philosophy" that helps them cope with the ever-changing and challenging culture.

Surprisingly, although teaching work comprises 30 to 70 per cent of college or university professors' professional work, novice professors are not given any kind of preparatory courses on instruction or education to help them pursue teaching in a professional way. Moreover, neither professional developers nor faculty members themselves devote time to search for professional development programs that can provide faculty members with the basic components of effective teaching (Perry, 1992). Consequently, many educators such as Maryellen Weimer (cited in Perry, 1992), Kember and Kwan (as cited in Light et. al., 2009), and others urge higher education administrators and faculty members to position faculty professional development in the core of their concerns towards effective teaching and attaining Teaching Excellence.

Teachers Professional Development in Higher Education: A Way to Excellence

What do teachers “know” about teaching? This is a question that is highly pertinent to this study. The norm in schools in developed and some developing countries dictates that prospective teachers should take courses in education and pedagogy or even acquire teaching certificates before they proceed to teaching. These certificate programs include courses that offer them a solid grounding in teaching practices to start their profession in teaching and be competitive university professors. However, this is not always the case in higher education! In many countries, having a PhD degree in a certain discipline is enough to start teaching in a higher education institution and begin your journey towards

"professorship." However, not all PhD degree holders, such as PhD degree holders in engineering or in nursing, have taken courses in education or pedagogy, which may render their job as teachers more challenging. For this reason, and with the move towards transforming the teaching-learning process into a learning-teaching process, administrators in HEIs are increasingly concerned with providing professional development opportunities for their teachers (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Engaging in professional development activities not only improves teaching practices for teachers, but also turns them into on-going learners. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the USA has introduced a teaching certificate specifically for university professors to introduce them to diverse teaching techniques and help them improve their teaching (Grasgree, 2010). The same thing is happening in Temple University, which has introduced a teaching certificate designed specially to prepare community college professors (Moltz, 2010).

With the many changes occurring in HEIs, teachers are being challenged about various teaching–related issues including their perceptions of their overall role in the process of teaching and learning, their philosophy of teaching and their perceptions of teaching practices and teaching excellence. These perceptions may change with the change of the role of higher education institutions within particular societies and the world in general. These perceptions constitute the driving force for teachers' performance and practices. This brings into discussion the perception(s) that underpin the "best" or "excellent" teaching. Therefore, teachers in higher education are becoming increasingly in need of professional development activities or programs to support them in their teaching work.

The interest in teachers' engagement in professional development is not recent; it dates back to the year 1970 when research regarding the professional development of

teachers in higher education witnessed a considerable growth (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). However, in the last decade, professional development grew to become one of the main topics of discussion in higher education, (D'andrea & Gosling, 2001) especially the professional development of teachers. The significance of teachers' professional development has grown in alignment with the emphasis that has been put on research over teaching, which led teachers to lose interest in teaching (Healey, 2005; LaPointe, 2005), in improving their teaching, and therefore in Teaching Excellence. In the UK, accreditation processes education promoted the establishment of training courses that led to the spread of professional development activities in most of the Kingdom's higher education institutions (Brown et al., 2002). The emphasis on professional development was also concurrent with the rapid technological changes that began to impact higher education. Teachers' professional development became an important way to help teachers cope and take advantage of these technological advancements to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, Donnelly (2007) considers that professional development programs for teachers can act as "outlets" for them to share their teaching experiences along with the various challenges they face in teaching. In addition, engaging in professional development programs allows teachers to raise problems and come up with suitable solutions.

Therefore, HEIs became accountable for providing opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development activities inside or outside their institutions. However, teachers are also responsible for grasping any suitable opportunity to engage in a professional development activity that would support the attainment of Teaching Excellence. This agrees with Hutchings' (2013; p.9) premise that "good teachers must be learners." More importantly, engaging in professional development should not be only restricted to novice teachers but it should include experienced teachers as well, since the

aforementioned changes may require certain strategies to deal with them which may be new and challenging for both veteran and novice teachers. Yet, the needs of experienced teachers must be considered differently since they diverge from those of novice teachers (Huston & Weaver, 2008).

Proponents of professional development argue that the benefits of engaging in such activities do not affect teachers only, but will spread out to impact students as well as the institution as a whole (Huston & Weaver, 2008). In this regard, Bendickson & Griffi (2010) consider that "an effective faculty is essential to student success, and faculty development programs help sustain that effectiveness," (Bendickson & Griffi, 2010; p. 25). In the same regard, Kostadinovic (2007) considers that "the quality of the teaching staff is one of the main factors influencing the level of students' educational achievement." Focusing on improving the performance of teachers in higher education is expected to reflect positively on students' learning and academic achievement, one of the main products of teaching.

Teachers' professional development can take different forms and shapes. Professional development activities may be short-term, taking the form of a workshop, seminar, presentation, or conference of which the duration can range from a half-day to one week. Otherwise, professional development activities may be long-term or continuous, in the form of programs that include a series of related activities that are designed for well-defined learning outcomes.

Moreover, professional development models differ widely in their approach. Gosling (1996) has outlined five models of professional development used higher in education. In the reflective practice model, teachers engage in an on-going process of critical reflection on their performance. In the educational researcher model, teachers follow a research-led process of professional development in which they criticize their teaching methods in the

same way they would criticize scholarly work in their discipline. The professional competence model focuses on skills and competences that lecturers need to be successful. The human resources or managerial model is an institutional model that develops mechanisms through which the university can achieve its mission, such as appraisal and reward systems. Finally, the expert model relies on an "expert teacher" who can correct teaching practices among novice teachers. Gosling recognizes that each of these models is underpinned by a different understanding of the role of professional development, and each model has its respective limitations. In a similar vein, Land (2004) has come up with twelve styles or orientations of educational development: managerial or human resources management; political-strategic; entrepreneurial; romantic or ecological humanist; opportunist; researcher; professional competence; reflective practitioner; internal consultant; modeller-broker; interpretive-hermeneutic; and provocateur or discipline specific. According to Neame (2011), these twelve orientations differ based on whether they are "interventionist," in which the developer is external to the academic community, or "democratic," whereby development is pursued within the academic community.

It is crucial that professional development programs address teachers' needs and interests, relate to the subject matter they are teaching, and match their intellectual or cognitive capability (Corcoran, 1995; Little, 1993). According to the Professional and Organizational Development Network, which manages teachers' development in higher education institutions in the USA, in order for teachers' professional development programs to be effective, they must consider three key issues: the teacher's instructions or practices, the teacher's scholarliness and professionalism, and the teacher's personality (Cruz, 2013). The first key issue entails analysing data collected from students' evaluations of instruction that are conducted at the end of courses and using such data to improve the practices of

teachers. The second key issue focuses on the way teachers update their knowledge, improve their practices, and share their expertise with their colleagues inside and outside their institutions. Finally, the third key issue focuses on the total wellbeing of the teachers at all levels, including the psychological, physical, and social (Cruz, 2013).

The change that has taken place since the last decade towards cooperative and active types of learning has necessitated the monitoring of faculty performance and their quality of teaching (DeRijdta, Tiquetb, Dochyb, & Devolderc, 2006). Bouwma-Gearhart (2012) considers that the dominant form of teachers' professional development has always been evaluative and focused on meeting their pre-determined learning outcomes. However, little concern has been devoted towards exploring the perceptions of teachers of professional development and its effect on their teaching (Bouwma-Gearhart, 2012). Since improving teaching in any educational enterprise is linked to student achievement, faculty and staff developers' main focus is always oriented toward improving student learning rather than faculty performance. This attitude still persists in the dominance of teacher-focused approaches in higher education institutions (Postareff et al., 2007). Consequently, for better student achievement, deans and academic directors prefer changing faculty members rather than working on their professional development and improving their performance (Foster, 1998). Lately, however, active learning, which situates students at the centre of the learning-teaching process, has activated the need for improving teaching in higher education. As a result, various professional development programs were designed to improve educators' teaching skills and their instructional practices inside their classrooms. This has shown a strong correlation with improved student learning outcomes (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004).

Nature and Role of Higher Education Institutions:

Teaching Work vs. Research Work

Higher education is facing lots of challenges all over the world. These challenges are mainly due to the changes exerted by the two 21st century giant factors: globalization & technologization. These factors had impacted greatly the various sectors such as communication and economic sectors during the past decades and they are impacting the higher education sector as well. Early on, there has always been fierce competition among HEIs in the world; nowadays, this competition is becoming tenser especially in regards to attracting competitive students, or to granting and conducting research. However, in the near future, it is expected that this competition will become more ferocious as the concept, nature, role and purpose of higher education are under pressure and are subject to change due to many reasons including the increase in the number of HEIs in the world, the increase in the various means that courses are offered within or outside the walls of universities, and the diversification in the market demands.

HEIs have always aimed to produce able graduates through the knowledge and skills that are assumed to be shared with them through various means. In this regard, Nixon (2007) argues that the knowledge and skills that are encompassed in the learning that takes place in HEIs and are supposed to be shared or communicated should be moral-based to guarantee the production of "intermediate" generation who are able to make subtle decisions and lead wise changes; thus manifesting the perception of excellence. According to Nixon (2007), Policy makers and stakeholders are entitled to support the HEIs to maintain the public trust and aspire to excellence through facing the various challenges on top of which the massification and the diversification in the universities sector and market

demand. In Nixon point of view, this kind of support is highly significant as universities are the chief resource of "good society".

Although higher education is one of the oldest organizations in the world, however, due to the changing environment within which HEIs function, it is still challenging to come out with a universal or unified idea about universities (Courtney, 2013). Accordingly, the idea, the concept, and the role of HEIs have changed over time (Taylor, 1999). At the very beginning and since they were established, universities were perceived as a physical setting where students are directly engaged with teachers in classrooms which have always considered to be the lively stage of teachers. However, this definition has subjected to change especially lately when technology has drastically advanced to allow distance and online learning to occur.

Since the establishment of the very first university in the world, The University of Qarawiyyin in Morroco by Fatima Al-Fihri in 841 CE, higher education institutions were intended to be a center of intellect to introduce the objective "knowledge" to students (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatima_al-Fihri). In this regard, Newman (1852) declared that originally the primary role of higher education was to offer teaching through which knowledge, values, and culture are transformed. This is directly related to the significance of providing high quality teaching and therefore, Teaching Excellence. Since that date and in alignment with the changes occurring at different levels in the world, educators had actively participated in suggesting or adding new roles to higher education to take. These roles vary in nature and in implementation in regard to how these educators understand higher education (Barnett, 1990) in accordance to the changes that are taking place and how they think HEIs need to respond. "Teaching to transform knowledge" is not any more the only or the primary role of higher education. Other roles are being increasingly added to

higher education, the most significant of which is research. Research was added to constitute another major function of universities (Schills, 1992, Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999) and the importance of research started to grow rapidly and intensively until it is favored over teaching.

Therefore, universities are perceived to serve two major functions: teaching and research, each of which is central to the assumed or pre-defined purpose or nature of universities. Accordingly, universities became categorized as either teaching- intensive or research- intensive universities. For Mousley (1992), in research intensive universities students need to be engaged in the research that their teachers are doing. Engaging students in research has many benefits, including improving their skills in research, and helping them construct their own understanding of knowledge, and actively construct their learning goals which concurs with the epistemological position of the constructivists.

Moreover, research constitutes the most important criterion that determines the rank of universities and shape their reputation, whereby the research studies that are being conducted in a certain university on yearly basis at both quantity and quality levels are the first to be considered (Harrison, 2002; Mayson & Schapper, 2012). Furthermore, the promotion of teachers and their tenure in universities became linked to the quality and quantity of research studies conducted by teachers every year. The elevating interest in research diverted the attention of HEIs' stakeholders from teaching, which has always been the chief role of HEIs, to research. This diversion from teaching would adversely influence the quality of teaching provided in HEIs, as teachers would think more of the means that would lead to their promotion than thinking of their teaching. This is also evident in the scarcity of research studies that address the issue of improving teaching in HEIs or those

that address the best teaching strategies employed in HEIs in Lebanon, the context of study (Osta, 2012; Ghaith, 2011).

Foster (1998) emphasized the worry of teachers or even their anger about the existing conflict in colleges and universities between teaching and research. He claims that legislators or universities' deans tend to favor research work over teaching work in almost all aspects. Favoring research is highly related to the funds that research brings to anyone university whereby these funds are considered as another major source of income next to students' tuition (Frazer, 2006 & Marginson, 2007). Moreover, Mayson and Schapper (2012) emphasized the tight relationship that exists between teaching and research whereby they appreciate research-led teaching. Atkinson (2001) announces a new transition or transformation in HEIs in the USA from a system, Carnegie Classification which was widespread since 1971 and which classifies HEIs based on research activities to a new Carnegie Classification system that includes teaching and services in the classification. Accordingly, teachers call for a high need to award equal value for teaching work in comparison to research work. More importantly, they suggest that people who are responsible for teachers' professional development should take into account the issue of teaching awards, promotion, and recognition. This suggestion was supported by teachers in Atlantic Canada who highlighted the necessity of giving teaching work in higher education equal value to that of research and recommended rewarding and supporting all teachers, especially those who excel in teaching (Foster, 1998); therefore, Teaching Excellence.

In the same regard, Johnston in the year 1997 in her article "Academics Hard at Work: The Place of Teaching and Professional Development Related to Teaching" focused on the troubled relationship that exists between teaching work and research work in higher education institutions. The author referred to this troublesome situation to the pressure that

is exerted on teachers by the overestimation of research work in opposition to teaching work. This explicit favoring of research work over teaching reaches a limit that any success achieved by any higher education institution is referred to good-quality research work alone; thus ignoring the significance and impact of teaching work and its effect on students' achievement.

Eventually, research informs teaching and teaching research skills improves the quality of research. So, why don't we call for excellence in both: teaching and research? This is exactly what the Vice Chancellor of a University in Australia called for and which he called the "Twin Peaks". In this University Mayson & Schapper (2012) analysed the research-led teaching policy through their involvement in a project in the years 2005-2006 in universities to explore the perceptions of senior academic managers of this policy. Therefore, it is significant to emphasize the role of research but it is of equal importance, if not more, to emphasize the role of teaching in enhancing research. However, this is not the case of most HEIs which are mostly concerned of increasing the research studies conducted in their institutions at both the quality and quantity levels. These HEIs encourage research and favor it over teaching (Boyer, 1990; Knapper & Rogers, 1994; Martin & Ramsden, 2000; Smith, 1991; Mayson & Schapper, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2011) to an extent that they relate teachers' promotion to the number and quality of research studies they conduct (Gray, 1999) and teachers tend to buy-out teaching to be able to engage in research (Smith & Smith, 2011). This may refrain teachers from thinking of their teaching, of the means to improve it and therefore from thinking of attaining Teaching Excellence.

Nevertheless, research is not the only other role that higher education is deemed to take. Gradually, new functions were being added to higher education to accommodate the rapid change that is occurring at different levels in the society and in the world at large. In

1997, Brown and Atkins suggested a new role of higher education namely significant administration, while Grant, Hackney, and Edgar (2010) consider that higher education is even taking a new role namely “income stream generation”.

Recently, with Globalization and technologization, higher education faced and continues to face transition phases. The first phase is the digitization which is manifested by the rapid advancement of technology, while the second phase is the phenomenon of globalization. Both phases had great impact on the whole world the least and most obvious of which is transforming the huge globe into a small village in which people can communicate easily and instantly.

Therefore, the most important challenging changes are exerted by globalization and technologization which had greatly impacted and are still impacting both developing and the developed countries. These impacts have resulted in change in the needs of these societies at the economic, labour, and even cultural levels. To face globalization and its consequences, people first need not only to satisfy or accept the phenomenon of globalization, but also to manage this phenomenon in order to maintain the identities and specifications of anyone society or culture especially small ones (Yang, 2003) and HEIs are the first and best place to start with.

The upper managements and the stakeholders of most universities are mostly interested to meet the needs of the labour market in the first place; thus performativity. This renders higher education to act as a “servant” to the labour market. Accordingly, and due to the changes that resulted from the effect of globalization and technologization, we find that meeting the current needs of the labour market, the qualifications of new employees that the labour market is now seeking, have changed a lot and still more variances are expected in the near future. These anticipated variances are a result of the changing nature and

content of the labour market; the change that is leading to the need of new employees with "new" qualifications. These new employees are mainly coming from higher education institutions.

However, if we limit the role of higher education to only one or two objectives like serving the labour market or just introducing objective knowledge, we will transform higher education to a bird with no wings; thus skinning off higher education and its institutions from their crucial role. This role is manifested in preparing individuals for a wiser future, for quality life; life in all its aspects and with all its challenges and changes that occur at different levels. HEIs are entitled to provide students a learning environment that maximizes and invests in students' abilities: intellect, feelings, intuition, memory, envisioning, asking, reflecting and so much more. This environment can best be facilitated by higher education teachers in higher education institutions through Teaching Excellence.

At this point two significant issues are to be considered: the first issue is related to the nature, role, management and means of development of HEIs in order to cope with the inevitable changes, while the second issue is related to the teachers in HEIs themselves who are primarily concerned in the preparation process of the future generations. It is crucial to note at this point, that teaching and learning are occurring anywhere, anytime, and in any form whether within the physical context of the classroom or online; it still needs to be moderated or facilitated or even led by teachers. These teachers, within the rapid changing world, are preferred to have excellent research skills that allow them to continuously update their knowledge, improve their practices and overall experience of teaching to attain excellence. Therefore, even within the great advancement of technology which may abolish the concrete or physical walls of HEIs, these changes will neither be able to abolish the role

of the teachers who could be inside or outside the walls of the classrooms nor eradicate the need that teaching is expected or needs to be done in excellent way.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The literature reviewed on Teaching Excellence and the means that lead to it revealed a deficit of research studies and their findings in relation to the perceptions of teachers in HEIs about Teaching Excellence, and the means that lead to it. While there has been considerable attention given to HEIs in Lebanon and their curricula, no studies have been conducted on teaching or on Teaching Excellence (Osta, 2012; Gaith, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers of Teaching Excellence in public and private HEIs in Lebanon.

This study presents a detailed description of the methodology that establishes this research study. This study will present an exploration of the Understanding/s that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon- the context of this study- have in light of the theoretical framework that guides this study. This theoretical framework suggests that the perceptions of teachers in HEIs of Teaching Excellence belong to one of the following understandings: Traditional, Psychologized, Performative and Critical.

This chapter discusses the research design and methods of data collection and analysis. A description of the various research stages and their implementation is presented in detail. This chapter starts with explanation of the ontology and epistemology of teaching and Teaching Excellence. This part is followed by detailed parts about qualitative research, triangulation, sampling procedure, semi-structured interview, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter ends with a brief note on the limitations of the study and ethical

considerations.

Ontology and Epistemology

My perception of teaching, learning and Teaching Excellence is informed by my general ontology of the world, which is influenced by Searle's (1995) views of 'Social Reality'. This ontology differentiates between the existence of "brute" physical facts and mental facts, and physical reality and social reality. For Searle, a physical fact, which constitutes the solid ground of the mental fact, becomes a social fact when it gains an attitude from one individual or multiple individuals, or when it is given an interpretation that may differ from one individual to another (Searle, 1995). Teaching, according to Searle, comprises physical as well as social reality. Teaching exhibits a relationship between physical and social reality. The physical reality is manifested in all teaching aids used like visual aids, power points, videos, posters, technological tools, and others constitute the physical objects, whereas teaching activities like cooperative learning, working in groups, lecturing, and discussions constitute the cognitive acts or states in virtue of which physical objects get particular kinds of functions. Teaching itself or the act of teaching which is manifested in the relationship between the teacher and students comprises the functions themselves. Classrooms, lecture halls, or laboratories and the HEIs constitute the context in which teaching or the cognitive acts or states are effective. Accordingly, physical reality should precede the social reality and social reality is constructed when a physical fact which is directed towards something and has an intention is given an interpretation within a related context. Therefore, or simply stated, lecturing or discussions or any other kind of instruction while using any existing or available teaching aid and taking place within a specific context like classroom constitute a physical fact, while the unique understanding that each learner constructs constitutes a social reality.

To describe Teaching Excellence in light of this ontology to the world, we need first to describe teaching and all the activities or tools through which teaching is manifested and thus constitute the physical foundation of Teaching Excellence as a social fact. In light of this ontology to the world, teaching and Teaching Excellence can be considered as social facts that are recognized by individuals and groups of people like the students, faculty members, administrators, parents, and stakeholders. Teaching Excellence is perceived differently by people, and it is the main intention of teaching whereby all the teaching activities that take place inside or outside the classrooms within the context of the institutions of higher education are "moves" towards Teaching Excellence that ensures better learning. As Searle's view of social reality assumes that people can have different interpretations of a certain concept, this ontology concurs with the epistemology of "The Constructivist Theory" or what Crotty (2003) calls in his book: The foundation of Social Reality: Meaning and Perspective in the Research, The Constructionism. This epistemology assumes that individuals- students- construct their own and unique understanding of knowledge based on their prior knowledge and experiences. Constructionism is the epistemology that qualitative researchers appeal to (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, and based on the basic assumption of the Constructivists, learners actively construct their own understanding rather than passively receive it which justifies the effectiveness of employing student-centred learning as the main approach in HEIs. Likewise, faculty members, program directors, deans, and policy makers in HEIs will tend to construct different understandings of Teaching Excellence based on their previous knowledge, prior experiences, values, and beliefs in addition to the prevailing societal, environmental and cultural traditions.

Qualitative Research

One of the aims of educational research is intended to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all educational institutions including higher education ones. Conducting research is the most effective method to acquire reliable information about the ways of improving teaching and learning. Research is inquiry that leads to learning. “By research we mean an enquiry that seeks to make known something about a field of practice or activity which is currently unknown to the researcher” (Brown and Dowling 1998: 7). Inquiry is an attempt by the learner or inquirer to find an answer to a question or a solution to a problem. Inquiry is not restricted to the hard Sciences; it applies to education as well whereby it is referred to a social inquiry as education is considered as a Social Science. Inquiry is needed in education in order to help educators in general and teachers in particular to relate related theories to their practice. Accordingly, two basic elements must be considered: the question that is going to be answered by the research and the way to answer this question. Consequently, the most important issue at this point would be the research approach that the researcher selects to best fit the research question and most appropriate to answer it (Robson, 1993).

There are two main research approaches: the qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative is associated with deductive reasoning while Qualitative is associated with inductive reasoning (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008).

Quantitative research aims at finding the truth, the absolute truth through quantitative methods. Results and findings are presented in numbers to reflect an objective reality and truth. Quantitative research explains relationships between variables and is intended to generalize the factual and objective findings which are assumed to be valid. Quantitative research tests a theory based on deduction. In positivist research, the

researcher is supposed to be at a distance from the studied phenomenon during data gathering.

As a form of social inquiry, qualitative research focuses on how individuals perceive the experiences they live in the world. Qualitative research encompasses a variety of approaches that serves to understand the social reality of people: individuals, groups or whole cultures (Atkinson et al., 2001).

Qualitative research belongs to the interpretivist camp and is underpinned by what Merriam (2009) calls Constructionism, whereby participants construct their own reality through their interaction with the world around them and researchers interpret the findings through their own lens. Suter (2012) explains that the philosophical framework that leads qualitative research is related to the participants' experiences and how differently these experiences are perceived or constructed by each participant. Accordingly, unlike quantitative research in which reality is objectively constructed, in qualitative research reality is socially constructed. This social construction of reality is called constructivism that is related to interpretivism whereby participants express and interpret their perceptions of their life experiences from their own point of view (Suter, 2012).

Qualitative research helps the researcher understand the way people interpret a certain experience they live or the way they understand it (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research refers to "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of thing" (Berg 2001, p. 3) which may vary from one person to another. For that reason, "there is almost no consistency across writers in how [the philosophical] aspect of qualitative research is discussed" (Merriam 2009, p. 8). Moreover, qualitative research tends to be described as "flexible" rather than "sequential" and inductive more than deductive (Maxwell, 2013). Inductive, by going from the particular to the general;

from the micro-level to the macro-level, like exploring the perceptions of teachers of Teaching Excellence, at the micro-level, and communicating these perceptions with policy makers and administrators, at the macro-level. The qualitative design is not intended for generalization and does not chart trends or patterns (Mason, 1996).

For that reason, researchers tend to use qualitative research to explore the perceptions, behaviours, life experiences, feelings, life changes and challenges lived by people and their influence on their lives. Qualitative research entails that researchers describe, explore and explain the different life experiences lived by people through interpreting the meaning in the collected data.

As an example of qualitative research situated in the social sciences, this study is basically interpretive since it seeks to understand the perceptions of teachers of Teaching Excellence within the context of HEIs in Lebanon. Schrurink (1998, p. 241) describes the qualitative paradigm as an "antipositivistic, interpretative approach, idiographic, thus holistic in nature, and the main aim is to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life."

Although, the number of participants in qualitative research is not usually as large as compared to the size of the sample in quantitative research, nevertheless, the depth in which the experience or the phenomenon under study is dealt with give the findings and results sufficient rigor. This is important especially that qualitative research is not intended for generalization on the one hand and this rigor helps researchers to understand more the studied experience or phenomenon (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Moreover, unlike quantitative studies which commonly fall under a hypothetical-deductive approach, qualitative research studies fall under an inductive approach whereby no theories are forced on the collected data, but guided by a theoretical framework which

encompass the data and makes meaning to it (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative methodologies offer in-depth explanation of a specific phenomenon or concept, program, or practice. Qualitative research methodology employs different methods like grounded theory, ethnography, documentary analysis, in-depth interviews and participant observations.

Qualitative research is based on inductive and constructive processes that is intended to provide a "thick description" (Punch 1998) of the understanding/s that the teachers in HEIs in Lebanon have about Teaching Excellence. This research was chiefly concerned to explore the meaning/s that teachers in HEIs have of excellence in teaching or more precisely to explore the way they think about Teaching Excellence. Exploring such meanings or perceptions is most appropriate through qualitative research using qualitative methods. Based on that, semi-structured interviews was chosen to be the tool used to explore the understanding of Teaching Excellence that the teachers in HEIs in the context of this study have, which allows the researcher to be at a close level of proximity with the interviewees and hear their voice from a close distance. This factor, was emphasized by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) who believe that "If you want to understand the way people think about their world and how their definitions are formed, you need to get close to them, to hear them talk" (1998, p.32).

The significance of exploring the understanding/s of teaching excellence as an essential factor in teaching, aligns with the constructionist epistemology in the way explained by Crotty (1998, p. 42): "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context." This places emphasis on the meaning of reality in reference to the meaning

attached to teaching related activities.

In light of that, this research study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach as it aims at exploring the way teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of excellence and how they construct their own understanding of Teaching Excellence through their interaction with the world of teaching and learning. This world encompasses interacting with all teaching-related factors including but not limited to the taught subject matter, students, teaching activities, and even the physical setting of the classroom. In these terms, the research will explore the way teachers in HEIs in Lebanon perceive and interpret their own teaching experience from their point of view, and accordingly the way they perceive Teaching Excellence through their own teaching experience. Considering the perceptions of teachers at the micro-level explains how inductively this research study will deal with the data which is collected at the particular level to be communicated to the policy makers at the general level. Moreover, the theoretical framework, Skelton's four Understandings of Teaching Excellence, that guides this research study constitutes a solid reference in terms of which the data will be interpreted, and thus helps in responding to the basic assumption of the study. This exploration entails interpreting the "spoken words" in relation to excellence and teaching in an attempt to understand how different teachers in different universities with different circumstances perceive Teaching Excellence. Therefore, the qualitative interpretive approach is the best suitable approach to answer the main research question of this study through answering the various sub-questions that led the formulation of the interviews protocol.

In response to the questions included in the interview questions, which were developed in strict alignment with the research questions to best answer them, the participant teachers were asked about the way they think about Teaching Excellence, its

attributes, characteristics of excellent teachers and other related aspects. In response to the interview questions, such as “what does the term Teaching Excellence mean to you?”, “what are the characteristics that you think teachers should have to lead to Teaching Excellence?” and “what do you think are the actions that you must do to lead to Teaching Excellence?

At this point, it is significant to discuss the drivers behind the participant teachers’ responses. The participant teachers’ responses might reflect either their actual practices in their educational context on and off stage, or express the way they think about how “excellent” practices should be. In this light, Dunkin (1995), Farrell & Lim (2005), and Pratt (1992) posit that teachers act the way they think and teachers’ practices are influenced by their values. This means that teachers’ work or practices reflect the values, beliefs and theories they adopt and accordingly guide their work. Therefore, these values are reflected or expressed in the teachers’ actual practices, and the actual practices of the teachers are influenced by their values, beliefs as well as the theories that teachers claim guide their practices.

However, this may contradict with Argyris and Schon (1974) who claim that people’s beliefs and values that they claim their professional practices and behavior are guided by are different from the beliefs and values implied by their actual practices and strategies at work. Therefore, Argyris and Schon (1974) came out with two types of theories: “espoused theories” which represent the beliefs and values that people think their practices are influenced by and “theories in use” which represent the theories that are implied by the teachers’ behaviour at work.

This may highlight the importance in differentiating between these two types of theories. The theories that the participant teachers think or claim that their work is guided

by, and the theories that are expressed in their actual practices. To examine the "espoused theories" that the participant teachers claim they adopt, the participant teachers were asked questions regarding their teaching philosophy that includes the values and theories that underpin the actions and practices of the participant teachers. To examine the theories in use, the participant teachers were asked questions regarding their actual practices on and off stage. Therefore, the examination of both types of theories were further examined through the differentiation between the teaching philosophy that shapes the teaching of participant teachers and the respective examples they gave for their actual practices in teaching. This exercise tends to support the interpretation of results in regard to exploring the Understandings of Teaching Excellence that participant teachers have.

This study embraces five higher education institutions that are officially recognized as "universities" by MEHE: four private universities and one public university all of which fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education (www.wes.org/ewenr/00jan/practical.htm). These universities are: The American University of Beirut (AUB), The American Lebanese University (LAU), Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), The Beirut Arab University (BAU), and The Lebanese University (LU), the only public university in Lebanon. Throughout the study, these universities will be identified by the three- letter abbreviations that are written next to the name of the university above. These universities were selected because they vary in origin and identity whereby the AUB and the LAU adopt the American system and foreign, the BAU follows the Egyptian system and foreign, the USJ follows the French system and Foreign, and finally the LU follows the Lebanese system and the only national university in Lebanon. This was discussed in details in Chapter Two "The Context of the Study."

Trustworthiness

As truth or reality is not the objective of a researcher using qualitative research, many qualitative researchers favour a qualitative research study based on its validity and reliability aspects (Johnson, 1997). The perspectives regarding applying the validity and reliability concepts for qualitative research range from considering these two aspects as completely not relevant to qualitative research, and therefore, should not be considered as basic components of qualitative research, to perspectives that consider validating qualitative research as essential since it adds value and credibility to the research (Lincoln & Guba ,1985).

As qualitative researchers always face challenges to clarify the trustworthiness of their research studies, Guba (1981) posits four criteria that qualitative researchers should consider in order to ensure trustworthiness of their research studies. These criteria include the internal validity where credibility of the research is addressed, and external validity whereby transferability or generalizability of the research is addressed. Most importantly and to encourage qualitative researchers to ensure the validity of their research studies, Guba (1981) provides specific means that qualitative researchers can use in order to ensure maintaining the related proposed criteria. In this light, the researcher was keen to consider both the internal and external validity of this research study through meeting the criteria proposed by Guba (1981).

Internal Validity

Internal validity is one of the concerns that qualitative researchers need to consider to ensure that their research study is appropriately measuring the intended research questions. To ensure the credibility of a qualitative research study, Guba (1981) proposes

multiple means that the researcher can adopt to ensure credibility among which the researcher of this research study has implemented four.

The first means that was implemented in this research study to ensure credibility is using an instrument to collect data that was used in a comparable research study (Guba, 1981). In this research study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, the tool that was used by a research study conducted earlier by Skelton (2004) about a similar topic. Using semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher of this research study to implement iterative questioning whereby the researcher picks a question included in the interview protocol or poses a probing question based on the response of the participant teacher either to clarify a point mentioned by the participant teacher, or that needs further explanation, or may contradict with an information mentioned earlier during the course of the interview. Nevertheless, while using iterative questioning, the researcher made sure that all participant teachers were asked all the questions included in the protocol but maybe in a different order. Therefore, iterative questioning was another means suggested by Guba to ensure credibility which the researcher used, while the third suggested means was to give the participant teachers the ultimate freedom to accept or refuse to participate in the study, and give them the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time. In light of this, all participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research study and were assured that there are no right or wrong answers for the interview questions. This is considered as a *tactic,* as suggested by Guba (1981), that relieves the participant teachers and helps them to open up and freely share all their thoughts about the topic under discussion. The fourth means that was employed in this research study to promote credibility was the thick descriptions provided in the Findings chapter of this research

study. The detailed descriptions and quotes that were provided are crucial in conveying the real situation and helped in promoting the truthfulness of the overall findings.

External Validity

External validity is related to generalization which is not an intended objective of qualitative research studies for two basic reasons. The first is related to the non-random sample of qualitative research studies and the second is related to the original interest of the qualitative researcher to find particular findings rather than general ones (Johnson, 1997). Still, Guba (1981) suggests that generalizability can be considered by qualitative researcher through identifying six different means among which the researcher of this research study was able to employ four. First, the researcher selected twenty-five participant teachers who differ in age, gender, discipline, years of experience, assuming teaching positions only, or teachers who are teaching and occupying administrative positions at the same time. These participant teachers are selected from five different HEIs which differ in identity, pattern and origin as explained in detail in the Context of the Study Chapter of this research study. Also, the researcher collected the data of this research study over an extended period of time that lasted for about two years. Third, the researcher employed in-depth semi structured interviews with all participant teachers which each lasted for around 60 minutes a fact declared by the researcher at the beginning of every interview session.

Triangulation

Triangulation entails the utilization of a certain method in order to validate another method. Triangulation is meant to enhance confidence to the results and findings of research. Webb et al. (1966) was one of the early references of triangulation who suggested that “Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most

persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes" (p. 3).

Triangulation can take different forms. Denzin (1970) provided four forms of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation refers to using more than one sampling strategy to collect data, investigator triangulation refers to employing more than one researcher to gather and interpret data, theory triangulation refers to interpreting data by taking more than one theoretical position, and methodological triangulation refers to using more than one method to collect data. Patton (2002) added one more form of triangulation which is called environmental data which refers to collecting data in different settings, different times and places, when these two factors may have an influence on the collected data.

In this research study, none of the different triangulation forms mentioned above was used. However, a pilot study was conducted at a smaller scale whereby the sample of this pilot study included five teachers from three universities following two different patterns: The American and Egyptian pattern.

Why Pilot Study?

By definition, a pilot study is a small-scale study of a small sample that aims at examining the effectiveness of the methods and tools designed to collect and analyse the data for the original study (Jariath et al., 2000; Prescott and Soeken, 1989; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Accordingly, this pilot study was conducted on small number of participants to investigate the feasibility of the main study, confirm the workability of the original planned methods intended for the major study, and enhance the credibility of the main qualitative study (Padgett, 2008).

According to the results obtained in this pilot study, the researcher was able to think

and apply specific changes or modifications (Padgett, 2008) to the research protocol or schedule especially the interview questions.

More importantly, in this pilot study the researcher used the same instruments for data collection which is the in depth semi-structured interviews and same means of data analysis which is the qualitative interpretive approach. This pilot study was intended to test these methodology- related elements. The researcher transcribed all of the five interviews, analysed and interpreted the data in light of the theoretical framework that guides this study. Therefore, this pilot study helped the researcher to validate the results obtained from the collected data.

Accordingly, this pilot study helped the researcher to review the questions in the interview protocol or schedule and made the necessary changes in a way to get more comprehensive details from the participants about their perceptions of Teaching Excellence from their position as teachers. More importantly, in the pilot study the researcher became more confident about the usage of semi-structured interviews as a research instrument for this research study. Moreover, the pilot study that was conducted as a preliminary study during which the researcher collected preliminary data enabled the researcher to estimate or predict the challenges at the logistical level that the researcher needed to consider in regard to taking appointments with the participant teachers due to the remote residential status of the researcher living in a country different from the context of the study.

In addition, the results obtained in this pilot study convinced the researcher to proceed with the research questions of the major research study; this was mainly emphasized through the consistency of the results that were obtained in both the pilot and the major research studies. This enabled the researcher to incorporate the data that was collected in the pilot study in the data that was collected in the major study.

Particularly, this pilot study improved the interviewing and listening skills of the researcher, and emphasized the suitability of the duration of the interview in a way not to exceed sixty minutes. In addition, after this pilot study, the researcher avoided asking certain direct probing questions such as asking the participant teachers a direct question about the existence of quality assurance systems in their respective Universities, whereby answers for this question were obtained indirectly and spontaneously through a question about the opportunities or actions that the institution provide or take to lead to Teaching Excellence. Moreover, this pilot study helped the researcher in data analysis especially in regard to categories selection. In the pilot study, the categories were somehow abstract "at the student level, and at the teacher level". This categorisation was revealed to be abstract to a certain extent; for this reason, in the major research study, the data was categorised under the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence, the thing that gave more sense to the data and thus paved the way to its interpretation in terms of these Understandings which constitute the theoretical frame work that guides this study.

Sampling Procedure

Purposeful or purposive sampling is the typical sampling procedure that is followed in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that works effectively with interviews whereby the researcher chooses participants because of specific characteristics (Creswell, 2012) that render them more eligible to answer the research questions of this research study (Patton, 2002).

This research employed a purposeful maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2012) This research employed a purposeful maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2012) whereby the participants were intended to be selected based on being teachers in HEIs in Lebanon and in a way to be credibly representative in terms of sex, age, years of

experience, specialization, and teaching in different disciplines or programs. As the sample of participants of this research study was purposive, the sample of universities was purposive as well. The HEIs were also selected purposively following the maximum variation sample of HEIs. The Universities included in the sample were first chosen based on being approved by MEHE, being public or private, follow different patterns and having different identities. Therefore, the sample which encompasses the participants and the Universities selected for this research study is representative for HEIs in Lebanon. It is worth mentioning here that the selected participants were interviewed and the collected data was transcribed and analysed in stages. In the first stage, five participants were contacted and interviewed. The interviews were transcribed, and analysed. At this stage, this group of participants constituted a pilot study based on which the questions in the interview protocol were revised and modified to help the research study accomplish its intended purpose especially with it being the first in the context of this study. After this stage another group of participants were interviewed, collected data was transcribed and analysed. This was repeated for four times until the researcher was confident that new data was not adding new information or new understanding to the research questions, or until reaching what is known as theoretical saturation (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

The selected sample has its own limitations as well as strengths of representativeness. The sample's strengths are derived from being selected from the biggest or major HEIs in Lebanon which follow the different existing patterns and adopt the various present identities. Moreover, the maximum variation feature of the selected sample enhances its representation of the teachers in HEIs in Lebanon, whereby the participant teachers were selected to teach in different disciplines, have various years of experience, have different teaching workloads per week, teach only or assume administrative position in

addition to teaching, belong to different age groups, and of both genders. Accordingly, the participant teachers were selected from five different HEIs in Lebanon based on the pre-identified criteria mentioned above. In addition, the researcher made sure to invite or communicate with teachers for the interviews from different departments with different characteristics rather than inviting teachers of similar characteristics to ensure collecting a wide range of data from participants of different characteristics to enhance the representativeness of the sample.

This kind of sampling is most suitable for a qualitative kind of study because this sample can enhance the exploration of a complete scope of the investigated topic (Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008; Creswell, 2012), help learn more about the concept of Teaching Excellence and give voice to silenced people who have never been interviewed or asked about their perceptions of Teaching Excellence (Creswell, 2012). The perceptions of teachers were collected from five different universities; four private and one public, whereby the selected universities adopt different academic system. Therefore, twenty-five teachers were selected from the only public university and four private HEIs in Lebanon which adopt four different systems or patterns: The Lebanese system, the American, the French, and the Egyptian system.

Therefore, the researcher will approach “The Lebanese University” the public university which adopts Lebanese system, “The American University of Beirut” and “ The Lebanese American University” both of which adopt American system, “The Université Saint-Joseph” which adopts a French system, and “Beirut Arab University” which adopts the Egyptian system and is undergoing a transition phase towards the American system in terms of the credit hours offered. Because the American system is more prevalent in Lebanon, as the HEIs which adopt the American system outnumber the HEIs that adopt

other systems, the researcher decided to select two universities that adopt this system and consequently, the number of teachers who were interviewed from the universities which follow the American system was more than the number of participants interviewed from the other universities which adopt other systems. Moreover, the American system in Lebanon was the oldest in the country as indicated earlier in the context of this study and the Universities which were chosen date back to 1866 and 1924. Therefore, twenty-five teachers were interviewed in Lebanon from five universities each adopting one of the four systems mentioned above.

The main limitation of the selected sample in this research study, is that it did not include teachers from the large number of newly established HEIs in Lebanon. These HEIs were established after the civil war (1989) and attracted a considerable number of students to their classes. Accordingly, a future study is recommended to listen to the voice and explore the perceptions of Teaching Excellence of these teachers who share the same context with their colleagues in the selected HEIs. Another sampling related limitation is related to the number of the participant teachers of this study. Nevertheless, this research study which adopts a qualitative research design is not intended for generalization,

To contact the participants, the researcher contacted the administration of the selected HEIs and informed them about the nature of the project. Then, the researcher sent the information sheet of the study to the administration of the selected universities which included all related and needed information about the study. At a later stage and after getting the permission accompanied by getting emails of a large group of teachers in each university, the researcher sent emails to a number of teachers in each HEI based on the requirements of a purposive and maximum variation sample. Positive responses were received and the researcher selected four to six participant teachers from each institution

from different disciplines, different gender, different age, and having different teaching experiences. The researcher made sure to provide explicit explanation of the intent of the research study and took an appointment with each teacher for conducting the interviews. The interviews took place in two different ways: on-site whereby the researcher met the interviewee in their offices in the institutions they teach in, and online via SKYPE through video calls. The researcher had to utilize the latter method in communicating with six interviewees due to her residential status; the researcher does not currently live in the context of study, but she lives in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010) are among the educators who approve the effectiveness and efficiency of conducting interviews through SKYPE or any other online means.

Data Collection

This study employed in depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews with teachers to explore their perceptions of the issues addressed in the research questions in relation to the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

Employing semi-structured interviews is one of the most common sources of data collection in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). The qualitative methodology is effective as it gives the researcher the opportunity to hear teachers' perceptions in their own words (Lichtman, 2006). The open structure is intended to allow the discovery of unpredicted facts or attitudes (Jarratt, 1996; Yin, 1989). In this research, an interpretive epistemological stance was adopted in an attempt by the researcher to explore how each teacher perceives and interprets TE. Moreover, as a Lebanese citizen and being a former student in higher education institution in Lebanon, the researcher is quite familiar with the various features of the higher education system in the context of this study. This provided the researcher with an easy access to both private and public HEIs there.

The questions included in the semi- structured interviews, the instruments that were used to collect data from the participant teachers, focused on areas that are designed to answer the research questions of the research study guided by the four understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005). The first area focused on teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence and the characteristics that excellent teachers should have, and the second area focused on the means that teachers think can be employed to achieve Teaching Excellence. The third area inquired about the challenges that teachers face in their teaching, student empowerment, and the relationship between the higher education institutions and the labour market. A sample of the open-ended questions of the interviews is to follow in the Research Question section of this chapter.

Semi-structured interviews involve in-depth open-ended questions that provide the researcher with data that is qualitative in nature and allow free expression of perceptions of the respondents about Teaching Excellence. One-on-one semi-structured interviews give the participants an opportunity to speak up, express their thoughts, and communicate their ideas freely (Creswell, 2012). The semi-structured interviews have clear, well- defined objectives and allow some flexibility in wording and sequencing of questions. Semi-structured interviews are effective in qualitative research as they give the researcher an opportunity to hear the teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence explicitly -each at a time- and in their own words (Lichtman, 2006; Wildy, &Wallace, 1998). This interview format involved asking a series of structured or pre-planned questions followed by probes of more open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information from the respondents, to get a clearer picture on certain points and focus on issues that the researcher deems to be significant. The questions that made up the interviews focused around the topics included in the research questions. Probing during semi-structured

interviews helped the researcher to seek better understanding of the perceptions of teachers in the various HEIs in Lebanon that vary in origin, pattern and identity. Therefore, offering some structure gives the researcher the opportunity to obtain standard data from the different participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). The questions included in the interviews tackled different aspects of Teaching Excellence like teaching philosophy, improving the quality of teaching, challenges faced by teachers, workload, professional development, and academic freedom.

The interviews included questions that were open and flexible such as "What does the term Teaching Excellence mean to you?" and other questions that were more focused such as "What are the characteristics of excellent teachers?" Each participant was interviewed using a protocol or interview schedule that addressed the meaning of Teaching Excellence, the characteristics of excellent teachers, and means to attain Teaching Excellence.

The majority of the interviews took place in the workplace of each participant teacher and were conducted by the same interviewer who is the researcher. Interviews were planned to take around sixty minutes to allow the interviewees to express their perceptions freely and comprehensively. During the interviews, and after informing the interviewees about the purpose of the study, the researcher made sure to connect with the interviewees by giving them the opportunity to talk about their real experiences in teaching in HEIs. A Grand Tour Question about the respondents' educational background and their various professional development activities constituted an effective entry for the pre-planned topics that the researcher asked about in the interview (Litchman, 2006). Data from the semi-structured interviews were compared to identify common themes which were in turn compared with and linked to the literature to check for relevance. To be able to catch every

single word that the interviewees mentioned in their responses, interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and typed in word document.

Table 2

The Profile of the Twenty-five Participant Teachers in the Research Study from Different Private HEIs and from the Only Public University in Lebanon

Teacher	University Pattern	Department	Years of Experience	Date Conducted	Workload per Semester	Gender
Phill	American-Foreign	Education	13 years	02/05/2013 (Face-to-face)	3 credit hours teaching in Fall and 6 credit hours in Spring	M
Jonathen	American-Foreign	Physics	6 years	06/05/2013 (Face-to-face)	3 credit hours teaching in Fall and 6 credit hours in Spring *[1]administrat-ive work)	M
Randy	American-Foreign	Biology	22 years	09/05/2013 (Face-to-face)	6-9 hours/week	M
Sandra	American-Foreign	Psychology	8 years	20/04/2015 (Via Skype)	6-9 hours/week	F
Kris	American-Foreign	Engineering/ Architecture	8 years	13/07/2013 (Face-to-face)	20-24 hours per week	M
Tamara	American-Foreign	Math	12 years	16/03/2015 (Face-to-face)	6 credit hours per week	F

					(has *[2]administrat-ive work)	
Moren	American-Foreign	Sociology	16 years	16/03/2015 (Face-to -face)	18 credit hours per week	F
Lana	American-Foreign	Graphic Design	8 years	15/04/2015 (Via Skype)	20-24 credit hours per week	F
Frank	American-Foreign	Education	30 years	02/05/2013 (face-to -face)	3 credit hours teaching (*Administrative work)	M
Beth	American-Foreign	Education	20 years	06/05/2013 (face-to -face)	6 credit hours teaching (*has administrative work	F
Koreena	American-Foreign	Graphic Design	7 years	09/05/2013 (face-to -face)	9 -12 hours/week (*has administrative work	F
Fred	American-Foreign	Psychology	17 years	20/05/2013 (Via Skype)	9 -12 hours/week	M
Nejm	Egyptian-Foreign	Medicine	6 years	7/04/2015 (Via Skype)	6 credit hours (has *[3]administra-tive work)	M
Nabhan	Egyptian-Foreign	Engineering	5 years	3/04/2015 (Via Skype)	18 credit hours	M
Karman	Egyptian-Foreign	chemistry	13 years	16/3/2015 (Face-to -face)	18 credit hours	F
Nilo	Egyptian-Foreign	Physiology	10 years	17/03/2015 (Face-to -face)	18 credit hours	F
Jakie	Egyptian-Foreign	Engineering/ Architecture	8 years	13/07/2013 (Face-to -face)	20-24 hours/week	F

Albert	Lebanese	French Literature	20 years	18/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	12 credit hours	M
Tom	Lebanese	Arabic Language	18 years	18/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	12 credit hours	M
Sema	Lebanese	English Literature	5 years	19/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	12 credit hours *[4]administr at-ive work)	F
Tony	Lebanese	English Literature	11 years	19/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	12 credit hours	M
Mari	French	Nutrition	3 years	19/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	18 credit hours	F
Rene	French	Business Administration	4 years	20/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	18 credit hours	F
Divina	French	Agriculture	7 years	20/03/2015 (Face-to - face)	18 credit hours	F
Nina	French	Education	22 years	22/04/2015 Via Skype	18 credit hours (She is a teacher trainer)	F

*1 Jonathan: is a teacher and a Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences in the University
*2 Tamara: is a teacher and a director of the Institutional research and assessment in the University
*3 Nejm: is a teacher and Dean of the Medical School in the University
*4 Sema: is a teacher and Head of English Literature Department in the University
*Administrative position in the Center of Teaching and Learning

Research Questions

In accordance with the title of this research study: Understanding Teaching

Excellence in HEIs in an Arab Country: The case of Lebanon, the main question that guides this study is:

How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon understand Teaching Excellence?

To answer this question, the following sub-questions, need to be answered:

1) What do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think best lead to Teaching Excellence?
3) What are the characteristics that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to attain Teaching Excellence?
   - What do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think about the significance of meeting the labour market demands?
   - What do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think about the significance of professional development programmes?
   - What are the challenges that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think hinder the attainment of Teaching Excellence?

The researcher asked the participant teachers additional questions and probing sub-questions in relation to the labour market demands and means significance of meeting these demands. These questions and sub-questions were answered through the below interview schedule by obtaining answers and responses from the twenty-five participant teachers in the selected five universities in the context of this study to the following questions:

Interview Questions

1. Grand tour Questions
   a. Subject matter taught
   b. Years of experience

c. Teaching hours per week

d. Other responsibilities other than teaching, if any?

e. Average size of the classes you teach

2. What is your teaching philosophy? What theory mainly shapes your teaching philosophy?
3. What characteristics do you think excellent teachers should have?
   a. What are the actions that you personally take to meet students' needs?
   b. How do you describe the relationship between you and your student?
4. What do you think are the actions/strategies that you must do to lead to Teaching Excellence?
5. What are the opportunities that your institution provides that you think will lead to Teaching Excellence?
6. What does the term Teaching Excellence mean to you?
   a. Is the term "teaching excellence" emphasized or used in your institution?
7. Why do you think it is important to seek excellence in teaching?
8. What are the main challenges that you face in your teaching?
9. What are the factors that influence the promotion of teachers in any University?
   a. Explain how promotion takes place at the University?
   b. How far do you think your workload affects the quality of your teaching?
   c. Do you consider the promotion procedure fair?
   d. Suggest some indicators to be used to measure teaching?
10. How far do you give the students the opportunities to discuss sensitive societal or political issues?
11. How necessary do you think is to satisfy the labour market demands?

a. In what ways do you think the disciplines/majors in your institutions satisfy the labour market?

b. In what ways do you think your own teaching satisfies the labour market?

c. Explain how your institution attends to the need of the market to a certain major?

Additional questions related to professional development:

1. Describe the professional development program in your institution?
2. Do you have a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in your institution?
3. Does your university offer any kind of awards to appraise teachers' performance? Please explain

Data Analysis

The main tool for collecting data was in depth semi-structured interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted face to face in the offices of the teachers in the selected universities. Nevertheless, and due to the specificity of the residence of the researcher, whereby she is living outside the context of the study, Lebanon, few interviews were conducted through SKYPE. Accordingly, nineteen interviews were conducted face to face in the offices of the participant teachers and six interviews were conducted via Skype. Using the SKYPE (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010) enabled the researcher to see the interviewees and observe all related gestures. The audio-recorded interviews were completely transcribed verbatim (change from Voice files to Word files). Audio files were saved on the researcher's personal laptop, which is secured with a password to ensure confidentiality, and were analysed at a later stage.

To maintain credibility, the interviewees were given the opportunity to check and agree on the transcription before analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, the transcriptions of their interviews were sent to

them to check and agree on their content before being used for analysis. Validity was ensured by choosing appropriate means to collect the perceptions of the participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) through in-depth one-on-one interviews. Although the selected sample of twenty-five teachers is small, yet as any qualitative study, this research study is not intended for generalization. However, providing detailed information about the context of the study and its findings may be helpful in evaluating its fittingness and applicability in other HEIs in Lebanon as well as other HEI in the Arab context.

The basic method of qualitative interpretive data analysis was adopted in analysing the data collected for this study. Interpretive data analysis was conducted in a systematic way that starts with the formation of codes, followed by the formation of categories, and ending with finding themes. Although the participant teachers' responses for the same interview question differ at the level of words or statement used, they do relate or match at the level of the concept which enabled the researcher to form the codes.

The first step started with a thorough and conscious reading of the transcripts focusing on every single word and using coloured highlights for the commonalities in the responses. This gave the researcher a good opportunity to analyse data by open coding. Codes were then categorized around abstract concepts and conceptualized according to the similarities among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This step in data analysis was followed by reducing the data whereby the responses were reduced to codes, then these codes were grouped into categories of the same meaning which were treated in a way to eliminate repetition (Hycner's, 1985; Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro, 1988; Wertz, 1983). This quality of reading of the transcripts enabled the researcher not only to form the relevant codes but also to form the categories which constituted the second step in data analysis (Grbich, 2007). Then these categories were filtered in light of the research questions of this

research study (Yin, 2009). This facilitated the move to the third and final step in data analysis which is the formation of themes.

To detail the process of data analysis, coding is the first and most critical part for data analysis. To obtain these codes, the data in the interview transcripts were reduced into small pieces of information that share the same meaning. First, the data obtained from each semi-structured interview was transcribed carefully to ensure the inclusion of all information mentioned by the participant teachers. During the interviews the researcher made sure to take notes to help in the points of emphasis of the interviews. Then the researcher compared the notes with the transcriptions' data to ensure the inclusion of all information that was mentioned in the interviews. Then the researcher underwent another round of reading of the transcripts of the interviews while listening to the interviews to eliminate the possibility of losing data.

At this point, the coding started where there was open opportunity for the emergence of new ideas and opinions. Then, all obtained codes were compared to group the ones having the same meaning and evade redundancy. Finally, the grouped codes were given relevant names in relation to the research questions of this study thus forming the categories, and the grouped categories were given names called themes in relation to the theoretical framework that guides this study. The table below shows an extract of responses to one interview question posed to three participant teachers. The table included three codes that were grouped to produce an overarching concept which at a later stage constituted a sub-category: Communicating the Message to the students.

Table 3

An Extract of Responses to One Interview Question Posed to Three Participant Teachers

Q1) **From your experience in teaching in HEIs, what do you think are the characteristics of excellent teachers?** **Code: Transform the subject matter** **Teacher 1:** There are many dimensions actually, like, if you want, the first dimension, is the quality of the preparation. the second dimension is the ability to transform the subject matter into something that the students understand, you know that, you know when you are a PhD, probably, your knowledge base is much higher than what students know, and therefore the challenge is how you transform what you know into something the students can understand. **Code: Deliver the information** **Teacher 2:** Ah, well okay, the first thing, the ability to, to be able to deliver the information to the students. In a way where they can sustain it for a long time, in their minds. I mean, not just give them the information and they forget it after a week. Ah, but to be able to deliver the material and sufficient material that they will keep in their mind for a long time. Ah, to be able to, even in Biology, I stress a lot that, to allow them to think about, problems, in whatever field you are teaching, be it Biology, be it Sociology, maybe Math or Physics. **Code: Convey the message** **Teacher 3:** The way I, I look at it an excellent teacher is one who is, is, who not only has the knowledge. But the knowledge, the material, this is, this is necessary, but it is not sufficient. You also need to know how, to explain the material. To people who are novel to this, this, from whom this material is novel of course. So, ah, ah, excellence in teaching means several things including, knowledge of the task at hand, and the content area, and, knowledge of how to deliver, to others, how to convey the message to others, and how to teach in a way that, a, a, I mean, you don't want to, to spoon feed, but you don't want to leave 90% of the test for the students, so it's knowing how to balance things really, for the student, so that they become, independent learners, and, ah, ah, still be, guided sufficiently, and, and this is not as easy as it sounds, it requires some, some, some trials and errors, to figure out how to balance it.

This theoretical frame work is proposed by Skelton (2005) and suggests that the teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence in higher education fall under one of the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence: Traditional, Psychologized, Performative, and Critical. Analysing and interpreting data in light of these four understandings helped in reducing the data on the one hand and helped in forming the needed categories.

Ethical Issues

This research study was ethically approved by the School of Education in The University of Sheffield. The ethical approval was based on reassuring the reviewers about several issues which are considered by BERA (2011) as the ethical guidelines for educational research. The researcher ensures to treat the participants with dignity and respect at all levels such as ethnicity or race. Also, the researcher ensured that there are no risks from their participation; however, she made it clear to them at the beginning of the interviews that she will inform them about any kind of risk once it emerges at any moment. The researcher ensured the voluntary nature of participation by asking the participants to sign a consent form which included clear description of the purpose or the intended use of the study and their ability to withdraw at any time. The researcher also informed the participants about the duration of the interview, and that the interviews will be tape recorded. The researcher ensured privacy and confidentiality for the participants by ensuring anonymity and storing the information obtained from the participants in a safe place which is not accessible except by the researcher herself. The researcher either called or emailed the teachers who accepted to participate in the research to take appointments. Confidentiality was ensured by concealing the names of the institutions and the teachers themselves.

Limitation of the Research Design

This methodology was subject to limitation. The first limitation is the small size of the sample (twenty-five teachers) which is due to the issue that there is one researcher who is going to do the study with in a limited time utilizing in depth methods. Because the findings may be limited in their representation to teachers in HEIs in Lebanon, this point is addressed clearly in stating the findings. The second limitation is the fact that

the sample did not include teachers from the "new" universities or colleges that were established after the end of the Lebanese civil war and accordingly none of the participants were selected from these HEIs. This is again mainly because there was only one researcher working on the research study within a specific time limit. This is explained in more detail in the Sampling Procedure section of this research study.

Chapter 5: Findings of the Research Study

A study for understanding the perceptions of teachers in HEIs of Teaching Excellence is intended to help in offering considerable understanding of the teachers' practices inside or outside the classroom. The study will also shed a light on the various tools or means that either exist or are needed to lead to Teaching Excellence in HEIs in Lebanon. Consequently, the researcher will emphasize all the perceptions that teachers have, as well as the various means that they use in the different HEIs in Lebanon, of different patterns, private and public, that help in attaining Teaching Excellence.

The purpose of this research study is to explore how teachers in HEIs in Lebanon perceive Teaching Excellence and identify the nature, the characteristics, and the practices that signify, indicate, or lead to Teaching Excellence through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. This exploration will be done in terms of four Understandings of Teaching Excellence that have been identified in order to compare or relate participant teachers' perceptions and practices to. The researcher's interest in exploring teachers' perceptions comes from her experience as a teacher in HEIs who must bear a special perception of Teaching Excellence which blends two of the existing understandings.

The research questions that this study is trying to answer are typical to qualitative research studies as they are exploratory and open-ended to help in exploring how teachers think of Teaching Excellence in higher education institutions in Lebanon, something which has never been explored before. The research questions of this study are:

1) How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think can best lead to Teaching Excellence?
3) What are the characteristics that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to lead to Teaching Excellence?

This research study opts for a qualitative interpretive approach whereby the meaning of Teaching Excellence, as it is perceived and understood by the participants, was explored and interpreted from their spoken words. The instrument used is in-depth, semi-structured interviews that included a set of open-ended questions supported by related probing questions that were used for the purpose of obtaining comprehensive responses from the participant teachers. The main questions that were posed to the participant interviewees were about their perceptions of Teaching Excellence, their perceptions of the characteristics of excellent teachers and their perceptions of the means that lead to Teaching Excellence. Following the interviews, the teachers' responses were coded, analysed and categorized according to the four understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005).

This chapter focuses on analysing, interpreting, and synthesizing the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon of Teaching Excellence. The findings of this research study will be presented in two stages. First, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews will be presented and the responses of the participants categorized according to the four

understandings of Teaching Excellence that constitute the theoretical framework of this study. Second, the data will be interpreted in light of the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. The interpretation is intended to be open enough to allow for the emergence of any understandings that do not belong to the four understandings proposed by Skelton.

The perceptions of teachers in HEIs inform their practices and guide their activities (Dunkin, 1995; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Pratt, 1992). The participant interviewees were asked about what they think of Teaching Excellence, of the characteristics of excellent teachers and of the means that lead to Teaching Excellence. The collected data from the twenty five in-depth semi-structured interviews were first coded, then analysed, and lastly organized around analytic categories according to the research questions and then by themes guided by the theoretical framework of this study.

Interestingly, all of the responses that were received from the interviewees for most of the questions were actually in the form of a description of the practices that teachers either actually do, which reflect their "theories in use", or they think they should do, which reflect their "espoused theories". In this way, they expressed the meaning of Teaching Excellence or indicated the means that they think lead to Teaching Excellence from their own perspectives. Accordingly, the researcher noticed that "students" featured in the core of all the responses in the different aspects considered by the teachers. Therefore, the various responses that the participant teachers described were coded and related codes that were first identified based on revealed patterns in the participants' responses, were then grouped under overarching sub-categories and which were allocated under the respective four Understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005):

1. The Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence

a. Being Highly Knowledgeable in the Taught Subject Matter

2. The Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence

a. Communicating the message to the students

b. Engaging the students

c. Meeting the students' needs and interests

d. Developing the teachers professionally

e. Characteristics of excellent teachers

3. The Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence

a. Meeting the labour market demands

4. The Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence

a. Building critical minds

The Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence

Being Highly Knowledgeable in the Taught Subject Matter

One of the main features of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence is an emphasis on the teacher's expert knowledge. Thus, Teaching Excellence is about being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter (Horan, 1991; Kane et al., 2004; Servage, 2009) and this attribute is one of the chief characteristics of excellent teachers (Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Hartung, 1972). When *excellence* in teaching is the question, being *highl*y knowledgeable about the subject matter is the answer. Being highly knowledgeable about the subject matter taught indicates that teachers need to *know* about the subject matter from different perspectives. Knowledge about the subject matter is the solid ground on which all other features or attributes of Teaching Excellence depend. This entails that teachers be continuous learners who always make sure to update their

knowledge about their subject matter through different means such as conducting research studies or participating in professional development activities.

The significance of being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter was a consensus among all the participant teachers who not only consider it as an attribute or a feature of Teaching Excellence but a necessary condition without which teachers cannot pursue teaching. For Phill "it is not enough to be knowledgeable in the content of the subject matter; rather, excellent teachers are highly knowledgeable." As Phill goes on to explain, "being highly knowledgeable in the subject matter is the starting point that offers the solid ground to teaching." Kris agrees with Phill as he explains that "to have extensive information about the topics we teach is a basic issue," while Nejm divulges that "to be an expert in the topic is what teachers need first." Also, Tom states that teachers "must first be highly knowledgeable in the courses they teach before they assume teaching" and Kris proclaims that "it's all about the knowledge…the right knowledge being conveyed by the teacher and acquired by the students." From her perspective, Nina clarifies that "holistic information about the taught subject is not only a need but it is essential to start with." Mari confirms the necessity of having a thorough knowledge of the subject matter as she holds that "knowledge is the starting point towards Teaching Excellence." Being highly knowledgeable about the subject matter or being an expert have almost the same connotation or meaning: to have knowledge about the subject in depth and breadth. From her side, Moren agrees with the other participant teachers as she states, "without high knowledge about the courses, students will not learn effectively." Therefore, being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter seems to be an attribute of Teaching Excellence that the participant teachers overemphasize.

The responses of the participant teachers reveal that they are highly aware of the

significance of having knowledge about the subject matter that they teach, both in terms of quality and quantity. The idea of quality generally refers to how thorough their knowledge must be and how they can build appropriate connections within the discussed knowledge and with other related information that the students have. The idea of quantity refers to the knowledge that the teacher needs to have about the content knowledge from different perspectives or what other educators and researchers say about the taught or discussed topic. Therefore, solid knowledge about the subject matter being taught is a starting point and an essential requirement not only for Teaching Excellence, but also for teaching itself.

For these teachers, being highly knowledgeable about the subject matter is what distinguishes excellent teachers. This is emphasized by the participant teacher Sandra who relates knowledge about the subject matter to characteristics of excellent teachers. In this regard, Sandra claims that "comprehensive knowledge in the subject matter is not sufficient, but it is necessary in order to describe teachers as excellent." Divina highlights the significance of having comprehensive content knowledge; for this reason, she shares that "I am pursuing my PhD studies to intensify the information I have about the courses I teach and to feel more confident in front of my students." In the same regard, Karman communicates that "knowledge is very much needed and this can best be provided by PhD holders like us." Furthermore, Rene admits that "learning by the students or even the best teaching and learning requires the best of knowledge." In this aspect, the participant teachers relate being highly knowledgeable about the subject matter to the characteristics of excellent teachers; this means that the journey towards being described as excellent teachers starts from the base knowledge that teachers need to have. This points to the relevance of professional development programmes that teachers need to be consistently engaged in in order to strengthen their information about the subject matter they teach.

Added to that is the research that the teachers also need to conduct on their own to study issues that are more specific to the topic they teach within their context. Moreover, the relationship between pursuing studies to earn the highest degree in the field and Teaching Excellence may support the idea of considering Teaching Excellence as personal or private (Kraft, 2000; Lefrancois, 1997). This can be explained in terms of the confidence that having the highest degree would give to the teachers, which in turn would have a positive effect on their teaching.

Lana believes that having base knowledge and conveying it to the students is an attribute of Teaching Excellence. To support this belief, Lana aims to "focus first on knowledge building. Students need to build their knowledge base, since without such a base they cannot reach deep understanding. Only through such a base can they relate new information and make sense of it; that is meaningful learning." Deep understanding of the taught subject matter or the topic being discussed happens when teachers enable students to connect the newly communicated information with the related information that they already possess (Gale, 2007; Northedge, 2003). This was conveyed by the participant teacher Nilo who shares that "having broad information [about the taught subject] enables teachers to help students build correct connections between the information they have and the new information." Randy adds that "the knowledge that teachers have about the subject matter is transferred to the students who will use it to think and solve problems." Being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter enables the teacher and students to think about the topic in hand from different perspectives. This divergent thinking facilitates the creation of critical thinkers (Northedge, 2003) which in turn can be enhanced through teaching strategies such as asking questions.

Consequently, it is evident from the responses of the participant teachers that having

solid base knowledge about the taught subject matter is not restricted to the teachers. However, this needs to be transformed in order to be transferred to the students. Transformation of knowledge entails providing the students with the opportunity to be active players in their learning process. This active engagement takes us to the multiple teaching strategies that teachers need to master and implement in their classes to avoid the traditional teaching strategy that makes students passive receivers of knowledge. In this aspect, the perceptions of the teachers diverge somewhat from the Traditional Understanding: although they emphasize being knowledgeable in the subject matter, they showed disdain for traditional teaching strategies and highlighted the need to use strategies that effectively engage students,

Asking pertinent questions or engaging in debates about a certain topic is a strategy that is followed by several participant teachers, including Sandra who proclaims that she encourages "discussions that are content-based so that students have to come to the class prepared to discuss the material and ask questions about it….asking questions tells me a lot about their understanding of the topic and about their way of thinking… yet this needs a lot of preparation from my side about the topic." Her colleague Jonathen also emphasizes the importance of asking questions, as he declares from his position as a teacher and Dean of the department in which he teaches, that "encouraging students to ask questions enables them to get clues about what to do in certain tasks, especially in practical ones like lab classes, and helps the instructor to get clues about the performance of the students and their level of understanding." Nina recognizes that "when teachers are experts in the taught topic, they can ask questions to the students and answer the students' questions fluently…. this gives more confidence to teachers in their teaching and to the students in their learning." For Phill, "asking questions makes the lecture-based sessions more interactive…

however, this requires a skill and requires broad knowledge about the subject matter." For Tom, "the content knowledge is the third component that makes up educational institutions after the students and the teachers…. this knowledge needs to be comprehensive and up to date… even if the instructor needs to change his notes every year." The participant teachers were able to recommend "questioning" as an interactive teaching strategy that can help students build their knowledge. This entails that teachers be up-to date in their knowledge of the subject matter as well as experiences of the related teaching practices.

The Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence

Communicating the Message to the Students

According to the participant teachers in this study, Teaching Excellence is about coming to class well prepared to communicate or convey the intended knowledge to all students despite the various individual differences that exist among them to meet their needs, interests and learning styles. This entails not only being knowledgeable about the subject matter being taught, but more importantly it entails being able to convey the message to the students while respecting the individual differences that exist in any given class (Horan, 1991; Servage, 2009). The value that the participant teachers gave to the significance of the teachers' ability to convey the message to their students, while emphasizing the importance of addressing students' needs and learning styles, situates the participant teachers' perceptions within the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. One of the main attributes of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, as explained by Skelton (2005), is to meet students' various needs and interests based on their different learning styles and individual differences. Doing so entails that

teachers come well prepared to their classes while carrying in their teaching pocket dozens of strategies that they are ready to employ according to the students' needs.

Teaching Excellence, as perceived by the interviewees, involves the nature and quality of practices that teachers carry out in different ways, whether on stage or off stage, to *"communicate"* or convey the intended knowledge to the students. Communicating knowledge may include the various strategies that could be followed by the teacher based on the adopted theoretical perspective or the learning theory that support the strategy. Communicating knowledge in this sense includes the various teaching strategies: "student-centred learning" strategies as well as teacher-centred teaching strategies. Communicating or conveying knowledge in this sense signifies the ways or the means that are being used by the teacher to convey or share the intended knowledge with their students.

This perception was reflected by the participant teachers' belief that excellent teachers are teachers who are able to convey the message of the subject matter content to the students. Accordingly, for Sandra, the excellent teacher is the teacher who is able "to convey the message effectively…especially the message that includes novel information to the students." The emphasis on considering the 'novel information' was also a concern for Rene, who explains that to be excellent, teachers should be able to "teach the students how to connect new information with other existing, related information." In this respect, Albert adds that excellent teachers are the ones who "are able to share their thoughts and the thoughts of educators with their students and keep this information for later use." For the participant teacher Tom, the excellent teacher "should at least have the newest techniques, newest teaching strategies, and always update his technological skills." In this regard, the participant teacher Sema indicates that "teaching is the art of communicating knowledge."

Communicating the message to the students effectively entails that the teacher "be knowledgeable in the subject taught", as Beth declares, and is related to the quality of teachers' preparation for teaching. This goes with Horan (1991) who considers that along with teachers' expert knowledge of the subject matter they teach, the way teachers convey this knowledge is essential for providing high quality teaching. The quality of preparation is revealed in terms of the way a teacher in HEI is "[able] to transform the subject matter into something that the students understand using various teaching strategies", as the participant teacher Frank states. Frank adds that quality preparation "starts from planning for teaching" which takes place off stage.

To be knowledgeable in the taught subject matter is more than essential for teaching to take place; nevertheless, what is even more important for the participant teachers is to have the talent, art and skills of communicating this knowledge to the students. Therefore, the participant teachers in the selected universities emphasized the importance of "know-how" to communicate the intended information to the students with different learning styles and divergent needs and interests. This was the first thing that the participant teacher Rene announced in relation to her perception of Teaching Excellence, stating: "it is important to be knowledgeable about the topic you teach, but what is more important is to communicate this knowledge to your students." Sema mirrors Rene's point of view as she declares that "knowledge is something important, but communicating the knowledge is something that is more important. A teacher may have the knowledge but may not be able to effectively communicate it with the students." Moreover, Sandra perceives that "although it is necessary to be knowledgeable in the subject matter, this is not sufficient at all." Sandra adds that "the teacher needs to know how to explain the material [to the students], especially the novel material, in order to produce independent learners."

In accordance with communicating the message in a way that takes into consideration students' diverse needs and interests, the participant teacher Karman calls for individualized learning. In service of this aim, Karman would like to "reduce the number of students in the sections [classes] and reduce the number of hours taught per week to give more time for the teachers to understand their students and respond to everyone." Accordingly, Karman adds that "when this happens, teachers can plan better and make sure that the information is well understood by all students." Mari agrees with Karman on the positive impact of small class sizes on teaching and learning in general and on its influence on communicating the message to the students in particular. In this light, she expresses that "planning and teaching classes which have a lower number of students than our current classes is much better because this [small class sizes] helps the teacher to explain the lesson and ensure that it is understood…you can listen to every student and answer all the questions."

Randy considers that the first feature of Teaching Excellence is to have "the ability to deliver the message to students in such a way that the information stays in their minds and does not fade after one week or right after the test…this is what usually happens and what almost all instructors complain about." Accordingly, excellent teachers are "the teachers who have the ability to deliver the information to the students so that they sustain it for a long time in their minds." Randy emphasizes the importance of teaching the students the *skills* to think by providing them with opportunities that "allow them to think about problems in any field or discipline." The participant teacher Tom supports this perception as he declares that "we need to create learners and not 'studiers'," explaining that the 'studiers' are "students who study for the grades and for the degree,", while the learners are "students who work for the knowledge itself." Creating this type of students, or

"learners" as Tom called them, is best achieved through teaching students the way of thinking. In this regard, Lana emphasizes the value of students acquiring thinking skills, declaring that "learning is equal to thinking." Tamara refers to the metacognitive level as she adds that "Teaching Excellence is closely related to making the students aware of how they think about the information in hand." By extension, excellent teachers are the ones who "facilitate learning and know how to convey this material to students in a way that they can grasp, through doing and not through memorizing."

Furthermore, as a feature of Teaching Excellence, communicating the message can most effectively be accomplished through "situated learning or apprenticeship-type learning" where students in higher education learn about their field of study "on site, under the supervision of someone who is specialized in the field, thereby acquiring both the knowledge and the skills from the right person in the right place." Situated learning is a methodology of teaching and learning that is supported by the participant teacher Phill who confesses that Teaching Excellence is "not an attractive phrase" since in his view, "Teaching Excellence means sort of very good teaching or teaching that is trying to be the best that can be; but I don't think that there is something that should be called Teaching Excellence. There is just teaching that can be better or worse." Nevertheless, from this participant teacher's perspective, "better" teaching can best be attained through apprenticeship which helps the student to maintain the communicated knowledge and the acquired skills." This is because the student would find both the intended "knowledge and the skills are like real life ones." Accordingly, he views teaching as a form of "a meaningful conversation between the teacher and students" that leads to what he calls "better teaching."

The 'know-how' to invest in technology to communicate the message is a feature of Teaching Excellence in this age of globalization. Technologization and globalization are the

two giant factors of the twenty-first century that teachers need to attend to (Brennan, 2008). This is an explicit declaration from another participant teacher, Albert, who considers that "communicating the message is increasingly becoming of greater importance in higher education." Nevertheless, the way this message is communicated should differ these days due to the major advancement in technology, or technologization. This was highlighted by Nilo, who considers that teachers need to "think of different ways to teach rather than just to lecture." Moren adds that teachers are entitled to "look for strategies to deliver information that reflect the new era we are living in." One of the primary teaching-related aspects of the new era is teaching research. Technological advancements have offered students enormous amounts of resources that they can access easily and quickly, and continue to offer them new resources every day. Consequently, Divina concludes that Teaching Excellence becomes related to the ability of the teachers to "become facilitators of knowledge and guide the students they teach in how to become researchers." From this point of view, Nina concurs with her colleague Divina's recommendation that teachers ought to teach their students "how to think of the information and how to become researchers." These responses reveal the high level of awareness that the participant teachers have about the enormous and rapid changes that are taking place in the world due to the giant factors of the twenty-first century. Most importantly, they are aware of the impact of these changes on the students' needs and interests and how the teachers can make corresponding changes in their teaching strategies to accommodate these needs and interests.

In order to effectively communicate the message to their students, teachers must engage in special and constant preparation and planning offstage (Macfarlane, 2007). Since students differ in their needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles (Arreola, 2007;

Burgess, 2000), communicating the message to the students entails that teachers need to think of their teaching and consistently reflect on it in order to ensure that they are communicating the message effectively. The significance of reflecting on one's teaching is highly emphasized by many educators such as Brookfield (1995), Palmer (1998), Ramsden (1998), Terenzini (1999) and Rogers (2001) who consider the active engagement in reflecting on one's teaching at the quality and quantity levels as the valuable time owed to actively think about teaching and the various means of improvement.

Moreover, Teaching Excellence not only involves thinking about the teaching strategies that can be used in order to communicate an idea or a topic, but it also involves thinking about the ideas themselves. This was a concern addressed by the participant teacher Koreena who, as an Art teacher, believes that the core of Teaching Excellence is to "turn ideas into visual or concrete [artifacts] that can be understood by students." Jakie went a step further whereby she thinks that Teaching Excellence starts from the ability of the teacher not only to communicate the message as it is, but also to "interpret the message." This concurs with the emphasis that Skelton (2005) made about the main features of Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence on the importance of considering students' prior knowledge in constructing their understanding of new information. This entails the presence of a certain kind of relationship between the students themselves and the information in hand to deal with. Moreover, this also is in accord with the constructivism learning theory which stresses the importance of relating to the previous knowledge that students have in order to guide them in connecting it to the new piece of information to be learned (Kember and Kwan, 2009; Ormord, 2012). This implies that the preparation for teaching that needs to take place on or off stage can be done in various ways which range from preparing and employing various teaching strategies to reach all the

students, to interpreting the intended message or information to the students, and to teach them how to think and interpret their own or others ideas or messages in the future.

Based on the responses of the participant teachers stated above, the participant teachers are aware of the significance of the work that teachers do offstage. They are aware of the significance of the planning and preparation processes that take place before the actual teaching and the reflection on teaching that takes place afterwards. Moreover, the participant teachers are aware that the planning and preparation processes should focus on the means and strategies that they can employ in their classes to meet their students' needs and interests.

Engaging the Students

Teaching Excellence involves positioning the students in the core of the learning-teaching process for the purpose of helping them to maintain the intended knowledge and apply it later in different contexts, in their own ways (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Handelsman et al, 2004; Ormord, 2008). This can be pursued by planning to engage students actively in their own learning. Engaging students in their own learning maximizes their understanding and produces life-long learners (Pekarsky, 2009; Little, Locke, Parker &Richardson, 2007). This engagement can best be enhanced by employing interactive teaching strategies as an effective replacement for lecturing, the well-known traditional teaching strategy. Communication of intended knowledge is enhanced through the employment of different teaching strategies that are based on active learning (Feldner & Brent, 1996). Engaging the students in their own learning through the utilization of interactive teaching strategies that situate the students in the centre of the learning–teaching process is an indicator of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

The participant teachers from the selected universities in Lebanon agreed that lecturing is a teaching strategy that does not result in students maintaining the delivered information. Lecturing seems to be attacked by all participants. Kris believes that "lecturing should die…..[lecturing] should not to be used anymore." Participant teacher Fred stated that lecturing is becoming a "boring" teaching strategy and indicated that he tends to use group work to avoid using "boring lectures" to express that lecturing in its passive way is not favoured anymore and is being gradually replaced with group work that entails more students' engagement. Jakie gives credence to this perspective as she also described lecturing as "boring" and she linked her perception of Teaching Excellence to "avoiding lecturing in teaching." Jakie, perceives that "Teaching Excellence is achieved through employing group work as a main teaching strategy to replace lecturing."

Therefore, the participant teachers perceive that lecturing is not a strategy that enhances the attainment of Teaching Excellence and thus it cannot be considered as an attribute of Teaching Excellence. This was brought up by the participant teacher Moren who declares that "we cannot talk about Teaching Excellence while we still see doctors [teachers] sitting on their chairs and dictating their notes to the students…who knows how often they update these notes?" For that reason, all participant teachers declared that they try to avoid using lecturing in their classes. These responses from the participant teachers reveal that although they are attacking lecturing, they are still using lecturing to some degree in their classes or at the very least they are still witnessing other teachers lecturing or favouring lecturing as a teaching method. Yet, the participant teachers' responses show that the utilization of lecturing as a teaching method is not dominant anymore and is decreasing in practice. The decision to shift from lecturing to employing multiple teaching strategies might have been made by the teachers themselves or recommended by their

respective universities' administrations, or both. In this regard, Karman shares that "we started recently, one to two years ago, to shift from lecturing to using interactive strategies to engage the students in the discussions in the class." Based on their responses, participant teachers are aware of the significance of engaging the students in their own learning in order to enhance the learning process and ensure that they are maintaining the information. Maintaining information in this sense is meant to use the knowledge in different settings in different times and in the appropriate way. This awareness is manifested in their recommendations for, or actual utilization of, interactive teaching strategies. The utilization of interactive teaching strategies that situate the students in the centre of the learning-teaching process is an aspect of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence that helps teachers to avoid

using lecturing, a strategy that belongs to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

All participant teachers recommended the employment of interactive teaching strategies, namely student-centered learning strategies. Student-centered learning strategies include all strategies that ensure the active involvement of students in their own learning, including group work, hands-on activities, group discussions, and other types of activities that render the students active players in their learning process. The use of student-centred learning strategies transforms the students from passive receivers to active players in the learning process. Student-centred learning provides teachers the opportunity to start from where their students are, whereby the teacher "starts from student's ideas and then builds on them" as Frank notes, and who in turn declares that "SCL is the main teaching strategy that I use in my classes." Frank explained that the strategy that he tends to employ in his classes depends on the utilization of a smart mix of discussion-based lectures accompanied with

tutorials which are called “lectorials.” In lectorials “teachers can first present the needed information supported or followed with hands-on and group work activities that allow the students to engage in their own learning” as Frank explains. In a similar vein, participant teachers Fred, Jakie and Koreena respectively related “engaging students in their own learning”, “interacting with students in the classroom”, and “creating interactive classroom” to Teaching Excellence.

Nejm also believes that employing student-centred learning is promising to the attainment of Teaching Excellence. For participant teacher Beth, student-centred learning is the “teaching philosophy which directs [his] work.” Beth proclaims that she is a “strong believer in student-centred classes, in terms of activities, course content, and in terms of assessment.” Nilo appreciates the effectiveness of using student-centred learning strategies in the class as she emphasizes the value of “forming small groups and allowing the students to learn from themselves, from each other and then learn from the teacher.” In support of this, Nejm considers that his university “already made their first step towards Teaching Excellence through the shift to employing student-centred learning strategies in classes.” This shift that has been made by the administrations of the selected universities shows that they are aware about the importance of changing from lecturing to student-centred strategies. This change entails a move from passive to active learning, and therefore, from the Traditional towards the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. It also shows that improving the quality of teaching provided to the students is a concern not only of all teachers, but the HEI administrations as well. Highlighting the significance of the processes that take place between the teachers and students on the one hand, and between the students and the information under discussion on the other hand, is related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

All participant teachers emphasized the importance of engaging students in their learning, although this priority is expressed at different levels and in different ways in their classes and their practices. For Lana, the utilization of different interactive teaching strategies is essential for learning. In support of this, Lana declares that it is important to "recognize the diversity in cognitive and learning styles among students…accordingly, the use of multiple teaching styles is essential for learning to occur." The actual strategies employed depend on several factors, including the class size and the teacher's workload. Regarding this last point, Divina considers that "the use of interactive teaching strategies is effective, but they require a small number of students in the class so that everyone has the chance to participate in the teaching activities." The agreement on the effectiveness of various interactive teaching strategies in class emerges in parallel with another agreement on the ineffectiveness of lecturing as a teaching strategy in class. Together with the teachers' awareness of the obstacles that might hinder the implementation of student-centered strategies in their classes, these responses reveal the seriousness of the teachers with regards to improving their teaching quality and producing better learning.

The ineffectiveness of lecturing as a teaching strategy was strongly emphasized by all participant teachers, but especially two teachers from one selected university who harshly attacked passive learning. In this regard, Albert declares that "passive teaching is harmful to the students because at the higher education level, students must have reached a level where they can research and analyse, not take the information and ruminate it during the test" while Tom states that "the passive teaching and rote learning that is taking place in our universities has made teaching and learning to fall to very low levels." Tom even adds that "passive learning based on lecturing is about to kill the curiosity instinct that children

are born with." This perception indicates the participant teachers' awareness of the use of lecturing in classes and the negative impact it has on students' learning.

From another perspective, interactive teaching strategies are perceived to help the students maintain the information communicated or conveyed in the classroom, and thus are considered as one of the basic attributes of Teaching Excellence. Sema supports the perception that the use of interactive teaching strategies is an attribute of Teaching Excellence, noting that "when students maintain the information that was delivered to them throughout their lives, here we would say that effective learning occurred and excellent teaching took place." For that reason, HEIs are putting increasingly more emphasis on the importance of employing active learning strategies in classrooms for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching at the universities. In this regard, Rene declares that "the University administration is asking us to change to active learning and increase the participation of our students in the class; so I am using case studies, article analysis, and asking students to conduct presentations in class after they research a topic." These strategies are designed to place the students at the centre of the learning process, thereby giving them the opportunity to be autonomous learners, to work collaboratively, and learn from each other.

This point of view was also supported by Sandra who declared that "we don't want to spoon-feed" the students; however, "we want to guide them sufficiently." Although providing this kind of teaching is a challenging task, especially in large-sized classes, it is necessary that teachers undergo "some trials and errors" and exert some efforts to figure out what methods best fit the students and the teaching environment as a whole. From the same university, participant teacher Randy also considers that interactivity is at the core of Teaching Excellence. In this regard, Randy added a new dimension to the interactive

strategies by including online learning, a strategy that invests in the evolving technology in teaching, as a possible way to enhance interactive learning. Accordingly, Randy states that "I base all my teaching strategies on interactivity" whereby "discussions, group discussions, and online discussions" are the main teaching strategies he utilizes in his classes in order to stay away from the "boring lectures." Randy emphasizes the significance of interactivity to the extent that he considers it as the base of his teaching philosophy. Furthermore, Tony relates Teaching Excellence to the utilization of "more than one methodology in teaching with more emphasis on cooperative learning and participatory approaches." For Tony, "Teaching Excellence means that the instructor makes students deeply involved in the process inside and outside of class."

The importance of interactivity is further accentuated by the participant teacher Jonathen, who states that he always tries to "create events that relate learning to students' real-life experiences in order to motivate students to engage in questioning and discussions with their peers and with the teacher" to come out with their own ideas and understandings about the given topic. Building students' own understanding of a topic is also a concern for another participant teacher, Phill, who devotes time to thinking of strategies that lead to "active involvement of the students" and of creative ways of presenting the content knowledge that are rooted in "Constructivism."

From another perspective, Tamara contends that Teaching Excellence is about enabling students to "transform the knowledge they receive and apply it in new situations so that when they get a novel piece of work that they have not done or seen before, they can make their way through it." This calls for involving students in "hands-on activities and work in groups to try the new learning experiences by themselves."

From another perspective still, the participant teacher Tom differentiates between two types of students. Tom claims that “some students enrol in higher education to pass their exams and earn a degree, while others enrol in higher education to learn. The students in the first group are studiers while those in the second are learners.” Accordingly, Tom recommends that teachers stop “showering our students with information every day, so that students sit in the class to receive information passively then go to ruminate what they studied for the exams.” He asserts that it is the time to “teach students the way to think in order to create learners and not studiers.” Tom adds that “teaching students how to think enables them to solve novel problems.”

Other interactive strategies were suggested and related to Teaching Excellence, such as the teacher giving examples about his or her own personal experience to help engage the students more and encourage them to talk about their own experiences as well. For Mari, Teaching Excellence is related to the utilization of various teaching strategies to make the learning experience enjoyable and create independent learners, while avoiding lecturing as much as possible. In this regard, she explains: “I try to use different teaching strategies to engage the students and make teaching interesting and exciting; I don’t like to do it the traditional way.” Moreover, Mari considers that “giving examples about [herself] promotes students’ engagement in the class discussion and awakens their curiosity to learn more.”

At this point, it can be observed from the participant teachers’ responses presented above that the participant teachers are knowledgeable about the various strategies that can be employed in class for the purpose of engaging students in their learning. In addition, the teachers are also aware of the specific impacts of these strategies on improving students’ learning. These specific impacts include enabling the students to maintain the information acquired, making learning exciting and enjoyable, motivating the students to learn for the

sake of learning and not for the sake of sitting for the test and earning grades, building students own and unique understandings, and other impacts.

The attack on lecturing is one of the clear manifestations of the waning influence of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, as described by Skelton (2005). The Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence is mainly represented by the utilization of lecturing as the sole teaching strategy in classes. This attack on lecturing at the level of the teachers and the administration has resulted in the favouring of interactive teaching strategies in general, and student-centred learning in particular, for the purpose of engaging the students in their learning and enhancing the quality of teaching. Consequently, relating Teaching Excellence to engaging students in their own learning through the usage of interactive teaching strategies is a clear reflection of the Psychologized Understanding that the teachers have about Teaching Excellence.

At this point, it is essential to emphasize the significance of academic freedom, or the autonomy of teachers in education institutions in general and in HEIs in particular, in helping teachers wisely utilize a diversity of teaching strategies to convey the message at hand. Since classrooms are full of individual differences, including varied student needs and interests, different learning styles, and even special needs, it is vital that teachers have the freedom to select and modify their teaching strategies in order to best adapt to the particular needs of their classroom.

Meeting the Needs and Interests of the Students

Teaching excellence is about meeting students' needs and interests (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Elton, 1998; Horan, 1991; Smith, 2000). Meeting students' needs and interests entails building a kind of relationship between the teachers and their students (Barr & Clark, 2012; Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Ghonji, et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2004) and can

be manifested in different ways according to the way educators perceive and establish this relationship (Skelton, 2005). Building a relationship with the students that respects their individual needs and interests on the one hand, and produces better learning on the other hand, is a basic feature of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as described by Skelton (2005).

First, meeting students' needs and interests is manifested in the exchange of feedback between teachers and students in order to improve the learning-teaching process. Meeting students' needs and interests to enhance their learning reflects the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, which restricts the learning-teaching processes between the students and their teachers. In this light, and for the purpose of enabling teachers to meet their students' needs and interests, the participant teacher Divina praises the role of feedback that the teachers receive from the students in improving the teaching and learning processes. Getting feedback from the students informs the process of reflection that teachers participate in to improve their teaching. In this aspect, Divina attests that "the reflections that we receive from the students either during the sessions, or after the sessions when students ask questions, play an important role in improving my teaching." For participant teachers Frank and Beth, responding to students' feedback and identifying their needs and working to meet these needs are practices that signify Teaching Excellence. This is explicitly indicated by Beth as well who emphasized that "I take [students'] feedback, and redesign my work based on their feedback. I do that even in exams, in midterms, in finals; I show them the format of the midterm, ., I keep it as is, ..., I modify it so that students can perform the best of their knowledge on the exams." Frank agrees with his colleague Beth on the importance of taking students' feedback to attain Teaching Excellence and considers that "the reflection on students' feedback helps teachers

to cater for the needs of their students." For participant teacher Jakie, Teaching Excellence can be perceived through advising, guiding students and putting them on track. This even turned out to be Jakie's philosophy in teaching who notes that "my philosophy, is just to put the student on track." Moreover, Teaching Excellence is perceived through the efforts that teachers make in order to make sure that they have reached all their students. These efforts are mainly revealed through "understanding the students' need and being able to reach out and explain to them so they can grasp the idea." For Fred, Teaching Excellence can best be practised through teaching the students the needed skills and enabling them to use the knowledge provided effectively. Fred claims that "I do my best to get the message across, to give my students the best information, tools, skills, [and] strategies they need."

A second aspect of meeting students' needs and interests is investing in technology to improve the learning-teaching process in class. Moreover, investing in technology, which in itself is of interest to the students, can provide teachers with the opportunity to communicate with the students on the one hand, and send and receive immediate feedback from them on the other hand. Investing in technology is highly recommended in the current period, in line with one of the giant factors of the twenty-first century: technologization. Technologization is one of the changes that have impacted the higher education sector just as it has impacted other sectors in most countries. In this respect, the participant teacher Nilo relates Teaching Excellence to the increasing use of technology in the class. She expresses her special interest in technology, encouraging teachers in her university and in other universities "to be pioneers in inviting technology into to their classes, such as by using "IPads" or students' mobiles in research or searching for articles about the discussed topics. This will make learning alive." The use of technology in teaching is increasingly attracting the attention of teachers and administrators in HEIs, since technology is proving

to have great potential for improving teaching strategies in the classroom in terms of motivating students and enhancing the learning-teaching process. Using technology as a tool to enhance better learning is also encouraged by the participant teacher Mari, who expresses that "we need to talk the language of our students, and technology is the language of this generation." Accordingly, "using audio-visuals, internet, projectors, and other related tools will attract the students' attention, trigger their thinking, and let them ask questions and obtain answers; therefore, better learning."

Third, meeting students' needs and interests is done by giving the students challenging tasks that lie in the zone of proximal development as suggested by Vygotsky (Ormord, 2012) and teaching them how to think to accomplish these tasks. This methodology is supported by the participant teacher Karman, who proclaims that teachers always need "to challenge their students in different ways; this will change the class to a stage where students are able to examine their abilities and their understanding of the topic and test their ideas or opinions." This will also increase students' participation in the class and motivate them to find answers to the given tasks. Nina adds that "this will help [teachers] to know their students and their learning styles more through their interaction with the task and with their friends."

Teaching Excellence is related to the extent to which teachers make themselves available for the students, to enable teachers to understand their students' needs and interests, even at the individual level. This is affected by many factors, the most prominent of which are the workload of the teachers, as measured by the number of credit hours they teach per week, and the number of students in the class. Through a close student-teacher relationship, teachers can receive immediate feedback from their students, which in turn helps the teachers to make the necessary modifications for their courses in general, and

their instruction in particular, for the purpose of improvement. The significance of receiving immediate feedback from students was raised by more than one participant teacher, including Nejm who states that "giving the students the floor to talk about their learning can tell you a lot about your teaching."

The importance of building or enhancing the teacher-student relationship was emphasized by the participant teachers from the selected universities in the context of the study. Tom strongly emphasized the importance of the student-teacher relationship and he considers building such a relationship as a one of the essential features of Teaching Excellence. Tom contends that "there is a spiritual and psychological relationship between the teacher and the student." He adds that "if teachers do not like the students they are teaching, it is better not to teach them as they will not be able to teach them. Also, if the students do not love the teachers who are teaching them, the students will not be able to learn from them." This kind of relationship is important to build the trust needed between the students and the teachers. In this regard, Tom states that "when the teachers prove that they are close to their students, students will trust them and believe them; so, in my opinion, this starts from a psychological relationship between the students and the teacher at not only the professional level, but also at a humanitarian level before everything, because the teacher is not a machine that explains a lesson and leaves the class." Another participant teacher, Albert, also supports this kind of relationship, recommending that "teachers should be the initiator of a close relationship with their students to build a culture of trust in the class. Then, learning can occur."

Students are always in the hearts and minds of the participant teachers. "Meeting the students' needs, their worries, and the impediments they may face in their learning" is a

concern that occupies the core of the teaching philosophy of the participant teacher Tony. According to him, this can be achieved through "the time that the teachers spend with their students whether in groups, in class, or even on individual basis." Tony considers that this is a "really challenging task especially in public universities where the class size is huge."

From another perspective, the student-teacher relationship starts from the teacher being available to the students, allowing students to approach their teachers easily and efficiently. One of the participant teachers, Sandra, supports this perspective, stating "I like to be available and approachable; for that reason, I used to have an open door policy where students can walk in into my office any time they find me there." However, Sandra adds that this policy still has its advantages and disadvantages as students can abuse a teacher's time and drain his or her energy. In this regard, she states that "this open door policy is a double edged sword." She goes on to explain that "although the open door policy makes you available to students, you still need to limit it to a specified number of hours, for example two hours a day, where students can walk in without an appointment. At the same time, you are exceeding the office hours officially specified for the course." Randy, a teacher from the same university as Sandra, agrees with her as he also considers that "an open door policy does not work effectively with all the work that a teacher has to do, whether teaching work, administrative work or research."

From another perspective, Teaching Excellence is related to meeting students' needs and interests through investing in technology to deliver the message in a way that is of interest to the students. The participant teacher Randy favours using technology in class, arguing that "sending questions to the students via WhatsApp or SMS and asking them to answer them immediately or consult their friends using the same means – WhatsApp or SMS – encourages them to actively participate in the class discussion." What is significant

about using technology in this way is that “the teacher answers the student’s questions on a one-on-one basis and receives immediate feedback from the student about his or her understanding; in this way, the teacher also gets to understand the learning style of the student and his or her ways of understanding, and memorizes their names as well.” Furthermore, the feedback that teachers receive from their students is a significant resource that they can use “to remodel their courses in a way that best suits the needs of the audience in the class.” This is one of the features that the participant teacher relates to Teaching Excellence.

The importance of receiving immediate feedback is emphasized by Tamara who mentions that building a relationship between students and teacher is necessary to verify students’ understanding on the one hand, and to improve instruction on the other hand, through the “direct and formative feedback that teachers receive from their students, whether during the assigned office hours for each course or by online means through which students can communicate directly and individually with their teachers.” For another participant teacher, Kris, Teaching Excellence is related to “understanding the culture of the school as a whole as well as understanding the culture of the students to be able to address the way they think and the way they learn.”

Excellent teachers are the teachers who are innovative in their teaching and in using available resources. This is highlighted by the participant teacher Sandra, who proclaims that excellent teachers “should be innovative in using and transforming the available resources to better convey the information, especially the practical [information].” The availability of resources, especially advanced resources, emerged as a concern of many participant teachers. Consequently, the participant teacher Randy clarifies that “teachers need to be aware of the advancement in technology which is in our hands…available

resources like using SMS and social media in teaching and learning, as long as that is of interest to the students….” In this matter, the participant teacher Jonathen communicates that “excellent teachers can explain the content [of the subject matter] by using examples from real life… the world around us is full of resources that [teachers] can make use of to make teaching more relevant’. For Tamara, being innovative or creative can even be demonstrated in the variety of “teaching methodologies that a teacher uses in the classroom to meet the students’ needs.” This perspective coincides with the participant teacher Tom who asserts that excellent teachers are those teachers who show creativity in “modifying the teaching methods to address the lazy students … the teacher who does not know how to teach lazy students is a failure.” Kris looks at the dimension of creativity in a wholly different light, explaining that excellent teachers are those who are able to “make the methodology subservient to the way information is presented and teachers’ performance as a whole…this depends on the teacher inside you and not on the scientist inside you; for that reason, not everyone can teach even if he or she has the knowledge.” Creativity is one of the twenty-first century skills that it is recommended that educators teach their students. Nevertheless, to teach creativity, teachers themselves need to be creative and innovative in their teaching. This, according to the participant teachers, can be facilitated by smart investment in the available resources in which the world around us is rich. More specifically, one of the main resources through which teachers can enhance their creativity, as well as be creative in their use of it, is technology.

From another point of view, Teaching Excellence is related to how far teachers can make the taught subject matter enjoyable and exciting for their students. This can be accomplished in different ways, one of which is by giving students challenging tasks, such as solving problems, instead of assigning them chunks of materials to memorize and

eventually forget. For Randy, teachers "can make the tasks challenging for the students and give them problems about pertinent topics to think about, then help them solve these problems in different ways; this will not only increase their interest in learning, but will also help the teacher uncover each student's potential by seeing how each student solves the given problem." The importance of giving challenging tasks to students is supported by another participant teacher, Sandra, who calls for "giving students arguments and encouraging them with the opportunity to state their opinions, and more than that, to explain or even justify why they adopted this idea or that." This would encourage the students to express their opinions, an exercise that should be respected by the teacher. This will build a kind of trust between the student and the teacher as well as establish a rapport for "learning conversation." Indeed, this is how the participant teacher Phill prefers to refer to teaching from the interactive point of view. For him, "teaching is a one-way process and it is more related to passive learning; however, I prefer to call what goes on in classroom 'learning conversation,' as this is when we can guarantee that learning is taking place and through which (learning conversation) the teacher and the student build understanding together."

The responses under this sub-category indicate that the participant teachers perceive that meeting students' needs and interests can be done in two major ways: the first way is "technical" and the other is "humane." The technical approach includes the teaching strategies that teachers can employ in their classes for the purpose of reaching all their students while addressing their individual differences and different learning styles. The humane approach includes the kind of relationship that the teachers need to establish with their students based on trust and care. Building such a relationship affects both teaching and learning. This is manifested in the two channels of feedback, both the feedback that the

students give to their teachers to inform their instruction and the feedback that the students receive from their teachers to inform their learning. This is turn is related to the availability and approachability of the teachers to their students.

Developing Teachers Professionally

Teaching excellence is about staying current with the advancement of knowledge, experiences, technology and all the changes that are taking place in the world around us (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; NCATE, 2004; Resnick, 2005). These changes primarily include the changes that have occurred due to the two giant factors, globalization and technologization, and their impact at different levels. This entails that teachers must become lifelong learners by participating in professional development activities (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2000). The impact of engaging in professional development activities will be translated into expansion in teaching strategies that the teachers can utilize in the classroom to meet their students' needs and interests, thereby allowing them to reach more students more effectively. These attempts or efforts which situate the students in the core of the teachers' work and thinking reflect the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005).

For years, teachers in higher education have been engaged in various kinds of professional development programmes. The activities in such programs vary in structure and objectives. The various kinds of professional development programmes may aim at improving teaching skills, developing faculty members' perceptions on teaching and learning, or improving the impact of such developmental programmes on student learning.

Teaching Excellence is related to the high quality of teaching that teachers can provide for their respective students. Excellent teachers are those who always update their knowledge of the subject matter and relevant experiences. In regard of this, the participant

teacher Albert considers that excellent teachers are those who keep the "subject matter content always updated," and Rene considers that excellent teachers are those who "always improve their teaching skills and skills of the topic they teach." Furthermore, the participant teacher Sema emphasizes the importance of being up to date about the newest learning theories, declaring that excellent teachers "always update their knowledge with the latest relevant learning theories" while Sandra states that "professors need to be up to date and conduct research to bring the newest into the classroom."

Engagement in professional development activities enhances teaching practices and helps teachers stay current with updates about the content of the subject being taught on the one hand, and with the advancements in skills or teaching strategies to communicate this content on the other hand. One participant teacher, Tamara, affirms that in her university, the teachers are continuously engaged in "professional development activities around investing in technology in education and about different formats of active leaning." Such kinds of activities give the teachers the opportunity "to share their experiences, share debates on social sciences topics, and share our perceptions of what the students need to learn." The professional development activities that teachers in any one university engage in can be either internal, part of an in-house professional development programme, or external, such as attending or presenting in an international conference in another country. In this respect, Sema states that "teachers are learners like their students" and Lana affirms that "to attain TE, the university should be transformed into community of learners where everyone has to continuously learn and improve their experiences." Expressing the same point of view, Nilo adds that "attending workshops or conferences that are held inside the university improves my teaching and strengthens my confidence in the class." Nina was even more specific in describing the impact of engaging in professional development

programmes on the teaching practices of teachers, asserting that “the seminars and the workshops that we attend provide us with new teaching strategies that align with the changes going on around us.”

Professional development programmes or activities are one of the essential resources for improving the quality of teaching. From the responses stated above, it is evident that the participant teachers are very much aware of the significance of engaging in professional development activities as well as its influence on the quality of their teaching. Moreover, the responses reveal that teachers’ professional development is a basic attribute of Teaching Excellence and constitutes a background for other attributes related to Teaching Excellence to function. In other words, teachers cannot be highly knowledgeable in the subject matter they teach if they do not update their knowledge consistently by engaging in various activities geared to develop teachers professionally. Further to that, teachers cannot have an effective grasp of the wide range of up-to-date teaching strategies, or be able to judge the appropriateness of these different strategies for different students’ learning styles, without engaging in professional development activities.

Higher education is one of the significant sectors that have a great impact on any given country at different levels, especially at the economic level. For this reason, internal and external efforts, at the university and national levels, need to be exerted to keep this sector current with the overwhelming changes occurring at all levels and to enable it to face the fierce competition among HEIs. These efforts must start from the teachers themselves who are tasked with the responsibility of continuously updating their knowledge about the subject matter taught and about the various teaching methods available to ensure the provision of high quality teaching for their students. This claim is supported by all participant teachers, who firmly believe that teachers need to be lifelong learners. From this

point of view, Sandra emphasizes the significance of professional development activities, such as attending or participating in seminars, workshops or conferences, stating that "attending seminars is a good learning experience and it is effective especially in providing tools or strategies to be used in teaching in classes." The participant teacher Randy, from the same selected university, agrees with his colleague about the significance of professional development activities or programmes that teachers engage in either during the academic year or during the summer holiday. According to Randy, the value of these professional development activities is manifested in "helping the teachers as researchers as well as enabling them to produce new knowledge to transmit to their students, which will definitely enhance the outcome of their learning."

In terms of specific initiatives taken by the university administrations, the participant teacher Randy admits that his university "regularly invites visitors from outside to conduct seminars or conferences inside the University for academic development, which directly impacts our practices in our classes." The participant teacher Phill explains that at his university, there is one centralized "source of professional development programs which is the Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, which invites faculty members in the University to sign up to participate by either giving or attending two-hour seminars on weekly basis." This was supported by participant teacher Frank who, from his previous position as a director of the "Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning" in the mentioned University, created what he calls "Learning Communities." These communities of learners invite teachers from different disciplines within the university to meet on regular basis to "learn from each other", as Beth noted, and to discuss teaching-related issues as well as "the challenges that they face in their teaching and the possible means to overcome it", as Frank confirms. Moreover, the Center of Excellence "established teaching awards

which are offered on a yearly basis to two teachers who really show excellence in teaching...to encourage them to really improve the quality of their teaching."

However, offering teaching awards seems not to be effective or motivating for all teachers in the University due to "the lack of clear criteria to measure high quality of teaching", as Beth declared. In addition, Beth stated that "the long or short term developmental activities that teachers engage are ineffective because they do not relate [in any mean] to the promotion criteria" set by the university. In this regard, Beth explained that the promotion "requirements at her university are related to research, community service and teaching." Unfortunately, the "research criteria are clear…but those of the community service and teaching are not." Although they are considered short-term learning, attending and participating in conferences and workshops is also a form of professional development activity through which attendees or participants update their knowledge and improve their experience in their respective fields. The improved perception of this form of professional development activities is supported by Frank who declared that the Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the University "conducts workshops to provide opportunities for faculty members to improve the quality of their teaching." However, in the other universities where the participant teachers teach, it was clear that there is no similar center. Accordingly, the engagement in professional development program or activities in these universities "is a personal decision….. [which] the university does not pay for" as Fred stated; however, the management still "encourage personal development", as Koreena from the same university declared.

Furthermore, other forms of professional development activities like attending workshops or conferences are also available at one of the selected universities whereby teachers are invited to participate in these activities either as presenters to share their

experience with other colleagues or as attendees. At the time when this kind of professional development activities is available and supported by the university, yet the University administration does not force any teacher to attend; “everything [any professional development activity] is voluntary; there is nothing mandatory. The university has no right to force anyone to attend anything” this how Frank explains the opportunities that teachers have for professional development at his University through which he considers that teachers can attain Teaching Excellence.

Nevertheless, engagement in other forms of professional development activities like participating or attending conferences is not supported by the management of the universities where the participant teachers work in spite of the importance of such programs. Accordingly, these universities do not, either fully or partially, pay the cost of any professional development activity and in turn the teachers themselves do not compete for engaging in such programs. More importantly, “the promotion criteria, [in the university] don’t have clear indicators on how teaching practices are measured” as Fred affirmed. This concurs with a concern that Beth raised, as mentioned earlier, about the lack of assessment tools to measure teaching and the absence of teaching-related criteria in the promotion policy. Furthermore, Fred confirmed that his respective university “do[es] not have anything systematic [professional development program]; but every now and then, we have training in some aspects like technology, typically, blackboard, and chair point, and [related topics].” These participant teachers declare the absence of systematic professional development programs in their respective universities that organize, facilitate, and monitor the engagement of the teachers in professional activities related to their field of studies.

Moreover, in the only public university included among the selected universities in this study, and in accordance with the responses of the participant teachers, engagement in

professional development activities does not seem to be of high concern to the teachers or for the administration. Engagement in professional development activities is revealed to be still in its infancy. This is expressed by the participant teacher Albert who explains that "teachers tend to attend workshops and meetings on a small scale with the heads of departments to deal with teaching issues and how they can improve their practices." The lack of support for professional development is affirmed by the participant teacher Tom from the same selected university, who explains that "academic development is difficult to do in our University in particular, and in the whole country in general, because those involved don't have the mentality of improvement." The lack of support from the administration of this university is confirmed by the participant teacher Tony who states in brief that the University "does not do much."

Although engagement in such professional development activities positively impacts teaching quality, this seems not to be the ultimate concern of teachers. Instead, the participant teachers show a high concern for their promotion, which seems to be more related or even dependent on their research work rather than their teaching work. This was expressed clearly by all participant teachers, who affirmed that research work is more valued than teaching work. As a result, promotion criteria are related to the quality and quantity of research studies published, with no clear cut criteria for teaching. This idea is supported by the participant teacher Jonathen, who considers that the significance of professional development is "related to teaching; it has a lot to do with research." Professional development activities geared towards research purposes are much more highly regarded by the University than the professional development programs or activities that address teaching work. In this regard, Jonathen asserts that "the University encourages faculty members to spend their summer vacation doing research because of its orientation

towards increasing the research product in the University." The participant teacher Phill supports this claim as he confirms that the "financial allowance that the University gives [the teachers] is for research work and not for teaching." This is also affirmed by the participant teacher Mari who explains that "the University now seems more likely to be asking [the teachers] to do things to achieve excellence. They are asking teachers to be involved in research, whereby 30 to 40% of teachers' time should be focused on research; so teachers are required to do research every year."

Teaching Excellence is related to having the intrinsic motive to engage in professional development activities and should be supported by university administrations, but not imposed. Whether or not to engage in professional development activities is a decision that is taken by the teachers themselves and is supported financially and logistically by the university administration. This is confirmed by the participant teacher Rene who states that the administration in her university "offers workshops about teaching and pedagogy; encourages the teachers to attend and tells the teachers that they need to attend conferences about the topic on yearly basis in order to update their knowledge and see the most recent research about the taught subject matter." The importance of attending workshops to improve one's teaching is emphasized by Mari, who explains that the University administration "always conducts workshops and ask us to attend; they call it teaching day whereby they invite significant figures in teaching or in education to give the teachers the latest strategies about teaching or about the topics in which teachers feel a need to improve." Mari adds that "I think that these sessions give me insights about something new, or in more exact words, allow us to work on certain competencies and improve them for the benefit of our students." Nabhan praises the value of engaging in professional development activities, which he considers as "highly beneficial especially for us as we did

not take teaching courses during our study." Divina adds that "the workshops or the conferences that we attend are important to acquaint us with the new teaching strategies and how they can best be used in our classes."

The responses of the participant teachers reveal the significance and impact of engagement in professional development programs on the promotion processes for teachers, or more precisely, the criteria followed in evaluating teachers for promotion. In this regard, it is evident from the responses that two main indicators appeared to be of significance in promotion: the research work and the teaching work at both the quality and quantity. Both of these types of work in turn appeared to be positively impacted by teachers' engagement in professional development activities. Moreover, a concern of the participant teachers that emerged from their responses, namely, the weight that is being put on research, takes us to the research vs. teaching dilemma that is overwhelming the higher education sector in many countries. In addition, another concern that surfaces from the responses of the participant teachers is related to funding professional development activities, which were revealed to be highly recommended but still optional for the teachers to engage in. The focus on the impact of engagement in professional development programs on improving the teachers' teaching, and in turn, the students' learning, which are the main transactions that take place between teachers and students, locates the participant teachers' perceptions under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Characteristics of Excellent Teachers

Teaching Excellence entails that teachers possess certain personal characteristics that drive teachers to maximize their efforts and invest their utmost potential in searching for the best available practices and employing them in their classes. These personal characteristics intrinsically motivate the teachers to pursue excellence in teaching and are

highly connected to the support, care, motivation, and inspiration that teachers must provide to students in order to enhance their learning.

The perceptions of the participant teachers of the meaning of Teaching Excellence are directly related to the characteristics that teachers have. Characteristics of excellent teachers, as perceived by educators such as Kane et al. (2004), are directly related to the practices that teachers engage in to attain Teaching Excellence. This is supported by the principle that teachers act the way they think. Other characteristics that the participant teachers think that excellent teachers should have can be more described as functional and are highly related to the different attributes that emerged to be related to the meaning of Teaching Excellence as perceived by the participant teachers. These include being highly knowledgeable about the taught subject matter, able to convey or communicate the message, and engage their students in their own learning, and constitute standalone sub-categories that can be comprehensively explained under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence in this Findings section.

The participant teachers believe that these characteristics, personal and functional, are needed by the teachers in HEIs to help them attain Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, relating Teaching Excellence to teachers having specific characteristics described by the participant teachers as *excellent* on the one hand, and perceiving these excellent characteristics in terms of the teachers' actions with their students on the other hand, situates the perceptions of the participant teachers under the umbrella of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005).

Striving for Teaching Excellence and practising it is a state of mind that entails having personal characteristics that are modelled and demonstrated by teachers on and off stage (Hartung, 1972). Excellent teachers are the teachers who can raise their students'

enthusiasm for learning, enable them to believe in their capabilities and talents, make learning enjoyable, and in the end, influence the students in one way or another (Sherman et al., 1987).

This perception is evident in the response of the participant teacher Mari who relates that "I like to impact my students. I like that my students find the course interesting…I like to have personal input on my students… I like them to leave and remember my sessions." In a similar vein, Tom emphasizes the significance of impacting the students' personalities as he claims that "the positive impact that teachers leave on their students creates lifelong learners." This happens, according to Tom, when teachers are "creative in attracting the students and using high intellectual processes that challenge the students to find the information." On the same subject, Tony asserts that the excellent teachers are the ones who "can dig up whatever capacities their students might have by making them believe in themselves, in their talents and abilities. They can also motivate learners to cooperate with the teacher and with each other."

Touching on the qualities of creativity and innovation as characteristics of excellent teachers, the participant teacher Nina advises that to reach excellence in teaching, teachers need to invest in research and the information it provides. Accordingly, Nina recommends that teachers "need to be smart in establishing a balance between giving the information in class and having the students research to get the information." In relation to showing support and care for the students, Karman communicates that "teachers need to play the role of the mother before their role as teachers…first they are tasked to prove to their students that they do care about their learning and not only to blame them when they fail." This was supported by Nilo, who moved one step further by proclaiming that "teachers are entitled to provide solutions for the struggling students to motivate them to continue on

learning… because [as you know] struggling students are more likely to drop out…and this does not reveal success in teaching." Building on this, the participant teacher Lana suggests that "Teaching Excellence is not always to have A and A+ students… Teaching Excellence is more related to inspiring the students and producing lifelong learners during the university years and after….this is especially needed nowadays with this generation which does not show eagerness to learn." Moreover, excellent teachers are those who show enthusiasm about teaching and the subject they teach as well (Dunkin & Precians, 1992). In this respect the participant teacher Moren states that "teaching is a profession that you need to love to do; this love of teaching and of the topics explained in class enhances students' learning." The ability to motivate students is an essential characteristic that teachers need to have and practice. Students, like all human beings, can be motivated and energized to learn (Maslow's Motivation Theory). By being able to motivate the students, teachers can transform the extrinsic motives into intrinsic ones, thereby producing lifelong learners.

For Beth, an excellent teacher is someone who is "innovative, being well prepared, knowledgeable, [who] monitors students work and junior teachers, [is a] motivator, and connected to the labour market." This was also emphasized by her colleague Frank from the same university who considers that the characteristics of excellent teachers have "many dimensions: the first dimension is the quality of the preparation and planning, [and] the second dimension is the ability to transform the subject matter into something that the students understand; …… therefore the challenge is how you transform what you know as expertise in the content matter into something the students can understand…." Fred was even more specific in identifying the characteristics of excellent teacher. For him, the excellent teacher is "not necessary popular… one or the one who has charisma or sense of humour… the effective teacher is the one who can instil the love of learning, make learning

accessible, make it easy, can relay the message effectively, clarify things, give [students] tools to think about, [and] challenge some of their assumptions." From another perspective, "the maturity of the teacher and her understanding of the other, the understanding of students' needs, in order to reach them and explain to them so they can grasp the idea." This was expressed by Koreena who also declares as an art teacher that "if [teachers] just have the knowledge and [they] cannot project it in clear manner, there's a real problem;….the idea needs to be clear for all students." Jakie was very brief in identifying the characteristics of "a good teacher" but definite. Jakie considers that "a good teacher is the one who can interact with the students" but not only "to communicate the intended message"; what is more important is "the ability to interpret this message."

Accordingly, relating Teaching Excellence to having specific characteristics described by the participant teachers as *excellent* on the one hand, and perceiving these excellent characteristics in terms of the teachers' actions with their students on the other hand, situates the perceptions of the participant teachers under the umbrella of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005). The participant teachers believe that these characteristics are needed by the teachers in HEIs to help them attain Teaching Excellence.

Excellent teachers are those who think about their teaching through reflection. Reflection is the basic component of reflective practice which involves continuously thinking about one's work for the purpose of improving it. The main resource for reflection is feedback that teachers receive from their students. Reflection is one of the features of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. In this regard, Skelton (2005) points out that teachers are not the only ones who need to reflect on their own teaching; they must also encourage their students to reflect on their learning at the same time. Through

reflecting on their own learning, students will be more engaged and rendered accountable for their own learning, which helps to produce independent learners. Furthermore, reflecting on one's own teaching for the purpose of improving teaching quality should be one of the objectives of the administration in HEIs. It is an important role of the administration to promote teachers' capability to engage in self-reflection on their own practices (DeRijdta et al., 2006).

Teachers' reflection on the act of teaching enhances the quality of teaching on the one hand and helps teachers to meet students' needs and interests on the other (Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Terenzini, 1999). For example, the participant teachers describe their understanding of reflection on teaching as follows: according to the participant teacher Phill, "reflection is thinking about teaching," whereas for Sandra, "reflection is summarizing all the comments collected over the semester and making the necessary changes for the next semester or next time the course will be taught". For Sema, "reflection is to happen on daily basis, to make the necessary changes and choose the conferences to attend accordingly," while for the participant teacher Divina, reflection "is looking back on one's teaching and building on it for the future." Moreover, reflection "is to receive feedback from the students to improve teaching and meet students' needs" for the participant teacher Nabhan, whereas it is a "two-way process whereby teachers give and receive feedback to and from their students to provide excellent teaching" for the participant teacher Kris.

For the participant teacher Phill, reflection is the time that any one teacher "spends thinking about their teaching." Tony also agrees about the influential role of reflection as he considers that "teaching is a task on which teachers continuously need to reflect." Nabhan goes a step further as he believes that "teaching and learning are on-going, changing tasks

that need on-going improvement, which mostly happens by reflecting on them… by the teacher through updating the information and assessment and by the students through questioning and researching." Participant teacher Beth considers that "reflection on one's own teaching is crucial" which makes planning for teaching, the act of teaching itself, and reflection on teaching as three interrelated processes whereby each process leads to the other. This reveals the awareness that the participant teachers have about the metacognitive processes that they engage in offstage, whether before or after teaching, that enable the teachers to think of their teaching and of the available and up-to-date strategies to select the strategy that is most appropriate for their students.

The Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence

Meeting Labour Market Demands

From a performative perspective (Skelton, 2005) and according to neo-liberal definitions (Archer, 2008), HEIs prepare students to handle their future careers. The higher education sector is of great significance to the national economy of any given country, and students are considered to be the chief component of higher education institutions (Harrison, 2002; McDaniel, 1985). In the beginning, HEIs were intended to provide knowledge and wisdom to their students (Skelton, 2005). However, it seems that the purpose of HEIs changed over time until the world reached an era overwhelmed by neoliberal thinking (Archer, 2008). As a result, new definitions and purposes have been given to HEIs (Skelton, 2005; Barnett, 2003). Accordingly, the purpose of HEIs from the neo-liberal perspective is to provide students with the knowledge and skills that are needed by the new professions in the labour market (Skelton, 2005; Archer, 2008). The labour market in turn enriches these institutions by providing them with opportunities to open new

disciplines that ensure the universities' continuity, success, and effectiveness to the community that hosts them.

This corresponds with Nejm's orientation towards meeting labour market demands, as he claims that "the labour market is a field that HEIs need to respect." This response uncovers at least one of the purposes that the participant teachers have in mind when communicating knowledge to their students. This purpose entails respecting the needs of the labour market by graduating students who are knowledgeable and skilful in the professions available in the labour market. Therefore, this indicates that there is a mutual relationship between the market and HEIs: the labour market provides new job opportunities for students, and in return, the HEIs introduce new disciplines that teach students the skills and knowledge needed to meet market demands efficiently and effectively. This idea was supported by the participant teacher Divina who specifies that HEIs which intend to align with labour market demands must "be current with the new jobs in the market and add majors that graduate students who are ready to fill in these jobs."

This relationship between the market and the universities appeared to be important to some of the participant teachers, such as Sandra who believes that meeting market demands is "necessary [and can be attained through] preparing the students to acquire an important set of skills that they can employ in the market in the future after they finish their post-secondary education." However, her colleague from the same university, Randy, considers that "this is a concern of the University administration to which it should respond differently." In this matter, Randy shares that "because of the war, the University lags behind in following the development of the labour market." For that reason, according to Randy, "there are several new disciplines that should have been introduced earlier to the University so that it could respond to the labour market demands and remain a strong

competitor." This claim is consistent with the perceptions of the participant teacher Jonathen, who thinks that the university to which he belongs is "a bit traditional in the majors [it] offers." From Jonathen's perspective, being traditional in this sense "will affect the job opportunities offered to the graduates or their employability, which in turn will affect enrolment in the University in the coming years."

For some participant teachers, meeting market demands is considered to be more of an administration-related issue than teaching-related issue for participant teachers. This is mainly manifested in the way the labour market determines students' enrolment, whereby the labour market, as Frank declares, "regulates the admission" and "the enrolment in the different departments fluctuates according to the labour market [demands]." More than that, Frank considers that any HEI would be "shooting itself in the head" if it did not satisfy the demands of the labour market. Moreover, Beth considers the market demands is an issue that needs to be considered at the administrative level by "introducing new disciplines" that are of need to the market. Beth adds that HEIs are considered to be the "pool to the market" from which it attracts the "professional students with new skills." From another perspective, and as Beth notes, meeting market demands can be addressed at the curriculum level, whereby the offered curriculum offered in any higher education institution needs to be driven by the market demands to "reduce the gap that exists between the university and the market" and to produce "professional students." Also, Beth considers that it is significant "to connect with market in an attempt to connect with real life experiences"; this can be done through "developing and updating the curricula of the disciplines offered in the universities to best meet the market requirements." Still Beth declares that meeting market demands can be addressed through "updating the knowledge and the skills that teachers provide" to enable HEIs to produce new professionals with new qualifications for the new

market. At this point, it is significant to note that none of the participant teachers denote a relationship between Teaching Excellence and meeting the demands of the labour market. This is explicitly revealed in expressing that this is an administration-related task and teaching or teachers have nothing to do with.

However, other participant teachers viewed meeting the demands of the market and satisfying its needs as a shared concern of both the teachers and the university administrations. For the participant teacher Kris, market demands are vital to the teachers as well as to the university. In this light, he states that "teachers are mandated to search for the knowledge needed by the market and share it with the students in class." This takes us back to the importance of professional development programs in allowing teachers to become up-to-date with the knowledge and skills needed by the labour market and communicate this information with their students. The ability to meet market demands determines the sustainability of a certain discipline in a given university. This point was emphasized by the participant teacher Rene, who considers meeting the demands of the labour market essential and believes that this issue needs to be considered at the level of the teacher and the level of the University administration. In this regard, Rene proclaims that "teachers need to be posted [up-to-date] on the skills that students need for their future career and bring them into the classroom." Rene adds that "the enrolment numbers in a certain major determine the continuity of the major; so if the major does not have the minimum number of enrolled students required by the university, the university tends to close it…. The university always opens new disciplines needed by the market or closes ones that have low enrolment and in which the graduates find no jobs." The responses of the participant teachers reflect their awareness of the shared responsibility that they have with their respective universities' administrations in regard to responding smartly and

promptly to market demands needs in order to face the fierce competition that they live in and ensure the continuity of their universities. Moreover, relating Teaching Excellence to meeting labour market needs reflects their performative perception of Teaching Excellence.

From another point of view, the participant teacher Mari considers that market demands can be satisfied "through the practical components of the courses…either by sending the students for internships or by borrowing the applied practices in the market in class." Another participant teacher, Lana, agrees that there is a need to meet market demands, but she considers that it is a task for the University rather than for the teachers. In this aspect, Lana expresses that "the University administration revised the plan of study of many core courses to include related practical components." This idea was supported by the participant teacher Moren, who shared that "the University included an internship in the first year instead of the fourth to ensure the development of skills needed by the market from the very beginning." The continuous development of the curriculum to accommodate the changes in the market, a process that the participant teachers are aware of and consider to be important, despite considering it a task for the administration, is another indication of the participant teachers' Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

From the opposing perspective, Phill and Sema were the only participant teachers who believed that HEIs do not need to respond to market demands. This is clear in Phill's statement that "there are always traditional majors in certain universities like Philosophy and History, although there is no clear indicator that these majors are needed by the labour market … but the university cannot stop offering these majors." This is related to Phill's perception of the purpose of HEIs, which is built upon "the universities' contribution to the transformation of the society;…so, the university cannot be a reflection of the market, and the market cannot decide that there is no interest in the philosophy major so [the university]

needs to stop offering it." This corresponds with the perception of the participant teacher Sema, who proclaims that it is necessary to "teach the students the skills that they need to use in their future profession, but I care more for the knowledge itself." Sema adds that "if the student has the knowledge, no one can control him…with knowledge the student can be followed and not a follower… with knowledge a student can really be an independent learner." Sema concludes that "meeting market demands is not necessarily an indicator or a feature of Teaching Excellence and should not be so." These perceptions stand out among the other perceptions of the participant teachers and can be related to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005). In this respect, the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence holds that higher education is the context where students acquire knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself, which is intended to be inherited by future generations, to ensure the continuity of the community while maintaining the "community value in preparing people for the professions" (Skelton, 2005; p. 28).

From another perspective still, satisfying market demands can be manifested by training students to meet labour market requirements. In support of this opinion, the participant teacher Lana expresses that "the department director must always communicate with the marketing departments of the big companies and participate in their competitions…this will expose the students to the work required by these companies and will give them confidence in their work and in their universities if they win." The participant teacher Tony, from his position as an English language teacher, suggests encouraging teachers to "give their students the space to write following international standard criteria and publish their pieces of writing or poems in the University magazine…this will enhance their writing skills and they will learn the criteria needed by

the market." These perspectives parallel the perception of the participant teacher Nabhan who, from his position as a teacher in the engineering department, explains that "the practical parts of the courses that we offer must be updated and our labs must also be reequipped with new equipment that is exactly like what they will use in their jobs later." These intentions of the participant teachers express an advanced step that can be taken towards the market, which involves taking the lead in contacting employers in the market and meeting their specific requirements. This can be seen as more than a reflection of the performative perception of Teaching Excellence, but it is rather a confirmation of the performative perception that the participant teachers have of Teaching Excellence.

The Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence

Building Critical Minds

Teaching Excellence is about creating students who can think critically and divergently (Northedge, 2003) and are able to become leaders in society and initiate changes in their communities or their countries at large. This means training students to think about a specific topic from different angles, enabling them to discuss others' points of views and express their own perspective, and empowering them to take a stance on sensitive or pertinent issues that could impact their context on a small or large scale (Skelton, 2005). This can be accomplished by giving students the opportunity to be involved in open discussions or arguments in class about critical topics of relevance. It is worth mentioning at this point that the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, as explained by Skelton (2005) and supported by Malcolm & Zukas (2001), is concerned with providing students with the freedom to deal with topics or issues that are context-related at the political, social and economic levels.

Teaching critical thinking and building critical minds are among the most challenging tasks that teachers are invited to do. In addition, these tasks are becoming of more importance these days, as critical thinking and critical minds are among the 21st century skills that need to be instilled in the future generations. Empowering students to lead wise changes in their societies through education must be a goal that teachers and administrators in HEIs plan to accomplish (Filippakou, 2011). This is related to a certain change that needs to occur in educational settings, specifically in HEIs, to lead to corresponding changes in societies (Walker & Nixon, 2004).

Teaching students to think critically is among the main features of Teaching Excellence according to most participant teachers in this research study. Tony considers teaching critical thinking skills as one of his main concerns as a teacher and asserts that it comprises the core of his teaching philosophy. Tony confirms that teachers need "to encourage critical thinking, promote creativity, and respect individual differences, so that we can have a variety of different opinions, and learners who can freely express their different points of view, rather than being mere conformists."

The participant teachers agree on relating Teaching Excellence to creating critical thinkers by teaching the students critical thinking skills, but it is evident that they disagree on the means to teach such skills. This is revealed through the response of Lana who expresses that "it is essential to teach the students the skills related to debating and presenting different topics…but not political topics…this is not allowed by our upper management." The participant teacher Moren supports this opinion, as she relates Teaching Excellence to "enhancing the ability of the students to discuss moral dilemmas and express their opinion about them…but not political dilemmas…we are not concerned about discussing such topics in our classes." Nina offers an alternative to prohibiting the students

from engaging in political or critical societal issues by describing what she actually does in her classes. She explains that "to avoid any conflicts between the students we prefer to discuss critical issues that are found in the literature and ask our students to come out with better solutions." Karman rationalizes this issue of not providing the students with the chance to discuss political or critical societal issues by saying "this is all due to the political situation in our country...such discussions would definitely lead to serious problems in our classes that may extend to outside the class. This happened in other universities. So it is wiser not to talk about such topics in the class."

In this regard, the way that the teachers perceive the critical approach of Teaching Excellence differs markedly from Skelton's (2005) understanding of the concept. According to Skelton, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence is related to giving the students the opportunity to discuss and debate sensitive societal and political topics (Skelton, 2005). Surprisingly, there is an explicit consensus among all participant teachers that discussing and debating sensitive societal and political topics is not allowed in their classes. According to the participant teachers, this is a clear policy created by their respective universities' administrations in response to the existing political situation in Lebanon. All participant teachers from the five selected universities confirmed that they do not discuss, and they are not allowed to discuss, any sensitive or political issue in class. Nabhan states that "teachers are not allowed to talk about any political matter because this will cause problems between students due to their belonging to different [existing] parties." Nabhan adds that discussing such topics "is prohibited by the university's top management due to the chaos that happened in 2007 and the death of two students" in his university's campus. This was confirmed by his colleague Jakie who announces that talking about political issues is "not allowed in our University… because we had problems in 2007 and

two students were killed." Nejm argues firmly that "teachers need to respect the diversity of the students in the University in all dimensions, including their affiliation or even emotional belonging to any political party." Consequently, he agrees with his university's decision to prevent students from discussing such topics, not only during class time but also during their leisure time. From Nabhan's perspective, this saves the university from multiple problems. Along similar lines, Frank states that the classroom "is not really the place" to discuss any political issues. Nevertheless, they have political clubs in which they can enrol and can talk about political matters."

Several other teachers agreed that they do not discuss political issues in class, albeit for different reasons. Beth states that "I don't teach Political Science courses…. and therefore the topics that I teach in education are not related to politics." Fred has the same reason as Beth for not discussing political issues as he states that "I don't raise political or societal issues in class… maybe because the discipline that I teach is not related to politics." Koreena agrees with the other participant teachers in regard not to discuss political issues in class. Nevertheless, she does that for completely different reasons which are related to time constraints as she noted that "we do not discuss political issues in class because I cannot jeopardize the time given for a course like studio course" and "because there's other things that we need to cover and also we have a tight schedule with tight deadlines."

The consensus among teachers about not allowing their students to discuss sensitive societal and political issues is open to discussion. This is due to the fact that the classroom originally is the natural platform made for learning, making mistakes, raising questions, receiving answers, and discussing various issues. This is facilitated by the teachers and can be done through various subject matters whereby teachers are entitled to guide the

discussion and help the students connect their ideas, look for evidences to support their ideas, and make decisions (Skelton, 2005). This is actually what critical thinking is about and this contrasts with the perceptions of the participant teachers. This contrast is highly related to the political and religious situation of the country of this study, Lebanon. In this specific aspect, the perceptions of the participant teachers do not conform to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Instead, most participant teachers emphasized the need to build critical minds through teaching students the skills to think critically, which is necessary in the 21st century to enable the students to face and accommodate the vast changes that the world is passing through. This entails teachers having extensive and deep knowledge about the subject matter they teach to enable them facilitate discussions, debates or arguments that students may engage in about various topics or concepts. This was emphasized by the participant teacher Randy, who claims that Teaching Excellence is related to how far teachers are "able sharpen their students' critical thinking skills through the subject they teach."

According to Randy, teaching students critical thinking skills can best be done by giving the students "problems related to the subject matter to solve." Teaching students the skill of solving problems is not only an attribute of interactive learning but it appears to be an aspect of critical thinking as well. Tamara confirms this point of view, considering that "giving students problems to solve allows them to learn how to think critically about such problems in the future." Participant teacher Kris advises that "to attain Teaching Excellence, instructors in universities and colleges are entitled to expose their students to situations that they may face in their future life and help them come out with more than one solution…this will improve the critical thinking skills of the students." Divina and Rene appear to agree with Kris on the importance of teaching the students the critical thinking

skills that enable them find alternative solutions for a given problem or specific situation. Building on this idea, Divina explains that from her position as a teacher who is supervising internship students, she always "brings into discussion problems related to work experiences… and I ask my students to come out with suggestions to improve or even fix these problems." Rene moves a step beyond this as she states that she asks "the students to comment on the adopted solutions [for a certain situation or problem] and chose the best among these solutions, or suggest a better solution derived from the existing ones… this will improve the students' critical thinking which should be one of our objectives for better teaching." Participant teacher Jonathen agrees that "teaching the students critical thinking skills, communication skills, and learning skills enables them to think about new issues or problems and solve them smartly." Moreover, Mari affirms that "teaching your students critical thinking skills encourages them to learn more and become lifelong learners." Nilo believes that problem-solving teaching strategies can be employed to empower students to lead wiser changes in their societies. Nilo explains that this process can occur through "engaging the students in solving problems that are strictly related to their daily life, and through teaching them the skills to make decisions about problems that they are very likely to face in their future careers."

Teaching Excellence is related to teaching students the skills needed to grapple with divergent points of view. This can be attained by giving the students the opportunity to look at a given topic from different angles, and more importantly, empowering them to express their own opinions. This is affirmed by the participant teacher Albert who claims that "students need not only to talk about a certain topic from different points of views, but they also need to be able to present their points of view with well-argued explanations and justifications." For this reason, Albert concludes that "students need to have research skills

that enable them to search for all existing information about a certain topic, check what others think about it, and think and express their own ideas about it." This notion was mirrored by the participant teacher Tom who argues that in higher education, students should "have the courage and learn how to argue and criticize the work of different educators, even the well-known ones, while providing objective justification" Tom adds that "teachers in universities and colleges should teach students how to assess the material they are learning in a scientific way." Tom concluded that failing to teach the students such critical thinking skills has led to "the decline of the Arab countries, as all teachers are only concerned about graduating students who have finished a certain topic rather than being eager to graduate competent students." Participant teacher Beth agrees that building critical minds requires teaching the students to think divergently. Divergent thinking is enhanced when teachers demonstrate accepting others' perspectives and encouraging their students to address issues from different angles. In this regard, Beth considers that "the person who has the knowledge of content, [and] who has diversity can learn about [a topic from] different points of views." Moreover, looking at a piece of information from "different angles and manipulating it in different ways" is a feature of excellence in teaching as emphasized by the participant teacher Fred. For the participant teachers Koreena and Jakie, thinking critically is a significant feature of Teaching Excellence which is best revealed through the teaching strategies that teachers employ in their classes to teach their students think critically.

Based on the perceptions of the participant teachers in the selected universities, creating critical thinkers is one of the attributes of Teaching Excellence. Creating critical thinkers can be enhanced by teaching the students problem-solving skills, training them to assess divergent points of view, enabling them to apply learned information in new settings,

bringing relevant real-life experiences into the discussion, and teaching them the skills of discussing or arguing debatable topics and presenting information. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the participant teachers mentioned the importance of all these skills, it is not possible to situate their perceptions directly under the umbrella of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as proposed by Skelton (2005). This is mainly because the range of debatable topics that the participant teachers are allowed to discuss with their students in class must not include controversial political, or economic or social issues in the Lebanese context. As will be discussed later, the teachers' perceptions are more related to the Performative Understanding rather than the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, due to the goal that the participant teachers have in mind when teaching students critical thinking skills. The intention of the participant teachers when teaching their students critical thinking skills is more oriented towards preparing students for their future careers or professions. In other words, teachers are preparing students to apply the knowledge they learned in their classes in their professions, rather than to lead changes in their societies. Empowering the students to lead wise changes in the societies entails giving them the freedom to deal with or discuss political topics, a practice that lies at heart of the Critical Understanding of TE. For Skelton (2005; p. 32) the "commitment to emancipation" is the core feature of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. This perspective brings into discussion the nature of teaching as a value-laden profession that directly contributes to ensuring social justice in society.

Therefore, although the interest in teaching critical thinking and building critical minds are present in the dialogue of the teachers, nevertheless, this does not fall neatly under the umbrella of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005).

Considering the Challenges in Teaching

As in all educational institutions, students, teachers and the content knowledge are the chief components of HEIs. Students demonstrate individual differences and their characteristics, preferences, and learning styles differ vastly. Teachers, on the other hand, ought to have specific characteristics and fulfil various responsibilities in order to attain Teaching Excellence. Lastly, content knowledge refers to the pre-planned information that is intended to be communicated with the students and is linked to predetermined learning outcomes. This situation is the main reason that makes teaching a challenging task, as the participant teacher Nabhan expressed clearly: “teaching is a difficult job… not everybody is aware of this.” Furthermore, and as mentioned earlier in the literature review and supported by Boyer (1990), teaching takes place outside and inside the classroom. Teaching starts offstage, is implemented on stage, and goes back to off stage for reflection to start again. Teaching starts when teachers search for knowledge which is intended to be communicated in the classroom with the students, then proceed to integrate this knowledge, and then teach it “on stage” or inside the class. On stage, and while teachers are in a direct relationship with their students, they receive immediate feedback which includes information that is useful for improving their teaching. In this way, teaching goes through a cyclic process that starts with preparation and planning, then implementation, receiving feedback, reflecting on teaching, modification, and planning again for teaching. During this journey, and especially as teachers aim to provide high quality teaching, teachers face a lot of challenges that vary in nature and vary in their influence on teaching, learning, and on students themselves. During this cyclic journey, the students are always situated at the centre of the learning and teaching processes, which means that teachers must make serious attempts to build a

relationship with the students to enhance their learning. Positioning the students at the centre of the teaching and learning transactions is an aspect of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as described by Skelton (2005).

The Challenges Faced by Teachers in HEIs in Lebanon

As demonstrated in the responses of the participant teachers, teachers face many challenges. The challenges that teachers face in their teaching differ from one teacher to another and from one institution to another due to many factors like the difference in teachers' competencies or like the differences in the context of the HEI.

First of all, the main challenge or obstacle that teachers face in their teaching in HEIs is the favouring of research over teaching. In this regard, Rowland (1996) argues that the conflict between teaching and research in HEIs has impacted the higher education sector and cannot be resolved unless the gap between these two components is reduced. This is a concern of most participant teachers, including Sandra, who proclaims that the main challenge that teachers face in their profession is "favouring research over teaching." The participant teacher Randy agrees with his colleague in that he considers research a challenge that he faces in his profession. Randy declares that "teaching is becoming second in the university." Moreover, Randy tries to be more specific in his concern as he expresses that "although teaching is the main task that we do in the university, our promotion is related to the quality and quantity of research we do rather than the quality or the quantity of teaching." Jonathen asserts that research is a real obstacle because he believes that "it is difficult to balance between teaching and research since research can be easily assessed while teaching is difficult to measure… and relying only on instructor course evaluation is very problematic." For that reason, as Jonathen states, "teachers tend to give the priority to research over teaching." Tamara echoes these concerns, viewing "research as the main

challenge that teachers face in universities and which eventually has a great impact on the quality of teaching provided." Tamara goes on to add that this is mainly due to "relating research to promotion." This point of view can also be found in the remarks expressed by the participant teacher Sema, who explains that "it is ridiculous to know that promotion is based on the number of years of experience and the research done in any academic year; teaching does not contribute to the promotion of faculty members." This is basically due to the difficulty in measuring teaching "which unfortunately has started only this year with initial or basic steps, like starting with students' evaluation, which never happened before in our university." Kris agrees that "research is increasingly being emphasized in the university to the point that it will not only become the most important indicator of excellent work, but it will be the only indicator of excellent work...this by itself is a real threat to Teaching Excellence." It is evident from the responses of the participant teachers that valuing research over teaching is one of the main challenges that teachers face in their teaching. This challenge is mainly manifested in relating teachers' promotion more to research work than to teaching work, despite the fact that teachers spend most of their time in teaching. Moreover, the second challenge that is represented in the participant teachers' responses is manifested in the difficulty of measuring teaching for the purposes of promotion. The literature confirms the real existence of these challenges in the sense that it points to the so-called "teaching vs. research" dilemma. Therefore, for such reasons, research represents an obstacle for the participant teachers towards thinking of attaining Teaching Excellence. Foster (1998) argues for the importance of valuing teaching as a profession in higher education institutions. He emphasizes the worry and even anger of teachers in HEIs about the existing conflict in colleges and universities between teaching and research. He claims that legislators and university deans tend to favour research work

over teaching work in almost all aspects. As a result, teachers emphasize the urgent need to award equal value to both kinds of higher education work: research work as well as teaching work. More importantly, Foster suggests that administrators or faculty developers should take into account the issue of teaching awards, promotion, and recognition. In a survey carried out in Atlantic Canada, faculty members' responses highlighted the necessity of giving equal value to teaching and research in higher education and recommended rewarding and supporting all teachers, especially those who excel in teaching (Foster, 1998).

Other than the debate about giving equal value to teaching and research, the participant teachers have other kinds of challenges that they believe constitute a threat to attaining Teaching Excellence. For example, the main challenge that Frank faces in his teaching is the students' proficiency in the English language and "their writing and reading skills; whereby the English, as a language of instruction in the university, "is a foreign language for almost all enrolled students." The participant teacher Phill has completely different concerns or challenges that represent barriers for him to attaining Teaching Excellence. One of the challenges that greatly concerns him is manifested in "finding and preparing high quality reading materials for the students…as I don't like to use text books especially in teaching graduate courses." Quality reading material seems "not to be easily accessible to students; so it's very difficult to find reading materials that are accessible to students especially with introductory courses, or lower levels, undergraduate classes. This draws our attention to the availability of resources that university administrations need to ensure in order to provide learning material for their students at the quality and quantity levels.

Other concerns include the “large amount of non-teaching tasks given to teachers, especially the new ones, which are time consuming.” This was a concern to the participant teacher Sandra as well as to Jonathen, who states that “although we are assigned a lighter teaching load, the administrative tasks are more time consuming than teaching the courses from which we were released.” Randy experiences similar challenges which are related to “the workload that teachers have… although in [our] university the teaching load is being reduced to three courses per year for assistant professors, unfortunately we are given administrative and research work instead.” Similarly, the main challenge that Beth faces in her teaching “is the heavy workload” in relation to the “very high expectations” that they set for their students. Therefore, from her perspective, such a workload hinders the teachers from providing all kind of support for their students to meet their expectations. Issues related to workload are proven in the literature to represent significant challenges worldwide (Clark, 1998). Teachers in higher education institutions always ask for a reduction in workload, which reflects the time of actual teaching that occurs on stage, in order to give themselves more time to spend on thinking and preparing for teaching, processes that occur off stage. It is noteworthy to mention here that teachers’ workloads vary from one university to another, both within one country and among different countries. The responses of the participant teachers also demonstrate the increasing load of administrative work that teachers in HEIs are held responsible for alongside their teaching and research work.

Another challenge that Randy faces in teaching is “the continuous and fast advancement in technology that teachers struggle to keep up with.” For the participant teacher Albert, the main obstacle that he is facing in teaching is “the lack of guidance from the upper management, who do not care about the quality of teaching.” Albert adds that this

disregard for teaching quality "starts from the first interviews with new faculty members which focus on asking the faculty members questions related to the content knowledge of their specialization, with no question about the teaching methods and ways to deal with students." Considering the rapid advancement in technology as a challenge, the participant teachers are aware about the importance of mastering the use of the most up-to-date technological applications or software in their classes. This is an indication of their desire to meet international standards while simultaneously acknowledging the needs of the labour market, which in turn reveals the participant teachers' performative perception of Teaching Excellence.

Highlighting similar concerns, the participant teacher Fred refers to being fascinated by technology and "drifting away from the core" as one of the main challenges he faces in his teaching. Fred feels that the management in HEIs "put so much emphasis on [technology], at the expense of quality; quality of a teacher. You have to be a prepared teacher, you have to be a knowledgeable, you have to be an inspiring teacher [in the first place]. [Technology is] just like the tools that teachers can use effectively or ineffectively." Fred adds that technology is important as long as it "serves my teaching." However, teachers and HEIs' administration need to be cautious about the objective and use of technology. "With technology, we're forgetting the human element….there is no substitute or replacement for the teacher. So [our university] likes the idea of technology; and if you know about technology, you know everything."

Another challenge that Fred is concerned about is the evaluation of instruction that students do. Fred believes that students are not qualified to evaluate the instruction or the instructors; "students are subjective" in their evaluation as they are "grade oriented." Accordingly, he suggested that HEIs should either ask their teachers "to prepare their own

portfolio as a self- evaluative tool" that documents their work and reveals their growth, or ask "peers to evaluate each other." This matter led Fred to claim that he does not "feel supported in dealing with some students who give [me] a hard time."

Jakie is still facing a completely different kind of challenge. Jakie is actually scared of the "quick development in technology, in communication, and all the theories." This fast change that is happening at many levels entails "continuous updating of knowledge" otherwise teachers "will be lost." Consequently, this is an additional effort that is put on the burden of the teachers in HEIs who are entitled to be up to date not only in regard to the content knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching, but also in terms of technology and the ways of integrating technology in education, as well as in regard of adapting available learning theories to accommodate the occurring changes.

Tom relates the obstacles that teachers in higher education institutions face to the "mentality of the policy makers who are not ready for improvement" due to "the influence of the political parties that they belong to." Tom believes that the political situation and the political leaders in the Lebanese context "are hindering the development of the higher education sector." For Kris, "teaching big classes and making the same achievements with all students" is one of the challenges that teachers face in teaching and consequently stands as barrier to attaining Teaching Excellence. The political situation in the context of this study has great impact on all vital sectors, especially the higher education sector (Buckner, 2011; Hasrouny, 2011; Frayha, 2009). The responses of the participant teachers constitute one of the ways in which they perceive this impact on the sector they work in.

For Lana, "motivating students to learn" is the main challenge that teachers face in their teaching." Lana considers that "the inability or failure to motivate the students to learn comprises a big threat to reaching Teaching Excellence." This confirms Jonathen's concerns,

when he states that "the general attitude of students towards studying has changed a bit. This is because there are so many things around for students to get distracted." This distraction is also a concern for the participant teacher Tony, who thinks that "the lack of motivation to learn is the disease of this generation…in light of the available or accessible technology which distracts them from teaching and from everything." As mentioned in the previous section, the ability to motivate the students was among the first characteristics that the participant teachers identified as necessary in order for excellent teachers to attain Teaching Excellence. This issue came up once again when participant teachers were asked about challenges, and they continued to emphasize its significance for providing high quality teaching while identifying its absence as a challenge for attaining TE. The ability of the teachers to motivate their students highlights the psychologized transactions that take place between teachers and students.

Tamara has different concerns that constitute real challenges to the attainment of Teaching Excellence. These concerns are related to the achievement of the predetermined student learning outcomes in any one course. According to Tamara, "Teaching Excellence can be attained when the predetermined learning outcomes are met…these outcomes contain all the intended knowledge to be communicated." Nevertheless, if these learning outcomes "are not achieved appropriately, Teaching Excellence is not ensured." For Nejm, the major obstacle that he faces in teaching is the "resistance to change that teachers exhibit as far as the shift from lecturing to student-centred learning…this creates discrepancy between instructors and affects our evaluation." Since meeting the learning outcomes has emerged as a factor in the attainment of Teaching Excellence, and the inability to achieve these learning outcomes is considered as a challenge that teachers face in attaining Teaching

Excellence, the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) becomes evident.

Koreena has totally different concerns and therefore is facing different challenges. Koreena's main challenge in teaching is manifested in the competencies of the students enrolled in the field of design. This challenge is mainly related to the absence of specific admission criteria that are specific to the School of Design and through which "they can be more selective in admitting more eligible students to study design." Based on providing "equal opportunities to all applicants" the admission criteria to be admitted to the "math discipline are the same criteria as those for design." Consequently, the university accepts students for the Design and Architecture "based on their SAT scores" and these "students barely know how to draw…. this is the problem." Accordingly, Koreena suggests that special criteria need to be developed to the School of Design and Architecture whereby students need to submit a portfolio that includes their own artwork.

Another challenge that seems to be of significance to the participant teachers and constitutes an obstacle against attaining Teaching Excellence, is the class size or the number of students in the class. From the responses of the participant teachers, it was obvious that the class sizes varied from one teacher to another depending on different factors such as the discipline or the subject matter being taught. Accordingly, this feature appeared to be a real challenge for attaining Teaching Excellence. This was clearly expressed by the participant teacher Nina who states that "large classes cannot afford interactive strategies." Karman adds that "dividing the students into small groups is difficult in large classes." This opinion is supported by Nilo who elaborates that "in big classes teachers cannot give turns to all the students...so they cannot participate in the discussions or debates which are essential for effective learning." The class size continues to be considered a

hindrance to attaining Teaching Excellence, as Moren affirms: "when talking about meeting students' individual needs to attain Teaching Excellence, this cannot happen when you are teaching large classes." Teaching large classes was also a concern for the participant teacher Rene, who was firm in articulating her opinion about the relationship between Teaching Excellence and large classes: "Teaching Excellence and teaching large classes do not meet." For participant teachers, the challenge of class sizes is a challenge that mainly affects the implementation of interactive teaching strategies that focus on engaging all students in the class discussions, group work, and other interactive practices. Therefore, large-size classes constitute a challenge for the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, for which reason Cooper & Robinson (2000) and Smith (2000) argue for providing teachers with professional development programs to supply them with the skills and experiences needed to facilitate learning in large-sized classes that face such challenges.

Interpretation of Results

In strict alignment with the title of this study, "Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education Institutions in an Arab Country: The Case of Lebanon", the main question that this research is intended to answer is: What are the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon towards Teaching Excellence? From this starting point, the main research question of this research study will be answered through answering the following research sub-questions:

1) How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think can best lead to Teaching Excellence?

3) What are the characteristics that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to attain Teaching Excellence?

The researcher also asked the participant teachers additional questions about their perceptions of satisfying labour market demands, the issues that they perceive to constitute challenges to their teaching such as the indicators of measuring teaching, the significance of professional development programs.

Therefore, the main research question of this research study was answered through the three sub-questions and the additional related questions, in addition to supplementary probing questions. The main research question and its subsequent research sub-questions were the framework that guided the development of the interview schedule, the responses from which were presented comprehensively in the "Findings" section of this research study. The responses obtained from the participant teachers in response to the research sub-questions of the research study were categorized according to the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence which embody: Traditional Understanding, the Psychologized Understanding, the Performative Understanding, and the Critical Understanding.

One finding which is significant to start with in the "Interpretation of Results" section of this research study is related to the responses of the participant teachers from the only public university in the context of this study. This finding is related to an observation that the researcher made about the lack of support or lack of awareness about Teaching Excellence that the teachers of this selected University are supposed to receive from their University administration. This observation was confirmed by the four participant teachers from this selected University who agreed that there is no serious work or even an obvious intention from the University administration towards considering Teaching Excellence as a

goal for the University to work towards. This was expressed by the participant teacher Tom who shared that “we don’t have the mentality of improvement…nobody is practicing improvement or even wants to improve…everyone is teaching according to his own mentality.” From his side, the participant teacher Albert agrees on the lack of interest or lack of serious attempts from the University management in the area of Teaching Excellence and considers this as one of the major obstacles that teachers face in improving teaching quality. In this respect Albert states that “improving teaching quality must come from the upper management of the University; there must be guidance from the uppermost management in the University to guide the teachers about the importance of changing their teaching strategies to lead to better teaching, or let us be more ambitious and say the best teaching quality.” Nevertheless, Sema states that “monitoring efforts for our teaching have just started; the university upper management introduced the students’ evaluation to obtain feedback on teaching for improvement purposes.”

The response of this participant teacher reveals several elements of her perception of Teaching Excellence. Considering monitoring teachers’ performance as a first step towards attaining Teaching Excellence shows that both the participant teacher and the University in which she works hold a performative perception of Teaching Excellence. This is especially true because the monitoring efforts rely on the implementation of students’ evaluation of instruction as the assessment tool for this performance. There is another element to be observed in this response that reveals the participant teacher’s psychologized perception of Teaching Excellence. This is related to emphasizing the value of the feedback that is received from the students and its role in improving the quality of teaching provided by the teachers. This in turn is related to the relationship that exists between the teachers and their students in particular and points to the transactions between teachers and students

in general. Moreover, Tony shares that the only actions that the University has taken for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching are manifested in providing the teachers with a "wide margin of freedom to choose the material and the methodology…and nothing else is evident." This observation from the participant teacher brings up two important points. The first is the awareness of the participant teachers about academic freedom, which is considered a right that teachers in HEIs must have. This awareness and appreciation for the right to academic freedom is an indication of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as Skelton (2005) describes, especially since the freedom that is mentioned by the participant teacher includes the freedom to choose the material that is given to him by the University. However, based on other responses from him and from the other participant teachers mentioned earlier, the idea of academic freedom is contradicted by the restrictions that are drawn by the selected Universities' administrations around the freedom to choose the materials to be discussed or taught in class. These restrictions namely rule out the freedom to discuss political or critical social issues related to the Lebanese context. This, in turn, means that neither the participant teacher nor the selected Universities can be said to adhere to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Another significant observation that emerged is related to the awareness that the participant teachers in the different Universities have about Teaching Excellence. It is evident from the responses of the twenty-five participant teachers in the five selected Universities that not all of them are aware of the notion of Teaching Excellence. The participant teachers who are aware or familiar with the term and concept of Teaching Excellence are those who work at the two selected Universities that follow the American pattern. In one of these two Universities, there is a "Center of Excellence in Teaching & Learning" in addition to a yearly "Award for Teaching Excellence." It so happened that two

of the participant teachers work in that Center where the term Teaching Excellence is regularly used. Moreover, the participant teacher Frank is the one who founded this Center and headed it for a couple of years, while the participant teacher Beth is now "a social director for the Center of Teaching and Learning" and shows enthusiasm to achieve the Center's mission of excellence.

In the other selected University that follows the American pattern, there is neither an existing Center of Excellence in Teaching & Learning nor a yearly award for Teaching Excellence, but this University is in the process of establishing both of these elements. This is clear from the responses of the participant teachers from this University as they explain the actions that their University's administration is taking to realize its intention of working towards excellence. As Tamara states, "the university administration is providing more in-house professional development activities" in an attempt to emphasize the value of providing high quality teaching. However, it should also be noted that one other participant teacher working at this University was still not aware of the term Teaching Excellence.

In regard to the other three selected Universities that follow different patterns such as the Lebanese, French and Egyptian patterns, it is evident from the responses of the participant teachers that the term Teaching Excellence is not clearly disseminated in any of the Universities, nor have centers been established to promote the concept. Consequently, for participant teacher Fred, the term Teaching Excellence is a "cliché" word which just belongs to mission and vision statements and there is no clear strategy built in the University where Fred works that informs teachers the "what" and the "how" of excellence in teaching. This is evident in the following extract from Fred pertaining to the use of the term Teaching Excellence:

> We only use the term [Teaching Excellence] when we write missions, and objectives…. But we use it as a cliché term. It doesn't mean anything for anyone, but they expect you to use it because, you have to use it. You cannot say we're teaching [only], you have to say excellent teaching. But the question is we are not held accountable to excellence. Is the job that we're doing really excellent? I don't think so; so we just have to use it; it's on paper, but I really don't think we implement it. We don't go by it, we use it, and then we forget about it in many ways. It's just a cliché term that belongs to catalogues, websites, and to brochures. I don't feel we're enforcing it in any way, so nobody has ever asked, or told us how we do things, in an excellent way.

However, there are clear attempts to improve teaching, manifested either by the professional development activities that the University administration is organizing and encouraging the teachers to attend, or in the nascent efforts being made to monitor teaching quality through student evaluations. For that reason, there is no available criteria or agreed-on attributes or even indicators of excellence in teaching in any of these Universities.

Still, another observation of significance that emerged in this research study is the perception that the participant teachers have about research. This is manifested in the increasing significance that all selected Universities' administrations are giving to research work. In fact, the literature is rich in research work that explains the concern that teachers in HEIs have regarding the favouring of research work over teaching work. (Healey, 2005; LaPointe, 2005). Valuing research work over teaching work is perceived to be one of the major challenges that the participant teachers are facing in the selected Universities. This was explained in detail in the "Considering the Challenges in Teaching" section of this

research study, where the participant teachers express their worry about spending great amounts of their time on teaching and exerting quality effort, while in the end the teaching work does not seem to be counted towards anything at any level. From the responses of the participant teachers, it was evident that teaching work is not satisfactorily measured. In reality, this is a universal problem in higher education institutions in that there is no consensus among educators, researchers, teachers and university administrations about defined criteria or indicators to measure teaching. Moreover, teaching work appears to the participant teachers to not have any significant value to their respective Universities' administration as it does not contribute to their promotion nor does it even guarantee their permanency in their positions in their respective Universities. What mainly counts in the promotion of teachers is the years of experience the teachers have in the field and the research work that they conduct in terms of both quality and quantity. This indicates that the teachers are highly aware that the quality of teaching is not of real concern for their respective Universities' administrations and it is not a criterion to evaluate their performance. For example, Sandra expresses that "the research is valued more than anything else." Sema adds that "research work is the factor that determines the promotion of teachers in addition to the years of experience" and Nina complains that "teaching cannot be measured like research…..so not a lot can be said about teachers' teaching."

At this point and in this part of the research study, the findings are interpreted then synthesized to draw conclusions about the perceptions or the understandings that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon have of Teaching Excellence. In alignment with the main research question of the research study and its subsequent sub questions, the interpretation and synthesis are structured around analytic sub-categories which fit under the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence. To obtain these sub-categories, the responses of

the participant teachers were meticulously examined with a view to identifying patters in their responses in relation to the research sub-questions:

1- Teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence (Research Question 1)
2- Teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of excellent teachers (Research Question 2)
3- Teachers' perceptions of the means to attain Teaching Excellence (Research Question 3)

These sub-categories are the focus around which the description, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of the collected data of this research study pivot. These analytic sub-categories, connected with the three research sub-questions of this research study are used to answer the main question of this research study on the one hand, and belong to the theoretical framework that guides this research study on the other hand. Furthermore, these analytic sub-categories were used to give codes for the collected data, to uncover patterns, reduce the data, and fit them under the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence.

The whole analytic process of this research study involved all the basic steps of qualitative research. Initially, the findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews were coded and categorized for the purpose of reducing the data collected. In this step, the collected data was analysed or broken down into pieces of the same meaning and categories, then arranged according to the four understandings of Teaching Excellence. In the interpretation section of this research study that follows, these categories will be examined thoroughly and given interpretive meanings to provide a comprehensive description of the teachers' understanding of Teaching Excellence in HEIs in Lebanon, the context of this study. This interpretation will be done in reference to the analytic categories

that are linked to each other as well as to the main research question of this research study, which in turn is guided by the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence that were proposed by Skelton and which constitute the theoretical framework of this study. This kind of analysis and synthesis of the data follows the strategy and explanation offered by Rossman & Rallis (2003), who clarify that the categorization of the collected data offers "information" to the reader, while the application and interpretation of this data offers "knowledge."

Accordingly, the following discussion considers the literature on higher education in general and on Teaching Excellence in HEIs in particular. The implications of the interpretation will inform the perceptions of Teaching Excellence that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon have in an attempt to examine the researcher assumption at the beginning of this study. The assumption states that teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence in HEIs belongs to one of the four understandings proposed by Skelton (2005) while leaving room for exploring a new perception that the participant teachers may have.

The findings in the research study are categorized into analytic sub-categories that are related to the three research sub-questions and connected to the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence which form the categories. To have a specific perception of Teaching Excellence entails teachers having corresponding "excellent" characteristics that help them identify the "excellent" means to utilize to ensure attaining Teaching Excellence. This interrelatedness is very clear in the overlap that exists among the responses of the participant teachers to the three research sub-questions in such a way that the meaning of Teaching Excellence is perceived by the participant teachers in terms of the teaching related practices and actions of teachers inside and outside the classroom on the one hand, and in terms of the personal characteristics that teachers need to have to promote their

opportunity to attain Teaching Excellence on the other hand. In this way, the participant teachers' perceptions about the meaning of Teaching Excellence, characteristics of excellent teachers, and means to attain Teaching Excellence comprise a cycle or closed chain made up of three interconnected rings that complement and supplement each other. That is, the perception that teachers have about Teaching Excellence is manifested by virtue of their practices, which require teachers to have specific personal characteristics in order to enhance these practices and ensure the attainment Teaching Excellence. In other words, attaining Teaching Excellence is fostered by the perceptions that teachers have about excellence in teaching and enhanced by specific personal characteristics that teachers need to have. This takes us back to the relationship that exists between the values and beliefs that teachers have about teaching and excellence in teaching on the one hand and their actual practices on and off stage on the other hand; which means the relationship between their "espoused theories" and their "theories in Use" which explained earlier.

The interpretation of results emerged from the responses of the participant teachers, in which the researcher found an interrelatedness among the answers to the three interview questions: 1) what does Teaching Excellence mean to you? 2) What are the characteristics that you think excellent teachers should have? and 3) what are the means that you think are best to lead to Teaching Excellence? This stresses the fact that the participant teachers could not separate their perceptions of the notion or concept or even the term Teaching Excellence from the teaching practices and from the characteristics of teachers that they think or consider to be *excellent*. This is supported by Dunkin (1995) and Hillier (2002) who claim that teachers act according to the way they think. This explains why the participant teachers expressed their understanding of Teaching Excellence in terms of the strategies they recommend teachers to utilize in their classes, through the characteristics

they advise the teachers in HEIs to adopt and through the efforts they suggest teachers to exert through their engagement in different kinds of professional development activities.

Based on this observation of the overlap or interconnectedness in the responses of the participant teachers, the interpretation of the findings in this research study will be carried out through the analytic categories holistically. This method is intended to allow for better reflection on the responses and deeper understanding of the obtained results.

The findings from this research study enabled the researcher to draw conclusions about the attributes of Teaching Excellence according to the participant teachers. After that these attributes will be interpreted to obtain the perceptions that the participant teachers have of Teaching Excellence and relate them to the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence that constitute the theoretical framework of this study. The first attribute that the participant teachers emphasized was "being highly knowledgeable about the taught subject matter", which can best be interpreted as an element of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence. In terms of attributes that relate to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, participant teachers emphasized the importance of 1) communicating the message, 2) engaging students in their own learning, 3) meeting students' needs and interests, 4) participating in professional development, and 5) characteristics of Excellent teachers. The orientation that some teachers displayed towards meeting labour market demands is consistent with the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Finally, the teachers' emphasis on building critical thinkers shares some elements with the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, although the reality of the Lebanese context means that their understandings and practices of this concept diverges significantly from Skelton's understanding.

Starting with the first attribute, being highly knowledgeable in the subject matter being taught is the cornerstone of teaching and the principal attribute of Teaching Excellence (Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Horan, 1991; Kreber, 2002). It can also be classified as one of the main characteristics of excellent teachers that participant teachers emphasized. Being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter enables the teachers to discuss related topics with the students at deeper levels by making valid connections with other relevant issues. More importantly, being highly knowledgeable about the taught subject matter enables the teachers to address the topic from different angles or different perspectives and therefore promote divergent thinking among students (Northedge, 2003) This attribute helps the students think critically about the taught topic and question, to argue about it, and even compare and contrast among the various opinions that exist about this topic. Engaging in asking questions about a certain topic or in relation to it makes attaining Teaching Excellence more plausible (Brew, 2007). In this regard, the participant teachers, as presented earlier in the findings section, emphasize the significance of questioning as a teaching strategy. This entails that teachers discuss the topic under discussion by asking questions. Employing this strategy enables the teachers to understand the way their students think, enables the students themselves to understand the way their classmates think, and more importantly, enables the teachers to teach their students the skills of asking questions. Moreover, employing questions is an interactive teaching strategy that enhances the engagement of students in their learning. Moreover, encouraging the students to ask questions about the topic enables the teachers to check on their students' understanding in relation to this topic, allowing teachers to start from where their students are. In this sense, the teachers' perceptions do not fall squarely into the traditional perspective, since this strategy is also one of the examples of the transactions that take

place between the teachers and the students as per the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Being knowledgeable in the taught subject matter is an attribute of Teaching Excellence that represents the foundation of all other attributes since all participant teachers believe that without a solid ground in the knowledge about the subject matter, one cannot even begin to think of attaining Teaching Excellence. From the starting point of having a solid ground or being highly knowledgeable about the subject matter to Teaching Excellence, teachers then need to think about how to communicate this message. This appears clearly in the responses of the participant teachers who work in different contexts and whose responses focused on translating their perceptions of Teaching Excellence into practices that teachers do on or off stage. These practices emphasized the significance of the ability of the teachers, who need in the first place to be knowledgeable in the taught subject matter, to communicate the intended knowledge to their respective students making sure to reach them all by addressing all their learning styles, needs and interests. This entails that the teachers need to be motivated to educate themselves about the various existing learning theories, read and research to update their information about the subject matter they teach, and ready to seek various strategies that can be employed in the classroom to ensure communicating the intended knowledge of predetermined learning outcomes to all students with their individual differences and thus meeting their various interests and needs.

Many educators acknowledge the existence of individual differences among students in higher education; and therefore, mastering and utilizing different teaching strategies to reach all students is considered essential for providing high quality teaching and thus ensuring better learning for all students (Arreola, 2007; Burgess, 2000; Chism,

1999; Duff, 2003; Horan, 1991; Macfarlane, 2007; Pekarsky, 2009). This is supported by the participant teacher Frank who considers that "matching the instructional strategies to student needs along with having the expertise in the content matter improves the quality of teaching" and an indicator of Teaching Excellence. Beth seems to be highly concerned to be successful with her students. This success can be enhanced through reflecting on teaching (Brookfield, 1995; Kember; 2002; Palmer, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Schon, 1983; Terenzini, 1999) whereby she explained that "I always reflect on my teaching to check to what extent I have been successful with my students." For Beth, reflection is one of the essential means to attain Teaching Excellence. Jakie from her perspective agrees that addressing students' needs and interests is a sign of Teaching Excellence; nevertheless, she considers that reaching the students can be done through effective communication with them. In this regard she declares that "the [teacher's] ability to effectively interact with the students" is an indicator of Teaching Excellence which fall under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Thus, communicating the message is based on being knowledgeable about the various teaching strategies and mastering their use in alignment with the different learning styles of the students. Accordingly, from the perspective of the participant teachers, attaining Teaching Excellence entails that teachers either tailor teaching strategies or select the appropriate strategy that best suits their students. It is evident form the responses of the participant teachers that they consider reaching all their students in their teaching as a major challenge. At the same time, they are aware of the significance of communicating the message and its positive impact on their students' learning.

After the importance of communicating the message to students through tailoring or

selecting teaching strategies, another attribute of Teaching Excellence that emerged was addressing students' needs. This attribute dictates that teachers need to think seriously of addressing students' needs and interests and attend to all their individual differences. The use of various teaching strategies can be deployed as a tool to address the individual differences that exist among the students in any given class in terms of their different learning styles and in meeting their different needs and various interests. As Koreena declares, one of the essential indicators of Teaching Excellence is to "develop different strategies to teach all my students in different ways in order not to be in a static position." This positions the students in the heart of Teaching Excellence, Psychologized, as perceived by the participant teachers.

Foremost among the teaching strategies that teachers need to be knowledgeable about in order to succeed in communicating the message or conveying the intended knowledge to their students is interactive teaching strategies. The use of interactive teaching strategies is believed by the participant teachers to ensure the engagement of the students in their own learning. More specifically, the interactive teaching strategies that appeared to be most often recommended by the participant teachers are the student-centered learning strategies. Through the use of interactive teaching strategies, the students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the learning-teaching process. This occurs through their active participation and their involvement in daily class discussions, group work, and hands-on activities.

Student-centered learning strategies ensure reaching all students while considering their individual differences and engaging them in their own learning. Educators like Light, Calkins, Luna, & Drane (2009), Postareff, Lindblom-Ylanne & Nevgi, (2007) and Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse (1999) emphasize the importance of employing the student centered

learning strategies. SCL strategies are based on positioning the student at the center of the leaning-teaching process, whereby teachers are entitled to tailor instructional strategies that engage the students in their own learning that render them active players in their learning instead of passive recipients. This was explicitly announced by many participant teachers who either consider SCL as their teaching philosophy, or consider engaging the students in their own learning through group or team work not only to communicate a message but also to empower the students to experience, explore and interpret the information from different perspectives when shared with other students.

Accordingly, the participant teachers agreed that the utilization of SCL strategies is the main means that teachers can use to attain Teaching Excellence. This was clearly expressed by Frank who respectively stated that "when I say that my philosophy [in teaching] is student-centered, this means this is what I do in the classroom, but this requires that I know the subject matter and requires that I know how to plan to deliver the content matter" and by Beth who declared that "I'm a strong believer in student-centered classes, in terms of activities, in terms of course content, in terms of assessment."

Other participant teachers did not explicitly or literally mention the term student-centered in their responses, but they affirmed that the utilization of group work or team work as a main teaching strategy in their classes to ensure the active engagement of students in their learning is a means of attaining Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, Fred was very firm about the importance of using group or cooperative work among students when he explained that giving the students the opportunity to sit together and discuss a certain topic does not only help them learn more about that topic, but also enhances the team work spirit among them to improve their communication skills. In this regard he confirmed that "I insist on pair work, and I insist on, group work, not because they have to

learn a concept only, but because they have to learn how to communicate, how to do team work, and, it's not part of our culture." For Koreena "teamwork is very encouraging, as it helps students to learn from each other." Jakie states that "to know the others, to be open, and have an open view to the others, to the outside…where working in groups can be a chance to expose students to; through this we can reach this excellence."

Interactive strategies are intended to be employed in classes to replace lecturing, which is a passive teaching strategy that is attacked by all participant teachers. Lecturing as a form of passive learning belongs to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005) and is described by most participant teachers to be a "boring" strategy that does not help students to maintain the information they learned in the class, as the participant teacher Moren expressed. Lecturing, the teaching strategy that was once dominant in classrooms in HEIs, is one of the basic features of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, which was the overriding philosophy in higher education for quite a long period of time, as Skelton (2005) has argued. Lecturing is now being replaced, or at least is recommended to be replaced, by an array of teaching strategies that have been developed to meet the various needs of the students and satisfy their interests. Therefore, the fading away of lecturing, along with the massification that opened greater opportunities for students who are eligible for higher education to enrol in HEIs, indicate that the perceptions of the participant teachers of Teaching Excellence do not belong to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

The employment of interactive teaching strategies in general and student-centered learning in particular ensures engaging students in their learning, which is another attribute of Teaching Excellence that emerged from the participant teachers' responses. Engaging students in their own learning helps students to learn better (Ho et al., 2001) and to

maintain the taught information for a long time, in addition to making learning exciting and enjoyable. Engaging the students in their learning helps the students to construct their own and unique understanding (Ho et al., 2001). This uniqueness in understanding is based on the uniqueness of each student's previous knowledge and prior experiences and augmented by the individual differences that exist among students at all levels (Skelton, 2005). Building such an understanding can be enhanced by teaching the students how to relate the new information to the relevant pre-existing information that the students have. This requires students to build a kind of relationship with their teachers as well as with the information itself. Building such a relationship is considered as a feature of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as proposed by Skelton (2005).

The importance of engaging students entails that teachers themselves have certain characteristics. These characteristics focus on the personal characteristics of teachers such as being passionate towards teaching, showing care and support for their students, inspiring the students, and motivating them to learn. These characteristics are exhibited in the teachers' practices inside and outside the classroom. Inside the class, they are exhibited through the strategies that teachers employ to make learning enjoyable and interesting and create lifelong learners (Kane et al., 2004). Outside the classroom, these characteristics are manifested in the efforts that the teachers exert to be approachable and available to their students. All these practices require teachers to have specific characteristics enabling them to build respectful and productive relationships with their students. Relating Teaching Excellence to having such characteristics which foster the learning-teaching transactions situate the perceptions of the participant teachers under the umbrella of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Another attribute that emerged from the responses of the participant teachers and

that falls under the psychological understanding of Teaching Excellence is related to the professional development of the teachers through their engagement in various short-term or long-term activities or programs, whether in-house or outside the university, to improve the quality of teaching they offer to their students (NCATE, 2004; Resnick, 2005; Darling-Hammond &Youngs, 2002). The in-house programs or activities take place inside the HEI and are moderated either by international trainers or guest speakers or conducted by veteran teachers from within the university, thus taking advantage of the available faculty experience within the given HEI. The outside programs include attending regional or international workshops or conferences that occur outside the higher education institution or outside the country and are conducted by notable key speakers in related fields.

The literature is rich in perspectives and experiences that show the significance of the continuous training and professional development that teachers have during their teaching journey in improving teaching and thus helping teachers attain Teaching Excellence (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; NCATE, 2004; Resnick, 2005). In addition, it is significant to emphasize the importance of advanced training that teachers have in the form of professional development programs in improving teachers' teaching strategies and empower them to tailor special teaching strategies that best fit the learning styles of their students and better meet their needs (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2000).

Engaging in professional development activities was a concern for almost all participant teachers. The participant teachers appreciate the positive influence of professional development not only in improving their teaching but consider it as one of the means through which they can attain Teaching Excellence. In this regard teacher Beth explains that "through professional development like attending conferences, presentations,

and attending seminars, and at the same time, and by giving presentations in conferences, giving seminars, giving workshops helps you to update your knowledge to provide high quality teaching." Frank agrees that the professional development programs "definitely tends to improve teaching" however, it "can be done through other than workshops, … I think it can also be done through "Faulty Learning Communities." For Frank "Creating Faculty Learning Communities is very effective and continuous; each learning community [consists] of 8 to 12 teachers who meet almost every other week to do things related to teaching and learning. Learning communities continue to meet and work together throughout the whole academic year. This system needs to attend to the needs of the university faculty members and this is by itself opportunities for students, for faculty members to take their own initiatives to improve." These perspectives of the participant teachers Frank and Beth seem to concur because they teach in the same university and they have the same opportunities for professional development.

However, although the teachers spoke positively about the significance of engaging in professional development programs, their engagement did not appear to be structured in any of the selected Universities in this research study. The participant teachers in the selected Universities for this study appeared to be strongly encouraged by their Universities to engage in short or long term professional development activities. However, this engagement was revealed to be optional and no special funds were allocated for such activities for teachers from the University. This was affirmed by all participant teachers, including Rene who claims that "we choose the conference we want to attend and we pay for it…but certain teachers succeed in having the university pay for their expenses."

The various kinds of professional development programs aim at improving teaching skills, expanding teachers' their knowledge about various teaching strategies, and

enhancing the knowledge of the teachers about the topic or the subject matter they teach, thereby improving the students' learning experience. Professional development can be seen as a characteristic of excellent teachers who are continuous learners and who are always motivated to update their knowledge about the content, teaching strategies and other related issues in order to reach all their students with their individual differences (Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Kreber, 2002; Sherman et al.; 1987). Considering engagement in professional development activities as an attribute of Teaching Excellence can be related not only to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, but in reality to all four understandings of Teaching Excellence that are explained by Skelton (2005). Professional development is related to the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence as this understanding entails that teachers be highly knowledgeable in their field of expertise, which can be enhanced through engagement in professional development activities. Also, professional development is related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as this understanding entails that teachers be well experienced in the various transactions that take place in the learning and teaching processes, as well as highly knowledgeable about the various teaching strategies that can be utilized in the classroom and skilful in establishing respectful and productive relationships with their students to improve their learning. All of these aspects cannot be honed to a high level without the continuous learning of the teachers and consistent updating of their information, which the participant teachers agree can best be achieved through engagement in professional development programs or activities. Moreover, the idea of professional development as an aspect of Teaching Excellence is related to the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence, as this understanding entails that teachers always remain up-to-date about the new skills and knowledge needed by the new professions that exist in the labour market.

Staying up to date can best be ensured through engagement in professional development activities. Finally, professional development as an attribute of Teaching Excellence is also related to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, since this understanding entails that teachers stay current with the rapid advancement in technology and empower the students to argue and discuss contextual political, societal and economic issues, which the teachers also need to be on top of consistently. Being up-to-date in all of these entails engagement in professional development activities.

As mentioned earlier, an important attribute of Teaching Excellence that emerged from the interviews with the participant teachers was the importance of meeting students' various needs and interests. These various needs and interests include the knowledge and skills that students need in their future or prospective careers. This intention that the participant teachers have in regard to providing their students with the knowledge and skills needed by the new professions and careers offered in the labour market is an indicator of the participant teachers' performative perception of Teaching Excellence. One of the chief features of the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) is a strong focus on considering the demands of the labour market and making serious attempts to serve this market.

The performative orientation of some participant teachers can be seen in their emphasis on "skilling" the students and providing them with the knowledge and skills that will empower them in their future professions. For example, participant teacher considers the excellent teachers to be the ones who provide their students with access to the knowledge and teach them the skills they need. This corresponds directly to the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence and its chief feature to make the knowledge, skills, and the universities themselves available to serve the market. This was

also addressed by the participant teacher Beth who recommends that HEIs need to adjust their curricula according to the professions available in the labour market to maintain the sustainability of these institutions and better serve the community. Furthering this point of view, Frank declares that any HEI who does not make the labour market demand as one of its main concern will be threatening its continuity. This indicates a perception which is more related to the neoliberal view of universities as expressed by Barnett (2003). Barnett (2003) illustrates that the universities are building tight relationships with the economy and the market. This is reflected on the one hand by what Barnett (2003) calls adopting an entrepreneurial ideology and by providing the students with the needed knowledge and skills that empower them in their future careers. Moreover, this is also reflected in the introduction of new disciplines that provide the students with new skills for the new careers in the market as the participant teachers expressed different times.

From the participant teachers' perspectives, meeting the demands of the market is a shared responsibility between the teachers in HEIs and the administrations of their respective universities. The university administrations' responsibility in meeting market demands entails examining the market and introducing new disciplines that produce students who do not only fit in the new professions in the market, but also add value to the market. This added value can be viewed in terms of the resources that the university administrations make available to the teachers and to the students. These resources include the professional development activities that the teachers can engage in and the most advanced technology that teachers and students can invest in. Further to that, the participant teachers consider the process of introducing new disciplines as one that helps their Universities to face the fierce competition that exists among universities at the local, regional and even international level. Finally, the participant teachers believe that

introducing new disciplines to the university ensures its continuity, which also expresses the mutual relationship between the higher education sector and the labour market. On the other hand, the responsibility of the teachers is expressed by relating Teaching Excellence to excelling in teaching their students the knowledge and the skills that they will need in their future professions. Moreover, the teachers' responsibility is also manifested in the eagerness of the teachers to engage in professional development activities, whether inside their respective universities or outside these universities, for the purpose of enhancing their teaching abilities in order to empower their students and prepare them for their future careers.

At this point, it is important to explain the perceptions of the participant teachers about teaching critical thinking and building critical minds. Teaching students critical thinking seems to be of a concern to all participant teachers and to them it is one of the main features of Teaching Excellence. The participant teachers were highly concerned about building critical minds and helping the students to think critically as well as addressing taught topics from different perspectives. This entails that teachers need to broaden the scope of discussions in the classroom to include political and societal related issues. However, all participant teachers expressed their disagreement to this practice due to the political situation in Lebanon, the context of this study.

As a result, this perception does not match with the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence that Skelton proposed. As all participant teachers agree that they do not and cannot allow their students to discuss any political or societal issue whether sensitive or not due to the current political and religious situation of the Lebanon. This is based on the crucial confession that almost all participant teachers made in relation to the restrictions drawn around discussing political or sensitive societal issues. This practice is in

compliance with a policy stated by the Universities' administrations that dictates the necessity of preventing students from engaging in such debates to avoid conflicts among them. This situation can be explained in light of the political situation that characterizes Lebanon, which is best described as a state of "confessionalism" in which power is shared between various religious communities. Naturally, the students themselves belong to these communities. This reality created a consensus among all the participant teachers about the impact of the political situation on teaching and learning in Lebanon, the context of this study. This consensus is that teachers explicitly must not allow their students to discuss any societal or political issues in their classes. This sharing of power in the confessional system allows the religious sects to dominate political decisions, weakening the power of the government and its related institutions.

The unpolitical and noneconomic nature of the topics that are allowed to be discussed in class totally contradicts with the basic feature of Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence according to Skelton (2005). This means that the participant teachers cannot be said to align with the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Engaging in societal or political issues under the guidance of the teacher is very vital for students' learning as it enhances their critical thinking skills, promotes building a critical intellect, helps them to initiate future changes in their societies, and leads to wiser decisions. For this reasons, engaging in these types of discussions is considered as one of the essential features of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as proposed by Skelton (2005).

Consequently, teaching critical thinking and building critical minds cannot indicate that the perception of the participant teachers belongs to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. This is because the participant teachers' only route to attain this objective is by merely being highly knowledgeable about the taught subject matter and only

discussing or debating the content knowledge of the taught subject matter from various perspectives. For the participant teachers, teaching critical thinking and building critical minds to attain Teaching Excellence can be done when the teacher succeeds to make knowledge accessible to students and provides them with all needed skills that enable them not only to access the offered knowledge but also to use it skilfully and throughout their life which makes them life-long learners.

Another feature that emerged from the responses of the participant teachers is related to the rapid advancement in technology in terms of depth, breadth and speed, and more importantly, the growing opportunities to invest in technology to enhance or improve teaching and learning. The concept of depth can be explained in terms of the enormous number of resources that are available about one topic, while breadth can be explained in terms of the huge number of topics that technology makes available, and speed can be explained in how fast students and teachers can access these topics. This is in addition to the technological tools that are made available for anyone to use anytime and anywhere, including the classroom. Respecting the role of technology, which is one of the giant factors of the twenty first century, and appraising its impact on teaching and learning can be related to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). However, although teachers in the selected Universities, with the support of their respective Universities' administration, give their students the opportunity to take advantage of the advancements in technology and access the new types of information provided, this cannot be considered enough to qualify their perception of Teaching Excellence as belonging to the Critical Understanding as explained by Skelton (2005). This is because the participant teachers, as discussed above, do not satisfy the main criterion of belonging to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence, which involves debating

and discussing critical sensitive political and societal issues. Consequently, it can be concluded that none of the participant teachers' perceptions belongs to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005).

Why the Four Understandings?

Towards a New Understanding of Teaching Excellence

After this comprehensive analysis and interpretation of results in terms of Skelton's four Understandings of Teaching Excellence, the results or findings can still be looked at through another two different angles. These angles are related to the *generality* or *specificity* of these findings, or in other words the extent to which the findings from the participant teachers' responses are applicable or not to other HEIs in other contexts outside the country of this research study.

Significant examples can be identified to further explain the generality of the findings. The first example is related to the teaching strategies that are actually being employed by the participant teachers in their classes or to the strategies that they think if employed would lead to Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, the findings in this research study concur with the literature which all emphasize the effectiveness of the student-centered leaning strategies (Pekarsky, 2009; Little, Locke, Parker &Richardson, 2007) in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in classes and in turn pave the way towards Teaching Excellence. For example, Frank claims that student-centered teaching helps the teacher "starts from student's ideas and then builds on them", and Beth proclaims that she is a "strong believer in student-centered classes, in terms of activities, course content, and in terms of assessment." Moreover, Nilo emphasizes the value of "forming small groups and allowing the students to learn from themselves, from each other and then learn from the teacher."

Another finding in this research study that concurs with the literature is the criticism

or the fierce attack on lecturing which is considered to be ineffective and boring teaching strategy and therefore can in no mean lead to Teaching Excellence. In this regard, Kris believes that “lecturing should die”, Fred stated that lecturing is becoming “boring”, and Jakie recommended to “avoiding lecturing in teaching.”

A third finding that concurs with the literature is related to appraising student-teacher relationship and situating the students’ needs, interests and respecting the existing individual differences among the students in the heart and mind of the teachers’ practices (Barr and Clark, 2012). The participant teachers value the relationship between teachers and their respective students whereby Tom contends that “there is a spiritual and psychological relationship between the teacher and the student” and Albert recommends that “teachers should be the initiator of a close relationship with their students to build a culture of trust in the class. Then, learning can occur.”

In addition, the participant teachers share several ways through which they can address students’ needs and interests as means towards Teaching Excellence. These ways include reflection on ones’ teaching, responding to students’ feedback on their learning, investing in technology, giving the students challenging tasks, and being available for them. For example, Divina attests that “the reflections that we receive from the students either during the sessions, or after the sessions when students ask questions, play an important role in improving my teaching.” Beth emphasized the importance of feedback in improving teaching through her claim “I take [students’] feedback, and redesign my work based on their feedback. I do that even in exams, in midterms, in finals; I show them the format of the midterm, ., I keep it as is, ..., I modify it so that students can perform the best of their knowledge on the exams.” Frank agrees with

Beth and Divina about the importance of the feedback and reflection in his quote “the

reflection on students' feedback helps teachers to cater for the needs of their students."

As far as the importance of integrating technology into the classroom is concerned, Nilo relates Teaching Excellence to the increasing use of technology in the class and she even invites teachers in HEIs "to be pioneers in inviting technology into to their classes". Supporting availability, Sandra states that "I like to be available and approachable; for that reason, I used to have an open door policy where students can walk in into my office any time they find me there." Defending the importance of giving challenging tasks to students, Karman, proclaims that teachers always need "to challenge their students in different ways", and Nina adds that "this will help [teachers] to know their students and their learning styles more through their interaction with the task and with their friends."

Still another finding from the participant teachers' responses that concur with the literature is related to the concern that teachers have to meet the labour market demands in order to prepare students in HEIs for their future careers. This is perceived to be achieved either by providing students with the knowledge and skills that they need in their future profession, or through the processes that HEIs are following or suggest to follow in monitoring the quality of teaching and the teachers' performance. For example, the participant teacher Nejm claims that "the labour market is a field that HEIs need to respect.", and Lana adds that the administration in any one HEI "must always communicate with the marketing departments of the big companies and participate in their competitions" to enhance their learning and through learning from real life experiences.

From the other angle, the main finding that the researcher found to be very specific to the participant teachers and to context of this study is related to their perceptions about teaching critical thinking and respective practices of building critical minds. In this regard, discussing the 'what', the 'how' and the 'why' of critical thinking and building critical

minds, we find out that the participant teachers and the literature converge on the ‘why’ whilst diverging on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. Accordingly, the findings revealed that all of the participant teachers and the literature emphasize the significance of teaching critical thinking skills and appraise its influence on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning to lead to Teaching Excellence.

However, the findings in this research study revealed that the participant teachers have totally different perceptions of ‘how’ critical minds can be built and ‘what’ is the nature or kind of topics teachers can discuss with their students to build their critical minds. To explain this further, the participant teachers Lana, Moren, and Nina express their agreement on the significance of teaching critical thinking and build critical minds; however, they consider that this does not necessarily happen through discussing sensitive societal or political issues. In this regard, Lana states that “it is essential to teach the students the skills related to debating and presenting different topics…but not political topics…this is not allowed by our upper management.” The participant teacher Moren supports this opinion, as she relates Teaching Excellence to “enhancing the ability of the students to discuss moral dilemmas and express their opinion about them…but not political dilemmas…we are not concerned about discussing such topics in our classes.” Nina offers an alternative to engaging the students in political or critical societal issues through her description of what she actually does in her classes. She explains that “to avoid any conflicts between the students we prefer to discuss critical issues that are found in the literature and ask our students to come out with better solutions.” These claims of these three participant teachers run along almost all other teachers who participated in this research study, which indicate a general practice among all teachers that is dictated by the senior management or the administration of the HEIs that prevent such a practice and

influenced by the unique political situation that Lebanon, the context of this study. Accordingly, the political situation that the country of Lebanon experiences, whereby the power is shared among the different religious communities, does influence the teaching practices in these HEIs and their perceptions. This situation can thus be considered to be very specific to the context and is not supported by literature which did not reveal or even mention such influence of the political situation of any country, whether developed or developing, on teaching practices or teachers' perceptions.

Therefore, although the participant teachers show high concern and intention to teach their students critical thinking skills and build their minds critically; their practices which exclude discussing political and sensitive societal issues, do not situate their perceptions under the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as described by Skelton (2005) and agreed on by the literature.

Consequently, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005) which explains that building critical minds and teaching critical thinking can best be done through giving the students the opportunity to students to discuss and debate sensitive relevant societal and political issues to empower them to lead wise change in their respective societies, clearly contradicts with what the participant teachers think of the means of doing so. Therefore, this leads to reducing the possibility of these teachers to have a Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Based on the interpretation of the data of this research study, it can be concluded that the Understandings of participant teachers in HEIs in Lebanon belong to two of the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence explained by Skelton (2005). The four Understandings of Teaching Excellence in higher education that constitute the theoretical framework of this study which guided all the data gathering, analysis and interpretation of

this study. These two Understandings are: Psychologized and Performative Understanding. Accordingly, holding perceptions and practices that clearly belong to two of the Understandings of Teaching Excellence, led the researcher to suggest breaking down the boundaries that surround each of the four Understandings and may force limitations on the perceptions that teachers may have of Teaching Excellence and their respective practices. Breaking these boundaries will provide the teachers with better opportunity to adopt practices from different Understandings, thus enriching the learning-teaching experience and paving a stronger way towards Teaching Excellence. This seems to highly relate to the "espoused theories" and "theories in use" of the teachers, or the values that the teachers have and guide their practices (Argyris, 1976). The relationship that exists between the values and beliefs on the one side and practices on the other side in light of which comes first or which influences what, entails that teachers be open to the various practices and related perceptions that belong to any of the four Understandings. Accordingly, teachers may even alternate in the teaching practices they employ.

Based on the participant teachers' responses, it was evident that almost all of the various perceptions that the teachers have of Teaching Excellence along with the different described practices appear to match the various perceptions and respective practices that Skelton (2005) described and analytically categorized into four groups which he called: Understandings of Teaching Excellence. Nevertheless, although one significant perception about teaching critical thinking and building critical minds is supposed to be related to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence according to Skelton, this diverges completely from it. This was concluded to be due to the very unique and specific political situation that the context of this study presents and which was agreed on by all participant teachers to have high and direct influence on teaching and learning in HEIs.

Therefore, this theoretical framework has provided the researcher a point of reference to relate, analyse and interpret the findings in terms of the wide range of attributes of Teaching Excellence that this framework includes. This theoretical framework comprises a critical attempt to provide a range of Understandings that teachers may have about Teaching Excellence instead of providing one definition which may limit the perceptions and the respective practices of teachers. This validates the usage of this theoretical framework to guide this research study, however, while allowing a kind of easy flow or movement among the four Understandings through breaking down the boundaries among them. This will open the floor either to come out with a new Understanding that combines the attributes of two or more of the Understandings. This is what the researcher has suggested in this research study, or be open to other conclusions which explain that teachers in HEIs may have more than one of the Understandings of Teaching Excellence that are proposed by Skelton to best describe the perceptions and respective practices of teachers.

This allows the researcher to confirm the assumption that she made at the beginning of this research study, which is that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon, the context of this study, hold more than one understanding of Teaching Excellence, namely the Psychologized and the Performative Understandings. For this reason, the researcher suggested formulating a new understanding that combines the features of the psychologized and the Performative Understandings as proposed and explained by Skelton (2005). This new understanding is the Psych-performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This discussion section is divided into two parts. The first part will discuss all the findings that were obtained from the responses of the participant teachers to the in-depth interview questions with respect to the main research question and associated sub-questions that guide this research study. The second part of the discussion section will provide a brief comparison between the perceptions of Teaching Excellence with respect to the literature review section and Teaching Excellence as it appears in the responses of the participant teachers.

Firstly, out of the research questions that guide this research study, the first research sub-question was intended to explore the perceptions of Teaching Excellence from the perspectives of the participant teachers. The participant teachers' perceptions were included in the sub-categories that belong to the four Understandings of Teaching Excellence.

Under the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, only one sub-category emerged and this is represented by the perception of the participant teachers that the journey to attaining Teaching Excellence starts from the state of being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter. Accordingly, being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter emerged as the first attribute of Teaching Excellence. Kreber (2002) and Macfarlane (2007) consider being knowledgeable about the subject matter being taught to be an essential feature of Teaching Excellence. This corresponds with the perceptions of the participant teachers who consider being highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter as a fundamental attribute of Teaching Excellence. This attribute of Teaching Excellence emerged from the responses of the participant teachers and appeared to represent a consensus among participant teachers, all of whom indicate that teachers

must first be highly knowledgeable about the subject matter they teach. For example, the participant teacher Phill emphasized this feature, stating: “being highly knowledgeable in the subject matter [being taught] is the starting point that offers the solid ground to teaching.”

Second, five sub-categories emerged under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence which are: a) communicating the message to the students, b) engaging the students, c) meeting the students’ needs and interests, d) developing the teachers professionally, and e) characteristics of excellent teachers. These five sub-categories comprise four attributes that the participant teachers associate with Teaching Excellence and reflect the emphasis that the participant teachers place on students as the chief component of higher education in general and teaching in particular. The sub-categories, “engaging the students” and “meeting the students’ needs and interests” express the individualized focus that the participant teachers hold towards their respective students. This is revealed through the second analytic sub-category under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, “engaging the students,” which is an attribute of Teaching Excellence that centres on opportunities that the teacher can provide to the students to actively participate in their own learning. This active engagement helps the teachers understand the needs of their students on an individual basis and enables them to start from where their students are. The “meeting the students’ needs and interests” attribute of Teaching Excellence can be considered a psychologized attribute of Teaching Excellence as it focuses on considering the needs and interests of the students at the individual level.

With respect to the teachers’ elevated concern about their students, this concern is reflected in the teachers’ eagerness to provide high quality teaching to their students in their

classes while addressing all the individual differences that exist among students in all dimensions. This perception is revealed through the participant teachers' responses, which show that they consider Teaching Excellence to be manifested in the teachers' *"ability"* to communicate the message or the intended knowledge to their students, to actively engage students in their own learning, to meet their students' needs and interests, and to develop the teachers professionally. As a consequence, these practices are most likely to take place when teachers do their best to build a relationship with their respective students to enhance their learning, keep on updating their knowledge about the subject matter they teach, and improve their knowledge about the various teaching strategies that help teachers to address the inevitable individual differences that exist among their students (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2000). This finding indicates that the perceptions of the participant teachers fall under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005).

Further to that, the participant teachers show high interest in preparing their students for their future careers or professions. They consider that this task can be achieved by providing the students with the knowledge and all related skills that they would need in the *new* professions that are offered by the labour market. This interest in teaching the students the *new* skills that they will need in their *new* professions (Harrison, 2002) indicates the implicit intention of the teachers to communicate knowledge not for the sake of the wisdom behind it, but for its use in students' future careers. This special attention or significance that is awarded by the participant teachers to preparing their students for the new professions or careers on which the students will embark in the future is related to the trends of new managerialism and marketization (Morley, 1997; Skelton, 2005). This

situates the perceptions of the participant teachers under the umbrella of the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence as Skelton (2005) proposed.

The participant teachers first perceive Teaching Excellence to be related to the way in which teachers in HEIs connect with their students to deliver or communicate the intended message to them. This is explicitly stated by the participant teacher Sema, who defines teaching as "the art of communicating knowledge." Accordingly, to communicate knowledge, teachers in HEIs need to be highly knowledgeable about the various teaching strategies that they could employ in their classes (Dunkin & Precians, 1992) in order to address the various needs and interests of students in any one classroom, the various learning styles, and the individual differences that exist among the students. These various needs and interests include needs that are related to their prospective careers.

Accordingly, to connect with the students, teachers need to establish a kind of relationship with their students (Barr and Clark, 2012; McDaniel, 1985) that is built on trust, respect and other qualities that motivate students and enhance their learning (Elton, 1998; Horan, 1991) as perceived by most participant teachers. The importance of building a relationship with the students is most clearly articulated by the participant teacher Tom, who asserts that there is a "psychological relationship between teachers and their students… without such a relationship built on trust and love, learning cannot occur."

The emergence of four attributes of Teaching Excellence confirms the congruence of the participant teachers' viewpoints with the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). In other words, the Psychologized Understanding is revealed through the focus of these attributes on the students, on their needs and interests, and on the transactions that take place between the teachers and the

students, and on the relationship that should be established between the teachers and students.

Third, “meeting the labour market demands” is a sub-category that emerged to fall under the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence. The Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence is mainly reflected in the concern that the participant teachers have to educate students who are well prepared for the new professions offered by the labour market, and being well trained and highly knowledgeable in the information and skills needed by those professions.

In addition to that, Teaching Excellence is perceived to be related to certain characteristics that teachers need to have for the purpose of motivating the students to become lifelong learners. These characteristics include being passionate about teaching, being enthusiastic about the taught subject matter, being supportive and caring for their students (Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Kreber, 2002; Sherman et al.; 1987), and being a continuous learner by staying current with all updates, whether through research work or through engagement in professional development activities or programmes that enhance student learning (Darling-Hammond &Youngs, 2002; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; NCATE, 2004; Resnick, 2005). According to the participant teachers’ perceptions, these characteristics appeared to be vital for teachers to have as they enable them to be up-to-date with regard to the content knowledge as well as the teaching strategies to make learning enjoyable and exciting for the students.

The literature is rich in research work that emphasizes the existence of individual differences among students in different aspects, especially in regard to differences in needs, interests, learning styles, actual development and potential development. To effectively consider these differences and reach all the students in any one class, teachers need to

constantly update their knowledge not only about the content of the taught subject matter, but also about the teaching strategies that they can use. It is evident from the participant teachers' responses that the teachers as well as the administrations of their respective universities do appreciate the significance of teachers' engagement in professional development activities. Also, it is evident from the responses obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted for this research study that there is no structured professional development programmes in any of the five selected universities. Nevertheless, there is still explicit encouragement from the administrations of these universities for teachers to attend or participate in international professional development activities. On top of this, it appeared from the responses that the administrations of the selected universities plan and conduct professional development activities within the universities such as seminars or workshops in which they invite all teachers to engage. These kinds of professional development activities are intended to improve the teaching quality offered to the students, and empower the teachers to address the individual needs and interests of their students. This focus on providing high quality teaching to the students through engagement in professional development activities to update teachers' knowledge and improve their experience in teaching with the goal of meeting the students' individual needs and interests situates the participant teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence under the umbrella of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, as explained by Skelton (2005).

Furthermore, the participant teachers' responses revealed a main emphasis and focus on the significance of the utilization of active teaching strategies in general and student-centred learning strategies in particular. The use of such interactive strategies has positive implications for improving the quality of teaching and enhancing students'

learning, which are considered as the main practices in which the teachers engage in their classes to attain Teaching Excellence. This claim is supported by almost all participant teachers, who not only agree on the ineffectiveness of the use of lecturing as a teaching strategy, but actually attack it as they consider it as a "boring" strategy that does not help the students to "maintain the information delivered" and thus does not enhance learning in general. In this regard, Sandra proclaims that her "teaching philosophy is to make learning enjoyable and exciting to the students, which is achieved through variation in the strategies that teachers use...while staying away from boring lecturing." Randy also attacks lecturing as he states that "I try not to dictate notes, and I changed lecturing into discussion which facilitates or ensures interactivity." Kriss declares that "special care needs to be given to the methods that teachers use in their teaching…teachers need to change their methods continuously." Changing teaching methods constantly takes us to the preparation and planning that teachers are expected to do off stage or before they come to their classes. Changes in teaching methods are tied to the significance of reflection that teachers are recommended to do following their teaching in order to improve their teaching practices (Brew, 2007). The perception that the participant teachers have regarding the need to reflect on one's own work is one of the features of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). Therefore, planning and reflection are two features that emerged to be related to the meaning that the participant teachers attach to Teaching Excellence and at the same time are considered as means to attain Teaching Excellence. The significance of reflection points to the importance and influence of the reflective practice model that informs Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005). In this respect, the participant teacher Phill stresses the significance of planning and preparation on the one hand and on reflecting on one's own teaching on the other hand. In this regard, Phill

proclaims that “I reflect on every single session and later on I reflect on the whole semester… that’s why I do not teach in summers because it is the time that I spend on reflecting on my work of the previous semesters and preparing for the coming ones, taking into consideration the things that I found needed improvement.” Furthermore, Tony uses the exam results as a tool to inform him about the effectiveness of the teaching that took place. Accordingly, he declares that “the level of the exam questions compared with the results can reflect how efficient and deep teaching is.”

As a related point, another aspect that appeared to be a feature of Teaching Excellence is the feedback that teachers get from their students. The value of the feedback is confirmed by most of the participant teachers who describe the different forms of feedback that they receive from their students and appraise its positive influence on teaching and learning (Skelton, 2005). Interestingly, and according to three participant teachers, the importance of the feedback provided by the students is mainly manifested in being immediate and is considered as one of the informative resources that teachers can invest in during the process of reflection. In this respect, Tamara states that “the immediate feedback that we receive from the students in the classroom helps us in improving our teaching.”

This holistic interpretation of the perceptions of the participant teachers in HEIs in Lebanon, the context of this study of Teaching Excellence, gives a comprehensive indication of clear relatedness of the teachers’ perceptions to the Psychologized and Performative Understandings of Teaching Excellence, which the researcher suggests to label the Psycho-Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

This suggestion, which is based on the results obtained in this research study, reveals that Teaching Excellence in HEIs could have attributes that belong to more than one

Understanding that are proposed by Skelton (2005); in other words, teachers may have an Understanding of Teaching Excellence that is a combination of two or more Understandings of Teaching Excellence proposed by Skelton (2005).

This brings us to the second part of this discussion section, which is intended to provide a brief comparison between Teaching Excellence as presented in the literature and Teaching Excellence as it is represented in the responses of the participant teachers. In the literature, Teaching Excellence is defined in terms of the teaching quality provided to the students. Accordingly, the literature as well as the responses of the participant teachers relate Teaching Excellence to the quality of teaching provided to the students, assuming that the teaching quality provided is high. This assumption is related to the premise argued by Sallis (1997), who confirms that the quality of teaching does not necessarily designate that it is *high* or excellent.

In the literature, Teaching Excellence is related to specific characteristics that teachers need to have in order to attain Teaching Excellence. These characteristics range from personal qualities of teachers to practices that teachers carry out to support these qualities and foster the attainment of Teaching Excellence. In this regard, the responses of the participant teachers concur with the literature because the participant teachers emphasize the significance of possessing specific characteristics, such as knowledge of the subject matter, teaching experience, enthusiasm, and knowledge about teaching strategies on the one hand, while also stressing the impact of engagement in professional development activities to either maintain these characteristics or improve them on the other hand.

The literature relates Teaching Excellence to the ability of teachers to establish a strong student-teacher relationship. This relationship is crucial in order for teachers to

understand the needs, interests, and learning styles of every student in the class. A strong student-teacher relationship can be fostered by the teaching strategies that the teacher utilizes in the classroom. Likewise, the student-teacher relationship appears to be of high significance to the participant teachers who relate the attainment of Teaching Excellence to the establishment of such a relationship.

The literature relates Teaching Excellence to the ability of the HEI to satisfy the needs of the national economy through meeting the demands of the labour market. The contribution of the HEI to national economy can be realized through the efforts that the university administrations exert to respond to the continuously changing demands of the market to produce generations with new skills and knowledge that align with the new professions of this market. This agrees with the participant teachers' responses, which exhibited their belief in a direct relationship between Teaching Excellence and meeting the market demands. From their perspectives, this can be done at the administrative level and the teacher level. The former level is related to the new disciplines that can be introduced and to the curricula or learning outcomes that can be modified to align with the new professions, new knowledge, and new skills needed by the market. The latter level is represented by teachers' roles in communicating the new knowledge and skills as well as meeting the intended learning outcomes.

The literature relates Teaching Excellence to the process of teachers' reflection on their teaching, both in terms of quality and quantity, in order to improve teaching quality. Reflection or thinking of one's own teaching was revealed as one of the practices that the participant teachers believe fosters the attainment of Teaching Excellence. The participant teachers consider that the thinking or reflection that takes place offstage has a significant and positive impact on teachers' teaching, and in turn on students' learning.

At this point, it becomes evident that the features that the literature associates with Teaching Excellence concur with the attributes that the participant teachers ascribe to Teaching Excellence.

Reflection

From my experience as a teacher in higher education for more than 15 years, I always view teaching as a story that starts and ends at the same point, in the sense that it starts offstage and also ends offstage. Teaching starts off stage in the planning and preparation processes for the actual teaching that takes place on stage or in the classes, and ends off stage in thinking and reflecting on the teaching that already took place on stage. Teaching starts with planning for one's own teaching, including thinking about all the teaching strategies that are intended to be used in class. This indicates that teaching is an on-going process which is interconnected with other practices or components, such as reflection, that are revealed to be attributes of Teaching Excellence in HEIs. This uncovers a metacognitive process that teachers undergo for the purpose of improving their teaching and for continuous learning. The metacognitive processes comprise thinking about teachers' own teaching, the way they teach, the teaching strategies that they chose to employ, the feedback that they received from their students, the results of the formative assessments that they undertake to check for their students' understandings, and other aspects that tell them about their teaching and their students' learning.

Teaching starts with thinking about the content of the subject matter to be taught in depth and breadth. Most importantly, teaching starts with thinking about the precious audience that teachers will meet in their classes; this audience is the students. These students are described in many texts as the clients of the educational institutions, but I prefer to call them the audience. The audience constitutes an indispensable component of

these institutions, which cannot operate without them, or in more precisely, cannot exist without them. Therefore, this planning places high emphasis on the students, and on searching and finding all plausible and possible means to provide them the best quality of teaching and learning, while taking their emotional, psychological, and personal development very seriously.

Further to this point, while thinking of the teaching strategies to be employed in the classes, teachers ought to think of the teaching strategies to reach all their students with their various individual needs and learning styles. This is best served or achieved through the use of interactive teaching strategies that ensure the engagement of the students in their own learning. Thinking of students' learning is the chief goal and task of teachers. This thinking can best be informed by the direct and indirect feedback that the teachers receive from their students. Direct feedback is obtained through the students' questions and answers in the classroom while indirect feedback is generated through the student evaluation processes that teachers undergo at the end of each course.

Thinking about one's own teaching can also be thought of as a self-evaluation process through which teachers identify their best practices, or what works best with their respective students, while also recognizing what does not suit their students. Focusing on students individually is meant to emphasize the existence of differences among students in any context and highlight the significance of respecting these differences. This eventually is reflected in the responses of the participant teachers who linked the meaning of Teaching Excellence and the means of attaining Teaching Excellence to the efforts and the work that teachers do onstage and offstage. Moreover, this can be explained in light of the reflective practice model, which relates reflection to the various existing learning theories. These theories on which teachers are entitled to reflect in order to distinguish between what they

actually use and what they need to use instead in relation to Teaching Excellence (Schon, 1987). There are different learning theories that teachers need to learn about. These theories are considered the roots or the solid ground from which all teaching practices or strategies originate. Moreover, the learning theories inform the teachers about the development of the students in all domains: psychological, biological, emotional, and cognitive or intellectual. The comprehensive and deep knowledge about the various learning theories improves the teaching quality provided by the teachers. This knowledge helps the teachers to choose the appropriate teaching strategy that best suits each student in the class with respect to his/her learning style and special needs and interests.

Moreover, and like any other story, the story of teaching does not become meaningful unless it is shared with its targeted audience: the students. The teaching story is written by the teachers with the intention of being read and comprehended by the students. This supports the interconnectedness between the teaching and learning processes that complement and supplement each other, and therefore points to the respectful and productive relationship that needs to be established between the teachers and the learners or the students. This relationship means situating the students in the core of the learning teaching process and in the hearts and minds of the teachers.

As we see from the analytic categories and sub-categories, there is kind of overlap, or to a certain extent, a kind of commonality among these sub-categories in the sense that one sub-category leads to the other within the same analytic category and one sub-category is an essential element for another sub-category. For example, “characteristics of excellent teachers” is a subcategory that is highly related to all other subcategories that fall under the same or different Understandings, as it encompasses the different personal characteristics that excellent teachers need to have to be able to communicate the message to students,

engage them, meet their needs and interest, and develop professionally to stay highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter to attain Teaching Excellence. Also, teachers' professional development is a sub-category that closely relates to the sub-category "being highly knowledgeable" as well as to "communicating the message" and "characteristics of excellent teachers". Moreover, the sub-category "communicating the message" and "engaging the students" are interconnected whereby to communicate the intended knowledge to the students effectively entails employment of interactive teaching strategies, the most prominent of which are the student-centred learning strategies. The use of interactive teaching strategies enables the teachers to actively engage the students in the class discussions and group work and attend to their individual needs and differences. Moreover, the use of interactive teaching strategies as a replacement for lecturing, the dominant teaching strategy in the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, is intended to ensure that the information delivered is learned by the students and not only taught. This is referred to as the ability of the interactive teaching strategies to help the students maintain this information for life.

This overlap or interrelatedness among the sub-categories has several implications. First, it justifies analysing the results of this research study in a holistic way while taking all attributes of Teaching Excellence as they reveal in the participant teachers' responses and as they relate to each other. Second, this interrelatedness explains the complexity of the teaching profession and how significant it is to respond to the individual needs and interests of the students in light of the changes that are taking place in the world, most importantly due to the factors of globalization and technologization. Third, the interrelatedness within the seven sub-categories reflects the interrelatedness among the major components of all educational institutions in general and higher education institutions in particular. These

components are the students, the teachers and the content knowledge to be communicated by the teachers to the students.

At this point, it is significant to further discuss the impact of the consistency in the results that are obtained in the pilot study with the results obtained in the major research study. This consistency in the results obtained in the main research study on the one hand, and those obtained in the pilot study in addition to those presented in the literature add validity to this research study. Nevertheless, some of the results obtained, whether in the pilot study or in the main research study, do pose kind of challenge to the existing findings in the literature. This challenge is manifested in the perceptions that the twenty-five participant teachers of the main research study and the five participant teachers of the pilot study from the five selected universities have regarding building critical minds or creating critical thinkers. In this regard, Skelton (2005) explains that the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence is related to the open and free platform that is must be given to the students to make wiser decisions and lead vital changes in their respective societies. On this open and free platform that teachers need to make available in their classes, students are allowed to engage in free discussions about vital issues such as political and sensitive societal issues related to their own contexts and that touch their societies in particular and their countries at large. This perception is supported by the literature which supports Skelton's explanation of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Searle and McKenna, 2007). However, as is evident from the participant teachers' responses, such opportunities are not permitted by the administrations of the participant teachers' universities. This was revealed to be due to the political situation in Lebanon, the context of this study, which has strong influence on all the vital sectors of the country, not least of which the educational sector. This situation is what led the researcher to eliminate the

possibility of relating the perceptions of the participant teachers of Teaching Excellence to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as proposed by Skelton (2005).

Nevertheless, the participant teachers' responses still uncover certain features or attributes that belong to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. These features include the need for reflection on the teachers' work for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching, as mentioned earlier in this section, and the high level of awareness that the participant teachers have about the teaching strategies that can be employed to teach their respective students the critical thinking skills needed to build critical minds and create critical thinkers. Moreover, the efforts made by the teachers to employ interactive teaching strategies that empower the students through participation in their own learning is a feature of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. In addition to the participant teachers' awareness of the strategies that they can utilize to teach critical thinking skills, their responses show their high interest and eagerness in building critical thinkers and build critical minds. This was manifested in their serious efforts to encourage critical thinking by dealing with other topics which are not political or sensitive in nature, to avoid any conflict among the students and to abide by the policy of their respective upper managements. This compliance with the set policy, which affects their academic freedom, also reflects their awareness about the impact of the political situation that overwhelms the country and considering this as a shared responsibility. In regard of this, we find that the participant teachers do expose their students for the different perspective of the topic under discussion; on one condition that this topic be neither political, nor societal or even context-related economic issues. This contradicts with Malcolm and Zukas (2001) who explains the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence in light of discussing issues only wit in their political, social and economic context to empower the students for a wiser future.

Therefore, the *critical* empowerment of the teachers of their students through transforming the knowledge and thinking *critically* of it seem not to be enough to build Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence from the perspective of the existing literature on the one hand and from the perspective of Skelton (2005) on the other hand whose proposed four understandings of Teaching Excellence is the theoretical framework that guides this study. So, here we find discrepancy between the perceptions that the participant teachers have towards creating critical thinkers or building critical minds and that of the one that exists in literature. This drives the researcher to conclude that, based on the theoretical framework that guides this study, although the teaching strategies that the participant teachers employ in their classes are the same as the ones suggested in literature, yet the topics addressed or under debate differ greatly. Therefore, it can be concluded that the discrepancy lies only at the level of the topics the nature of which has a major role in deciding the kind of the understanding that the participant teachers have of Teaching Excellence.

From another angle, the responses of the participant teachers align with todays' trend in HEIs. This trend can be described as an effort to dispense with of the dominance of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence. From the perspective of the teachers and their respective universities, this is evident in their severe attacks on lecturing as the sole teaching strategy utilized in classes. They view lecturing as a "boring" and ineffective strategy that makes learning passive and does not help the teachers to address all students' needs and meet their interests. Lecturing is being replaced by the use of multiple teaching strategies which are interactive in nature, thus changing the passive teaching-learning process into active learning-teaching process and positioning the students at the centre of this process. This change entails building a relationship between the teachers and the

students the significance of which is reflected in the participant teachers' responses. Moreover, in addition to the attack on lecturing, elitism, which is the second major attribute of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, was also attacked in HEIs in the context of this study. This was evident in the massification that occurred due to the expansion that occurred to the HEIs in response to the enormous increase in the number of students who are eligible to higher education in the various regions of the country. Consequently, it can be concluded that the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) is not the understanding to which the participant teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence belong.

As for the relationship between the teachers and the students, this seems to be of high importance to the participant teachers. This relationship that appeared to be secured through making themselves available and approachable to their students either via the office hours assigned on regular basis for each course being taught, or through the open door policy that some of the teachers adopt, or even through the after class minutes that teachers stay with the students to answer all their queries. Most importantly, the significance of the student-teacher relationship applies to enabling the teachers to realize the individualized needs and interests of their students and respond to them by selecting the most appropriate teaching strategies that best suit each and every one of the students.

From another angle, technology is increasingly proving to be a highly valuable resource for teaching and learning. This is what explains the digitizing trend that continues to invade the classrooms of education institutions. The advancement in technology, or technologization, appeared to be a factor that teachers need to attend to and invest in in order to improve their teaching and attain Teaching Excellence. Attending to one of the two giant factors of the twenty first century is one of the clear features of the Critical

Understanding of Teaching Excellence as described by Skelton (2005) and is an issue that the participant teachers believe to be highly influential in improving their teaching.

From another viewpoint still, the labour market and satisfying its demands appeared to be a concern of the participant teachers. This concern brings into discussion the role of the HEIs in any given society. Traditionally, the role of higher education is to deliver the knowledge to the students for the purpose of acquiring the knowledge in and of itself, for the sake of gaining the wisdom behind it, and for the sake of truth. However, relating Teaching Excellence mainly to the ability of the teachers to teach their students the skills and the knowledge they need in their new professions, transforms the role of the HEIs from communicating wisdom to serving the labour market. This underlines the relatedness of the participant teachers' perceptions to the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Therefore, the Psychologized and the Performative Understandings of Teaching Excellence are the only categories under which the perceptions of the participant teachers can be said to fall. Eventually, the responses of the participant teachers explicitly reveal that they perceive Teaching Excellence from in light of the attributes of the Psychologized and Performative Understandings of Teaching Excellence. In regard of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, this was evident in their responses which revealed their elevated concern with their students' learning and the way they can reach all of them and satisfy their individual needs and interests through the utilization of the interactive teaching strategies, the most prominent of which is student-centred learning, which actively engages students in their own learning and helps them maintain the information acquired and thus create lifelong learners. In addition, the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence revealed in the high interest of the teachers to prepare their respective students

for their future profession through teaching them related information and needed skills. This uncovers the high interest of the participant teachers, although not explicitly stated, in satisfying the demands of the labour market to promote the role of the HEIs in enhancing the national economy and ensure the continuity of the institutions. Further still, the performative discourse is evident in the appreciation that the participant teachers have for the two giant factors of the twenty-first century, which are technologization and globalization. This appreciation is revealed in their responses and reflected in their awareness of the vast and fast changes that are occurring at different levels and the fast vast advancement of technology and their influence on teaching and learning in HEIs. Moreover, the concern that the participant teachers have about meeting the intended learning outcomes is another indicator of the performative perception of Teaching Excellence of the participant teachers.

A final point of significance that is highly pertinent to end this section with is the perception that the participant teachers have about the notion of quality assurance and quality enhancement or improvement. The responses of the participant teachers in the five selected universities reflect the lack of awareness that the participant teachers have about quality assurance and quality enhancement or improvement systems of their respective universities. The participant teachers either have no clue about the existence of a quality assurance system in their universities, or they know very little about it and cannot detect its influence on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their respective universities. This does not necessarily mean that the selected universities do not have quality assurance systems, but it detracts from its explicit influence on the teaching and learning process in these universities. The responses on this issue were extracted from their responses for the question related to the opportunities that their respective Universities offer to lead to

Teaching Excellence. In this light, the participant teachers did not mention anything about their awareness of the existence of such a system or its impact on the quality of their teaching. At this point, it is worth recalling the high interest that the Ministry of Education in the context of this study has in establishing a national quality assurance system that monitors the performance of the HEIs in the country. This is exhibited in the serious initiatives that the Ministry of Education has introduced in this regard.

Another notion of significance is related to the professional development programs followed by the selected universities. It was evident from the responses of the participant teachers that there are no structured professional development programs running in their universities. Structured programs refer to programs such as in-house continuous-professional development activities that are run in the universities. This observation is valid for all of the selected universities, except for one of the selected Universities which follow the American pattern and which does have a Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning that has created communities of learners that conduct workshops to which teachers are invited. Moreover, the responses of the participant teachers revealed that it is optional for the teachers to attend or participate in the various professional development activities, although they are highly encouraged and invited to attend these workshops. Attending international conferences or workshops is also considered optional for teachers.

Since Teaching Excellence is a concept that is under researched or not researched at all in the context of this study, this research study has implications at both the macro and micro level. This research study informs policy makers about the importance of considering the perceptions of teachers in HEIs when starting any reform (Fullan, 2000), and encourages or raises the awareness of the teachers at the micro level to actively engage in any reform movement that is intended to improve the quality of teaching at the national

and institutional levels. Moreover, this research study informs policy makers at the national and institutional levels as well as the teachers in HEIs about the means that can be employed by teachers on and off stage. This can be through providing continuous professional development programmes to help teachers stay current with the up to date knowledge related to their field of teaching, improve related experiences and skills, and improve their relationships with their students. Moreover, this research study has other direct implications on improving the learning experience of students in higher education in regard to the nature of the topics they are exposed to and allowed to discuss and debate in their classes. This is evident in the findings related to the perceptions and practices of the teachers about teaching their students critical thinking skills and building critical minds and which was found to contradict with the literature and with the explanation proposed by Skelton about the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. This specific finding is of great importance to this research study not only because it is found to be so specific to the context of the study, but also because of its role in raising awareness or even in alerting policy makers at national and institutional level about the impact of the political situation of the context of this study on the learning experience of the students. This in turn raises a highly significant question about the preparedness of the students in HEIs in the context of the study to lead wise change and engage in shaping their societies. This takes us back to question the role of HEIs and its relationship with the societies that host them.

Accordingly, the findings of this research study are intended to be shared with policy makers in MEHE to communicate the perceptions of teachers in HEIs of Teaching Excellence. This can at least be considered as a starting point to help these policy makers to make educated decisions on whether to consider the obtained findings in this study or to

conduct further research for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching in the HEIs in Lebanon.

In summary, it can be concluded that the perceptions of the participant teachers of Teaching Excellence in the HEIs in Lebanon, one of the Arab countries, belong to Psychologized and Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). This confirms the initial expectation of the researcher as explained in beginning of this study, when she described it as the Psycho-performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence.

Teaching is a highly challenging and constantly evolving profession that is highly affected by cultural changes. This is why it is vital that all teachers in HEIs as well as all administrators in educational institutions in general and higher education institutions in particular to continuously seek improving their performance to ensure high-quality teaching for the best of their students. For that reason, educators nowadays are calling for emphasizing the significance of active learning and its effect in improving teachers' performance and developing students' learning. However, for that to occur, structured and effective professional development programs should be established, the purpose of which should be to provide teachers with the best and latest instructional practices that lead to providing high quality teaching and attaining Teaching Excellence. High quality teaching encompasses extensive knowledge about subject matters being taught, mastery of various teaching strategies, a high degree of concern with meeting students' needs and interests, a commitment to building critical thinkers, continuous professional development, and having specific characteristics that enable teachers to inspire, support, and motivate their students for better learning.

More importantly, the administrations in higher education institutions are urgently asked to accord teaching work equal significance and appreciation to research work. In addition, the deans and directors should target teaching excellence to motivate educators in the teaching profession to continuously update their knowledge and experiences, for teaching is the major vehicle that stands behind educating and graduating the never ending number of students who are the basic components of the future generation and the fundamental component of societies.

The researcher finds it most relevant to end her PhD thesis with the quote, "Education is a human enterprise" (Glickman, 2004, p. 370), which was the first sentence she used to start her Master degree thesis. This is intended to emphasize the humane aspect of education in general and higher education in particular. Based on the research I have done, and as teacher in a university who is highly interested and directly concerned with the development of this sector, I regret to declare that this type of research study is very scarce in the Arab countries in general and in Lebanon, the context of this study, in particular. Accordingly, due to how valuable and influential the realm of education is, and based on the importance of research about learning and teaching in higher education, the researcher finds that there are many related areas of research related to the topic of excellence in HEIs in which studies can be conducted to further enrich and add to this study. These research studies could focus on understanding Teaching Excellence in HEIs from the perspectives of the students.

Another potential study of significance would be to study learning excellence from the perspectives of teachers and students.

Conclusion

Finally, this section will present a meta-comparison of the features of the four understandings of Teaching Excellence that were proposed by Skelton (2005) and constitute the theoretical framework that guided this study, and the attributes or features of Teaching Excellence as put forward by the twenty participant teachers in the five selected universities of this research study. This comparison will be based on the description stated in the table quoted below about the four understandings of Teaching Excellence.

Table 4

Four Meta-understandings of Teaching Excellence in Higher Education (Skelton, 2005; p.35)

	Traditional	Performative	Psychologized	Critical
Who for?	Social elite	Meritocracy	Individuals	Informed citizenry
Where located?	Disciplinary knowledge	Rules and regulations	Teacher-student relationship	Material conditions
Epistemology?	Pursuit of truth	Knowledge that works	Subjective interpretation	Social critique
Indicative method?	Lecture	Work-based learning	Group work	Participatory dialogue
Teacher's role?	Subject expert	Enforcer of standards	Psycho-diagnostician	Critical intellectuals
Purpose?	Cultural reproduction	System efficiency	Effective learning	Emancipation

First, in the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, higher education is designed only for eligible individuals who have high socio-economic status; in other words, the so-called elites. This is not the case anymore in Lebanon, as described earlier in the "Context of the Study" section. After the civil war, Lebanon witnessed a significant expansion of HEIs all over the country, which opened the door for all individuals to be

eligible for higher education. Accordingly, elitism was defeated by massification. In the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, Teaching Excellence is located in the disciplinary knowledge offered in the HEIs. This entails that teachers be experts in the subjects they teach. This was emphasized by the participant teachers since they consider that being knowledgeable about the subject matter being taught as the first attribute of Teaching Excellence. Moreover, in the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, lecturing is the sole teaching strategy that is employed in the classroom to communicate the message to the students. The responses of the participant teachers indicate that lecturing is no longer the dominant teaching strategy in their classes. Although some of the participant teachers indicated that they are still using lecturing in their classes, nevertheless, it is not the sole teaching strategy they utilize. Moreover, according to Skelton (2005), in the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, the knowledge communicated with the students is intended to enable the students to search for truth and for the knowledge itself, and accordingly the purpose of the HEIs is to ensure the reproduction of the cultural knowledge through the generations. At this point, it can be concluded that only one feature of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, being highly knowledgeable in the subject matter being taught, is represented in the participant teachers' responses.

In regard to the teaching strategy/ies employed in the classroom, the participant teachers asserted that they had started to use interactive teaching strategies in their classes. In particular, student-centred learning strategies, that are based on engaging the students in group work and hands-on activities, are the main strategies employed. During group work sessions or while participating in group discussions, students think out loud, listen to their classmates' way of thinking, and most importantly, produce their own subjective interpretations of the topic in hand. As explained by Skelton (2005), student-centred

learning strategies are the main teaching strategies that are recommended to attain Teaching Excellence according to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. From this perspective, the use of the student-centred strategies is intended to assist teachers in reaching all students while making themselves available for their students to accommodate their individual needs and different learning styles. The intention of the teachers to address the individual needs of their students transforms the teachers into psycho-diagnosticians whose role is to tailor a specific type of teaching for each student in their classes, leading to effective learning rather than teaching. The teachers' proximity and approachability to the students allows for a relationship to be established between teachers and students. This relationship is the core of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. This shift in the kind of teaching strategies employed appeared to be the intention of the teachers as well as the universities' administrations. At this point, the researcher can conclude that all these features of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence that are explained by Skelton (2005) are presented or emphasized in the responses of the participant teachers.

As far as the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence is concerned, this vision of Teaching Excellence is best attained through the implementation of the rules and regulations that are set by the policy makers at the macro level and by the administrations of the universities at the micro level. This *compliance* to the policies is represented in the participant teachers' responses through their agreement not to engage their students in critical political, societal and economic issues that are sensitive to their context, despite the fact that doing so impinges on their academic freedom. Moreover, their compliance is represented in their concern about meeting the learning outcomes intended for their students. The concern of the teachers and the university administrations to implement the

set rules and regulations affords the teachers a role in enforcing the standards and makes the purpose of attaining the Teaching Excellence to ensure the efficiency of the system. Moreover, Teaching Excellence in the Performative Understating of Teaching Excellence is based in the meritocracy model in which by producing students who are well prepared to be high achievers in their future workplaces in order to better serve the governmental systems. This goal can be attained by providing students with the knowledge and the skills they will need in the careers or professions that will be offered by the labour market in the future. This can be achieved by employing work-based learning strategies that focus on communicating the knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. Through examining the features of the Performative Understanding of Teaching Excellence explained by Skelton (2005), the researcher can conclude that all the features of the Performative Understanding are clearly represented in the responses of the participant teachers.

Finally, according to Skelton (2005), the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence focuses on educating students who are well informed and capable of discussing, arguing, or even criticizing a topic from different angles or different points of views. However, one important condition to attain the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence is related to the content knowledge of these topics, which must be political or social in nature and related to the students' contexts. Accordingly, the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence entails that teachers become critical intellects who are able to raise sensitive political and societal issues and transform their respective students into critical intellects as well. This can be facilitated in class by employing participatory dialogue, which allows students to become active and critical players in the topics under discussions. At this point it is important to note that the major role of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence is to emancipate students from any

restrictions that may be imposed by anyone at any level. Taking all these features or attributes of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) into account, it can be concluded that the chief attributes of this understanding in regard to its core component, the conditions that are linked to the content material and in regard to its emancipation purpose are not represented in the responses of the participant teachers.

Based on this brief meta- comparison of the features of the four understandings of Teaching Excellence that are proposed by Skelton (2005) and constitute the theoretical framework that guided this study, with the attributes or features of Teaching Excellence as presented by the twenty-five participant teachers in the five selected universities of this research study, the researcher can emphasize the conclusion reached from the interpretation of results. This conclusion states that the participant teachers in HEIs in Lebanon have a combination of perceptions and practices of two understandings of Teaching Excellence. These understandings are the Psychologized and the Performative Understandings of Teaching Excellence.

Consequently, this conclusion leads to the inference that the understanding of Teaching Excellence of teachers in HEs can belong to more than one understanding, based on the attributes that the teachers relate to Teaching Excellence and to the practices that the teachers engage in and through which they perceive they can attain Teaching Excellence.

Therefore, the researcher suggests adding new understandings to the framework, which are combinations of two or more of the existing understandings that Skelton proposed. This could include new Understandings such as the one concluded in this research study, the Psycho-Performative Understanding, or other Understandings such as a

Psycho-Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence to explain an understanding that may fall under the Critical and Psychologized Understandings of Teaching Excellence.

A final outcome from this research study indicates a shared responsibility for providing high quality teaching to the students and attaining Teaching Excellence in HEIs. This responsibility can be represented in the form of a continuum whereby the teachers in any HEI occupy the first end of this continuum, while the administrations and policy makers in the same HEI occupy the other end. The administrations and policy makers of HEIs are responsible for providing all the needed resources to the teachers, the most important of which are professional development programs. These professional development programs can be offered in two forms: short-term, or long-term or continuous professional development programs. The short-term professional development activities include the workshops, conferences or seminars that teachers attend or participate in for a specified period of time. The long-term or continuous professional development programs are mostly intended for veteran teachers in HEIs and involve engagement in courses that extend over a period of time to help the teachers improve professionally. Providing and funding these forms of professional development programs on the part of the university administrations helps these institutions to create a culture of excellence (Skelton, 2005).

Another responsibility that HEIs must bear is according increased value and worth to teaching work with respect to research work. Valuing teaching work helps to create a culture of excellence and constitutes a crucial incentive for teachers to double their efforts to improve their teaching work, which occupies the second end of the continuum. These efforts include using multiple teaching strategies to communicate the intended message effectively, meeting the various needs and interests of their students and engaging them in their own learning, continuously updating their knowledge about the subject matter they

teach, and enhancing the personal characteristics that are necessary for excellent teachers to have.

Moreover, based on the results or findings of this research study, the incentive that the teachers see as a motive for improving their teaching did not appear to be the teaching excellence award. This is evident in the participant teachers' responses to the third research question, "What are the means to attain Teaching Excellence?" in which they did not recommend offering or developing Teaching Excellence awards as a means to improve the quality of teaching, nor did they mention anything about its nature or its impact on improving teaching practices. However, they emphasized the significance of giving teaching work more value, finding means to measure teaching, and relating teaching performance to teachers' promotion alongside research work and years of experience.

Moreover, meeting the demands of the labour market seems to be highly emphasized by the participant teachers as a shared responsibility between teachers and managers in HEIs as discussed earlier. However, the morals and values that underpin teaching and teachers' practices on the one hand, and the direct and significant impact of education on students and on the whole society on the other hand, were not emphasized by the participant teachers. This indicates that the role of higher education in society seems to be narrowly viewed by the participant teachers in terms of producing or developing professionals in the students' respective fields of study who are highly knowledgeable, skilful, and experienced in their new professions. Accordingly, in reference to the emphasis on the professional development activities and its significance or impact on improving the quality of teaching, the content of these activities can be expanded to go beyond disciplinary knowledge and related skills to address the morals and values that underpin teaching and education, which indeed ought to be disseminated to the students.

At the end, this research study ignites the interest of the researcher to explore the understandings of Teaching Excellence from the students' perspectives. The students who constitute the other chief component of the learning- teaching process.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Coding Processes

	Frank	Beth	Koreena	Fred	Jackie
What is your teaching philosophy? What theory mainly shapes your teaching philosophy?	Student centeredness Constructivism	Student centeredness Preparedness Giving quality feedback Connect to real life experience	I don't pretend, to have a philosophy I had some principles or guidelines, ah, I had some beliefs. Teach BEST, information, tools, skills, strategies, they need. critical thinking, let them think for themselves lifelong learners concern about students learning engaging students challenging students learning through assignments and principles	turning ideas into concrete visuals critical thinking	it's not memorization self assessment work in group think critically, we don't have lecturing. Put students on track

Meaning of TE **Knowledgeable** **Teaching strategies** **Building critical minds** **Students needs** **Continuous learner** **Create lifelong learners**	Collaborative work Service to community Aligning the SLOs with philosophy Reflection Respond to student feedback Planning Alignment of teaching with institution mission cater for the needs of students,	Innovation Preparedness Knowledgeable monitoring students monitoring junior faulty, eligible motivator connected with students, connected to job market connected to real life Teach students argument Build critical minds. Ability to argue	Being able to communicate, the information, the knowledge, which is in the books. Make knowledge Accessible to our students Knowledge accompanied by critical thinking give students skills, tools, to think about knowledge give them incentives to go seek knowledge outside. I'm not, the provider of knowledge, I'm a facilitator. excellence is not, just lecturing, or communicating the information,	that you are also an internal student as well, and you have to learn, and you can learn a lot from your students as well, develop different strategies, it's not be the static same strategy that you teach every year, and same way	good knowledge self-assessment strategy related to society; provide the needs to the society up to dated

			but it's in skilling the students, quality, certain quality skills, that are life, lifelong, ah, that have lifelong effects, long lasting, you give them, meth-, techniques, skills, competencies, you don't just give them information. You know even if your, you know, you have the most boring way of giving out information. Preparedness off stage Inspiring passionate, about what to teach accommodate students different learning styles		
Characteristics of Excellent Teachers	Quality of preparation Ability to transform subject matter	inspires, motivates Creates interest student to be curious to	Not necessary a popular teacher. who you learn from	maturity and the understanding of the other, and the understanding the students' need	interact with the students give the message and ah, know how to, ah,

	Expertise in subject matter Usage of various instructional strategies Addressing students needs Know the level and understand the students Think of himself as continuous learners Do research Reflect of his work	continuous learner spark in them curiosity (stimulate their thinking) professional caring, sympathetic diversity in view points Fair	who can instill love of learning, make learning accessible, make learning easy, who can relay the message effectively, clarify things Give tools to think about Challenge some of their assumptions, Make them think differently, be critical, Give them tools, Give students know-how, Makes learning relevant. Teach students how to communicate, how to do team work, prepare students for real life	Ability to project your knowledge didn't understand it in a certain way, then you have to try making them understand in another way patience	interpret, or the message

Actions to attain TE		Reflect on my teaching Reflect on Students evaluations of my teaching	We are not held accountable to excellence	We do a lot of international workshops, we bring a lot of international experts in the fields for us and for students	Being open to the outside countries.. opportunities
		High level of preparedness	It's just a cliché term on papers		
		Up to date knowledge	Respond to students complain… controlling excellence		
		Take TE as personal issue that I want to hit for the students learning	Nobody controls standards or quality by quality I mean excellence.		
		TE is not measured; No clear criteria for TE although it is one component for promotion	No violations of codes of ethics. the only control of excellence		
		CTL			

Appendix B: Pilot Study

A study for understanding the perceptions of teachers in HEIs of Teaching Excellence is intended to help in offering considerable understanding of the teachers' practices inside or outside the classroom. The study will also shed a light on the various tools or means that either exist or are needed to attain Teaching Excellence in HEIs in Lebanon. Consequently, the researcher will emphasize all the perceptions that teachers have, as well as the various means that exist in the different HEIs in Lebanon, of different patterns, private and public, that help in attaining Teaching Excellence.

The purpose of this pilot study was to explore how teachers in HEIs in Lebanon perceive Teaching Excellence by identifying the nature, the characteristics, and the practices that signify, indicate, or lead to attain Teaching Excellence through the interpretation of the spoken words of the participants. To explain this study more, four understandings of Teaching Excellence were identified to compare or relate participant teachers' perceptions to. The researcher's interest in exploring teachers' perceptions comes from her experience as a teacher in HEIs and bears a special perception of Teaching Excellence which blends two of the existing understandings proposed by Skelton (2005).

By definition, a pilot study is a small-scale study of a small sample that aims at examining the effectiveness of the methods and tools designed to collect and analyse the data for the original study (Jariath et al., 2000; Prescott and Soeken, 1989; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Accordingly, this pilot study was conducted on small number of participants to investigate the feasibility of the main study, confirm the workability of the original planned methods intended for the major study, and enhance the credibility of the main qualitative study (Padgett, 2008).

According to the results obtained in this pilot study, the researcher was able to think

and apply specific changes or modifications (Padgett, 2008) to the research protocol or schedule especially the interview questions.

Methodology

As planned for the original study, this pilot study opts for a qualitative interpretive approach whereby the meaning of Teaching Excellence as it is perceived and understood by the participants was explored and interpreted from their spoken words. The research questions that this study is trying to answer are typical to qualitative research studies as they are exploratory and open-ended to help in exploring the meaning of Teaching Excellence in higher education institutions in Lebanon which has never been explored before.

The research questions of this study are:

1) How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think can best lead to Teaching Excellence?
3) What are the characteristic that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to lead to Teaching Excellence?

The researcher also asked the participant teachers additional questions about their perceptions of meeting the labour market demands, and the challenges that they face in their teaching.

Data Collection: In-depth-semi-Structured Interviews

The only source of data for this study were in-depth semi-structured interviews which were intended to explore the perceptions of the participants of the issues addressed in the research questions in relation to the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The interviews included questions that were open and flexible such as “What does the term

Teaching Excellence mean to you?" and other questions that were more focused such as "What are the characteristics of excellent teachers?" Each participant was interviewed using a protocol or interview schedule that addressed the meaning of Teaching Excellence, the characteristics of excellent teachers, and means to attain Teaching Excellence.

The researcher, a previous student of one of the universities as well as previous instructor in one of the branches of the public University in Lebanon, is quite familiar with the various features of the higher education system in the context of this study, took appointments with every teacher and visited four of them in their offices in their respective universities and conducted the interviews in person. The fifth interview was conducted online using Skype software. Conducting interviews via Skype is becoming recommended by educators like Bertrand & Bourdeau (2010). Every interview took around sixty minutes. The questions included in the interviews tackled different aspects of teaching excellence like teaching philosophy, improving the quality of teaching, challenges faced by teachers, workload, professional development, and academic freedom.

The in-depth-semi-structured interviews were conducted by the same interviewer who is the researcher. All interviews were audio-recorded and notes were taken during the interviews to ensure capturing significant points and distinguishing quotes. Audio files were saved on the researcher's personal laptop, which is secured with a password, and were analysed at a later stage. A first stage transcription of the audio-recordings of the semi-structured interviews was done whereby all interviews were listened to and transcribed precisely. Nevertheless, this was followed by re-listening to the audio recorded material of every single interview and matching it with the initial transcription to ensure capturing all data and fixing any error. At a later stage, these transcriptions, which constitute the only input for the results of this pilot study, were summarized and categorized in relation to the

research questions.

Although the same questions were asked in all interviews, they were not always asked in the same order. The interviews' protocol addressed the following topics: meaning of Teaching Excellence, characteristics of excellent teachers, means to attain TE, student-teacher relationship, and challenges of teaching. The researcher intended to attend to the participant's responses by probing and picking up the question from the interview protocol that directly related to a specific topic or key term mentioned by the interviewee whether related to the research questions or to the theoretical framework that guides this study. This allowed questions and answers of the interviews to flow in more smooth and meaningful way on the one hand, and allowed the interviewee to sense the importance of his/her responses on the other hand. The researcher allowed herself to do that by investing in the flexibility feature that characterizes qualitative research designs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Sampling

For this pilot study, and as applicable to all qualitative research studies, a purposive or purposeful sampling strategy was employed to select the participants. Therefore, five teachers from three universities, of both genders, teaching in different disciplines and of varying years of experience were selected from three different HEIs which represent the majority, but not all, of HEIs' systems that operate in Lebanon, the context of this study. Accordingly, the systems of HEIs which were represented in this pilot study were the American system and the Egyptian system. It is worth mentioning here that all HEIs in Lebanon follow the American pattern except one University which follows the French pattern, one university which follows the Egyptian pattern, and only one public University which follows the national institutional pattern. Therefore, the systems that are not represented in this study are the French system that is followed by one important University

in Lebanon, and the Lebanese system that is followed by the only public University in Lebanon and follows to a great extent the French system. Addressing the perceptions of teachers in the various operating systems in Lebanon is intended to provide a solid basis of data in relation to the research questions. The researcher changed the names of the participants to letters in order to maintain the confidentiality of the study.

The table below shows the distribution of the participant teachers and displays essential features of the profile of both the universities and the teachers.

Table 1B

The Profile of the Five Participant Teachers in the Pilot Study from Three Different Private HEIs in Lebanon

Teacher	Univ. Pattern	Dept.	Years of Exp.
Frank	American-Foreign	Education	30 years
Beth	American-Foreign	Education	20 years
Koreena	American-Foreign	Graphic Design	7 years
Fred	American-Foreign	Psychology	17 years
Jakie	Egyptian-Foreign	Engineering/Architecture	8 years

Teacher	Date Conducted	Responsibilities	Workload/Semester	Gender
Frank	02/05/2013 (face-to -face)	Teaching & Administrative position in the Center of Teaching and Learning	3 credit hours teaching	M
Beth	06/05/2013 (face-to -face)	Teaching & social director for the Center of Teaching and Learning	6 credit hours teaching	F
Koreena	09/05/2013 (face-to -face)	Teaching	9 -12 hours/week	F
Fred	20/05/2013 (Via Skype)	Teaching	9 -12 hours/week	M
Jakie	13/07/2013 (face-to -face)	Teaching	20-24 hours/week	F

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this pilot study was conducted systematically in three main steps following the basic method of qualitative interpretive data analysis. This includes formation of codes or coding, forming of categories or categorization and finally finding themes. Open coding in this study was conducted by thoughtful reading of every single word in the transcripts in order to come out with relevant categories (Grbich, 2007). This was immediately followed by selecting the categories in relation to the research questions (Yin, 2008). Then the categories of related or similar meaning were first refined to avoid repetitions then grouped to reduce the data (Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro, 1988; Wertz, 1983; Hycner‘s, 1985) thus forming the main themes of the same meaning in relation to the research questions of this research study that are led by the theoretical framework of this study.

Coding is crucial step for data analysis of this research study. However, to generate these codes, systematic treatment of the data was done to reduce it into workable pieces of information that maintain the intended meaning. First, the data obtained from each semi-structured interview was transcribed carefully making sure to include every single word uttered by the interviewees. Then the researcher took some time to reflect on the notes that she took during the interviews and relate them to the data included in the transcriptions. This helped the researcher to maintain all the information collected and use it in the analysis. Second, the researcher listened carefully to each interview while reading its respective transcription to make sure every single word uttered by the participant interviewee was captured. Third, the researcher read each transcript thoughtfully while focusing on every single word and sentence mentioned to come out with relevant codes. As advised by Patton (2002) the researcher was open at this stage in a way to allow the

emergence of new ideas. At a later stage, the researcher listed all the codes generated from the five interviews, removed all existing repetitions and grouped these codes to form categories that are related to the same meaning and in turn to the research questions of the study. Finally, all categories were interpreted and grouped to form the themes that are related to the theoretical framework of the study.

The interpretation of the findings used in this pilot study was based on the theoretical framework which assumes that teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence in higher education belong to one of four understandings of Teaching Excellence: traditional, psychologized, performative, and critical (Skelton, 2005). These four understandings of Teaching Excellence are reflected in the research questions of this study as well as the interview protocol, and shape the teachers' practices and instructions. This theoretical framework suggests that in HEIs, teachers' perception of Teaching Excellence predominantly belongs to either one of these understandings. Moreover, this theoretical framework guided the analysis of data, whereby the participants' responses were analysed in terms of these understandings, and enabled the researcher to reduce the obtained data into more focused categories.

Findings

This study focuses on analysing, interpreting, and synthesizing the perceptions of teachers in HEIs in Lebanon of Teaching Excellence. This will be done in two stages: first, a description of the data which will be enhanced through analysing the data collected from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with teachers. Second, the data will be interpreted and synthesized in light of the four understandings of Teaching Excellence which constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. Therefore, the analysis is intended to identify the understanding of Teaching Excellence that teachers in HEIs have

following Skelton's (Skelton, 2005) four understandings of Teaching Excellence and based on an analysis of the data collected from five teachers through the semi-structured interviews. Nevertheless, the interpretation is still intended to be open enough to allow the emergence of any understanding/s that do/es not belong to the four understandings proposed by Skelton.

Meaning of Teaching Excellence

The perceptions of teachers in HEIs inform their practices and guide their activities (Dunkin, 1995; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Pratt, 1992). The main questions that were posed to the participant interviewees were about their perceptions of Teaching Excellence, their perceptions of the characteristics of excellent teachers and their perceptions of the means to attain TE. The collected data from the five in-depth semi structured interviews were first coded, then analysed, and lastly organized around analytic categories according to the research questions and then by themes guided by the theoretical framework of this study.

Interestingly, all of the responses that were received from the interviewees for most of the questions were actually in the form of description of the practices that teachers do or should do to express the meaning of Teaching Excellence or to indicate the means to attain Teaching Excellence from their own perspectives. Accordingly, the researcher noticed that "students" were in the core of all the responses in the different aspects considered by the teachers. Therefore, the various responses that the participant teachers described were coded and related codes were grouped under categories which were classified at two levels: the student level and the teacher level. Each category includes related codes that were first identified based on revealed patterns in the participants' responses. It is worth mentioning at this point that the categories used in the analysis below emerged during the interviews and taken directly from the responses of the participant teachers.

At the Student Level

a. communicating the message to the students

b. engaging the students

c. meeting the needs and interests of the students

d. building the critical minds of the students

At the Teacher Level

a. characteristics of excellent teachers

b. developing teachers professionally

At the Student Level

Communicating the message to the students. According to the participant teachers in this pilot study, teaching excellence is about coming to class well prepared to communicate the intended knowledge to all students despite the various individual differences that exist among them to meet their needs, interests and learning styles.

This is what exactly included in the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). One of the main attributes of the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) is to meet students' various needs and interests based on their different learning styles and individual differences. Doing so entails that teachers come well prepared to their classes while carrying in their teaching pocket dozens of strategies that they are ready to employ according to the students' needs.

Teaching Excellence as perceived by the five interviewees involves the nature and quality of practices that teachers carry out in different ways, whether on stage or off stage, to *"communicate"* the intended knowledge to the students. Communicating knowledge may include the various strategies that could be followed by the teacher based on the

adopted theoretical perspective or the learning theory that support the strategy. Communicating knowledge in this sense includes the various teaching strategies: "student-centered learning" strategies as well as teacher-centered teaching strategies. Communicating knowledge in this sense signifies the ways or the means that are being used by the teacher to convey or share the intended knowledge with their students.

This perception was reflected by the five participant teachers. Communicating the message to the students effectively entails that the teacher "be knowledgeable in the subject taught", as Beth declares, and is related to the quality of teachers' preparation for teaching. This goes with Horan (1991) who considers that along with teachers' expert knowledge of the subject matter they teach, the way teachers convey this knowledge is essential for providing high quality teaching. The quality of preparation is revealed in terms of the way a teacher in HEI is "[able] to transform the subject matter into something that the students understand using various teaching strategies", as the participant teacher Frank states. Frank adds that quality preparation "starts from planning for teaching" which takes place off stage. Nevertheless, for planning and preparation for teaching to be more effective, Beth considers that "reflection on ones' own teaching is crucial" which makes planning for teaching, the act of teaching itself, and reflection on teaching as three interrelated processes whereby each process leads to the other. The significance of reflecting on one's teaching is highly emphasized by many educators such as Brookfield (1995), Palmer (1998), Ramsden (1998), Terenzini (1999) and Rogers (2001) who consider the active engagement in reflecting on one's teaching at the quality and quantity levels as the valuable time owed to actively think about teaching and the various means of improvement.

Moreover, teaching excellence does not only involve thinking about the teaching strategies that we need to use in order to communicate an idea or a topic, but it also

involves thinking about the ideas themselves. This was a concern addressed by the participant teacher Koreena who, as an Art teacher, believes that the core of Teaching Excellence is to "turn ideas into visual or concrete [artefacts] that can be understood by students." Jakie went a step further whereby she thinks that Teaching Excellence starts from the ability of the teacher not only to communicate the message as it is, but also to "interpret the message." This concurs with the emphasis that Skelton (2005) made about the main features of Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence on the importance of considering students' prior knowledge to construct their understanding of new information. This entails the presence of a certain kind of relationship between the students themselves and the information in hand to deal with. Moreover, this also is in accord with the constructivism learning theory which stresses the importance of relating to the previous knowledge that students have in order to guide them connecting it to the new piece of information to be learned (Kember and Kwan, 2009; Ormord, 2012). This implies that the preparation for teaching that needs to take place on or off stage can be done in various ways which range from preparing and employing various teaching strategies to reach all the students, to interpreting the intended message or information to the students, and to teach them how to think and interpret their own or others ideas or messages in the future.

Engaging the students. Excellence in teaching, for the participant teachers, is about engaging students in their learning. Engaging students in their own learning maximizes their understanding and produces life-long learners (Pekarsky, 2009; Little, Locke, Parker &Richardson, 2007).

Teaching excellence does not only involve using different teaching strategies to communicate the intended knowledge, but it is more about the idea of engaging students in

their own learning to have better understanding and create lifelong learners. This is perceived to be best achieved through the implementation of student-centered learning (SCL) as declared by four of the participant teachers in this study. SCL is the "teaching philosophy which directs [the] work" of the participant teacher Beth and who is "strong believer in student-centered classes, in terms of activities, course content, and in terms of assessment." SCL is basically expressed in the group or team work activities that are facilitated by the teachers and give the students the opportunity to engage in their learning through communicating with the team members, thinking out loud, and generating independent learners. SCL provides teachers the opportunity to start from where their students are, whereby the teacher "starts from student's ideas and then builds on them" as Frank notes, and who in turn declares that "SCL is the main teaching strategy that I use in my classes." Nevertheless, Frank explained the strategy that he tends to employ in his classes which depends on the utilization of a smart mix of discussion-based lectures accompanied with tutorials which are called "Lectorials." In Lectorials "teachers can first present the needed information supported or followed with hands-on and group work activities that allow the students to engage in their own learning" as Frank explains. Furthermore, group or team work is one of the main features of SCL which helps in creating an interactive and engaging sessions. This perception was clearly reflected by four of the participant teachers Fred, Jakie and Koreena who respectively relate "engaging students in their own learning", "interacting with students in the classroom", and "creating interactive classroom" to Teaching Excellence.

Lecturing seems to be attacked by all participants. Lecturing is becoming a "boring" teaching strategy, for Fred, whereby he indicated that he tends to use group work to avoid using "boring lectures" to express that lecturing in its passive way is not favoured anymore

and gradually is being replaced with group work that entails more students' engagement. Jakie gives credence to this perspective as she also described lecturing as "boring" and she linked her perception of Teaching Excellence to "avoiding lecturing in teaching." Both teachers, Jakie perceives that "Teaching Excellence is achieved through employing group work as a main teaching strategy to replace lecturing."

Meeting the needs and interests of the students. Teaching excellence is about meeting students' needs and satisfying their interest. Meeting students' needs and interests depends on and is enhanced by the nature and kind of the relationship that teachers establish with their students (Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Ghonji, et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2004).

Teacher-student relationships are related to how much teachers are able to make themselves approachable to their students. This proximity is needed to help the teachers provide their students with constructive feedback that guide and improve students' learning on the one hand and provide them with the needed skills to empower them to become independent learners. This was evident in the quotes of all participant teachers who link Teaching Excellence to the efforts that teachers do during teaching. For Fred, Teaching Excellence can best be practised through teaching the students the needed skills and enabling them to use the knowledge provided effectively. Fred claims that "I do my best to get the message across, to give my students the best information, tools, skills, [and] strategies they need." For participant teachers Frank and Beth, responding to students' feedback and identifying their needs and working to meet these needs are practices that signify Teaching Excellence. This is explicitly indicated by Beth as well who emphasized that "I take [students'] feedback, and redesign my work based on their feedback. I do that even in exams, in midterms, in finals; I show them the format of the midterm, ..., I keep it as is, ..., I modify it so that students can perform the best of their knowledge on the exams."

Frank agrees with his colleague Beth on the importance of taking students' feedback to attain Teaching Excellence and considers that "the reflection on students' feedback helps teachers to cater for the needs of their students." For participant teacher Jakie, Teaching Excellence can be perceived through advising, guiding students and putting them on track. This even turned out to be Jakie's philosophy in teaching who notes that "my philosophy, is just to put the student on track." Moreover, Teaching Excellence is perceived through the efforts that teachers make in order to make sure that they have reached all their students. These efforts are mainly revealed through "understanding the students' need and being able to reach out and explain to them so they can grasp the idea."

Building the students' critical minds. Teaching Excellence involves teaching students how to think critically about various topics especially political or societal sensitive issues, in order to build critical minds (Skelton, 2005). Teaching critical thinking and building critical minds are among the most challenging tasks that teachers are invited to do. In addition, these tasks are becoming of more importance these days as critical thinking and critical minds are among the 21st Century skills that need to be instilled in the future generations.

Although thinking critically and building critical minds are intended and sought by the participant teachers, however, the way they perceive the critical approach of Teaching Excellence differs indeed from what Skelton (2005) explains and what the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence tends to be from his perspective. The need to build critical minds through teaching students the skill to think critically is necessary in the 21st Century to enable the students to face and accommodate the vast changes that the world is passing through. This entails teachers having extensive and deep knowledge about the subject matter they teach to enable them facilitate discussions, debates or arguments that

students may engage in about various topics or concepts and address them from different angles. This is emphasized by the participant teacher Beth, who declares that being knowledgeable in the taught subject matter is revealed through the argument that teachers can hold in the classroom and teaching the students to think divergently, thus building critical minds. Divergent thinking is enhanced when teachers demonstrate accepting others' perspectives and encouraging their students to address issues from different angles. In this regard, Beth considers that "the person who has the knowledge of content, [and] who has diversity can learn about [a topic from] different points of views." Moreover, although looking at a piece of information from different angles and manipulating it in different ways is a feature of excellence in teaching as emphasized by the participant teacher Fred. For the participant teachers Koreena and Jakie, thinking critically is a significant feature of Teaching Excellence which is best revealed through the teaching strategies that teachers employ in their classes to teach their students think critically.

At this point and while talking about the interest of the teachers in building critical minds and teaching critical thinking, it is important to emphasize their corresponding consensus about not giving their respective students the opportunity to discuss sensitive societal or political issues. This was emphasized by Frank who states that classroom "is not really the place" to discuss any political issues. Nevertheless, they have political clubs in which they can enrol and can talk about political matters." The other four participants agree with Frank whereby Beth states that "I don't teach political Science courses…. And therefore the topics that I teach in education are not related to politics." Fred have the same reason as Beth for not discussing political issues as he states that "I don't raise political or societal issues in class… maybe because the discipline that I teach is not related to politics." Jakie announces that talking about political issues is "not allowed in our

University… because we had problems in 2007 and two students were killed." Koreena agrees with the other participant teachers in regard not to discuss political issues in class. Nevertheless, she does that for completely different reasons which are related to time constraints as she noted that "we do not discuss political issues in class because I cannot jeopardize the time given for a course like studio course" and "because there's other things that we need to cover and also we have a tight schedule with tight deadlines."

The consensus among teachers about not allowing their student to discuss sensitive societal and political issues is open to discussion. This is due to the fact that the classroom originally is the natural platform made for learning, making mistakes, raising questions, receiving answers, and discussing various issues. This is facilitated by the teachers and can be done through the various subject matters whereby teachers are entitled to guide the discussion and help the students connect their ideas, look for evidences to support their ideas, and make decisions (Skelton, 2005). This is actually what critical thinking is about and this totally contradicts with the perceptions of the participant teachers. This contradiction is highly related to the political and religious situation of the country of this study, Lebanon.

Therefore, although of the interest in teaching critical thinking and building critical minds are present in the dialogue of the teachers; nevertheless, this does not fall under the umbrella of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005).

At the Teacher Level

Characteristics of excellent teachers. Striving for teaching excellence and practicing it is a state of mind that entails having personal characteristics that are modelled and demonstrated by teachers on and off stage (Hartung, 1972). These personal

characteristics are highly related to the practices that express TE to an extent that the participant teachers were sometimes unable to make clear separation between the practices that they think may lead to Teaching Excellence and the personal characteristics that they think excellent teachers have or should have (Kane et al., 2004).

Therefore, the characteristics of excellent teachers as perceived by the participant teachers in this pilot study support the meaning that they have of Teaching Excellence. Accordingly, for (B), an excellent teacher is someone who is "innovative, being well prepared, knowledgeable, [who] monitors students work and junior teachers, [is a] motivator, and connected to the labour market." This was also emphasized by her colleague Frank from the same university who considers that the characteristics of excellent teachers have "many dimensions: the first dimension is the quality of the preparation and planning, [and] the second dimension is the ability to transform the subject matter into something that the students understand; …… therefore the challenge is how you transform what you know as expertise in the content matter into something the students can understand….". Fred was even more specific in identifying the characteristics of excellent teacher. For him, the excellent teacher is "not the popular one or the one who has charisma or sense of humour… the effective teacher is the one who can instil the love of learning, make learning accessible, make it easy, can relay the message effectively, clarify things, give [students] tools to think about, challenge some of their assumptions." From another perspective, "the maturity of the teacher and her understanding of the other, the understanding of students' needs, in order to reach them and explain to them so they can grasp the idea." This was expressed by Koreena who also declares as an art teacher that "if [teachers] just have the knowledge and [they] cannot project it in clear manner, there's a real problem;….the idea needs to be clear for all students." Jakie was very brief in

identifying the characteristics of "a good teacher" but definite. Jakie considers that "a good teacher is the one who can interact with the students" but not only "to communicate the intended message"; what is more important is "the ability to interpret this message." Interpreting the message from different angles promotes students' divergent and critical thinking skills.

In regard to the additional questions that researcher asked about the perceptions of the participant teachers of meeting the labour market demands and the challenges that they face in their teaching. The responses to these two questions were coded and the related codes fall under two main categories:

Developing teachers professionally. Teaching excellence entails being continuous learners through updating teachers' own knowledge about the taught subject matter and improving their skills and experience in relation to all teaching activities like the teaching strategies employed in classroom. This concurs with Hutchings' (2013) who relates being "good teachers" to being continuous learners. Engagement in various forms of professional development activities or programmes are assumed to contribute to accomplishing these tasks (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; NCATE, 2004; Ramsden, 1993; Resnick, 2005).

Higher education is one of the sectors which is highly affected by the overwhelming changes that are taking place at all levels in our world due to globalization. Therefore, to cope with these changes while maintaining continuity, competitiveness, and success, teachers in HEIs need to keep themselves always updated regarding all the occurring changes (McRoy & Gibbs, 2009). Looking at this from the excellence angle, an "excellent teacher needs to think about himself or herself as a continuous learner." This can best be accomplished through the engagement in different forms of professional development

programs. This was supported by participant teachers Frank who, from his previous position as a director of the "Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning" in the mentioned University, created what he calls "Learning Communities." These communities of learners invite teachers from different disciplines within the university to meet on regular basis to "learn from each other", as (B) noted, and to discuss teaching-related issues as well as "the challenges that they face in their teaching and the possible means to overcome it", as Frank confirms.

Moreover, this centre of excellence "established teaching awards which are offered on a yearly basis to two teachers who really show excellence in teaching.... to encourage them to really improve the quality of their teaching." However, offering teaching awards seems not to be effective or motivating for all teachers in the University due to "the lack of clear criteria to measure high quality of teaching", as Beth declared. In addition, Beth stated that "the long or short term developmental activities that teachers engage are ineffective because they do not relate [in any mean] to the promotion criteria" set by the university. In this regard, Beth explained that the promotion "requirements at her university are related to research, community service and teaching." Unfortunately, the "research criteria are clear…but those of the community service and teaching are not." Although they are considered as short term learning, engaging in or attending conferences or workshops is also a form of professional development activity through which attendees or participants update their knowledge and improve their experience in their respective fields. The improved perception of this form of professional development activities is supported by Frank who declared that the Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the University "conducts workshops to provide opportunities for faculty members to improve the quality of their teaching." However, in the other two universities where the other three

participant teachers of this pilot study teach, it was clear that there is no similar centre. Accordingly, the engagement in professional development program or activities in these universities “is a personal decision…. [which] the university does not pay for” as Fred stated; however, the management still “encourage personal development”, as Koreena from the same university declared.

Furthermore, other forms of professional development activities like attending workshops or conferences are also available at one of the selected universities whereby teachers are invited to participate in these activities either as presenters to share their experience with other colleagues or as attendees. At the time when this kind of professional development activities are available and supported by the university, yet the University administration does not force any teacher to attend; “everything [any professional development activity] is voluntary; there is nothing mandatory. The university has no right to force anyone to attend anything” this how Frank explains the opportunities that teachers have for professional development at the University where he works through which he considers that teachers can attain teaching excellence.

Nevertheless, engagement in other forms of professional development activities like participating or attending conferences is not supported by the management of the universities where the participant teachers work in spite of the importance of such programs. Accordingly, these universities do not, either fully or partially, pay the cost of any professional development activity and in turn the teachers themselves do not compete for engaging in such programs. More importantly, “the promotion criteria, [in the university] don’t have clear indicators on how teaching practices are measured” as Fred affirmed. This concurs with a concern that Beth raised, as mentioned earlier, about the lack of assessment tools to measure teaching and the absence of teaching-related criteria in the

promotion policy. Furthermore, Fred confirmed that his respective university "does not have systematic [professional development program]; but every now and then, we have training in some aspects like technology, typically, blackboard, and [related topics]." These participant teachers declare the absence of systematic professional development programs in their respective universities that organize, facilitate, and monitor the engagement of the teachers in professional activities related to their field of studies.

Meeting Market Demands

Higher education institutions are from and for the societies which host them. From a performative perspective (Skelton, 2005) and according to the neo-liberal definitions (Archer, 2008), HEIs prepares the students to handle their future careers. This is done through providing them with the knowledge and skills needed for the professions or careers that are needed by the labour market. The labour market in turn enriches these institutions by providing them with opportunities to open new disciplines that ensure the universities' continuity, success, and effectiveness to the community that host them.

According to the participant teachers, meeting the market demand by HEIs can be addressed at different levels: at administrative level, curriculum level, and teaching level. Meeting market demands is considered to be more of an administration-related issue than teaching-related issue for participant teachers. This is mainly manifested in the way the labour market determines students' enrolment, whereby the labour market, as Frank declares, "regulates the admission" and "the enrolment in the different departments fluctuates according to the labour market [demands]." More than that Frank considers that any HEI would be "shooting itself in the head" if it does not satisfy the Labour market demands." Moreover, Beth considers the market demands is an issue that need to be considered at the administrative level by "introducing new disciplines" that are of need to

the market. Beth adds that HEIs are considered to be the “pool to the market” from which it attracts the “professional students with new skills.” From another perspective, and as Beth notes, meeting market demands can be addressed at the curriculum level, whereby the offered curriculum offered in any higher education institution needs to be driven by the market demands to “reduce the gap that exists between the university and the market” and to produce “professional students.” Also, Beth considers that it is significant “to connect with market in an attempt to connect with real life experiences”; this can be done through “developing and updating the curricula of the disciplines offered in the universities to best meet the market requirements.” Still Beth declares that meeting market demands can be addressed through “updating the knowledge and the skills that teachers provide” to enable HEIs to produce new professionals with new qualifications for the new market. At this point, it is significant to note that none of the participant teachers denote a relationship between Teaching Excellence and meeting the demands of the labour market. This is explicitly revealed in expressing that this is an administration related task and teaching or teachers have nothing to do with.

Considering the Challenges in Teaching

From my experience as a current teacher at higher education level, teacher trainer, and previous teacher at school level, I believe that teaching is a challenging profession. This is mainly due to the fact that that "Education is a human enterprise” (Glickman, 2004, p. 370) whereby the students, who are human beings, constitute the core of the teachers’ and educational institution as well as their product.

The challenges that teachers face in their teaching differ from one teacher to another and from one institution to another due to many factors like the difference in teachers’ competencies or like the differences in the context of the HEI. For example, the main

challenge that Frank faces in his teaching is the students' proficiency in the English language and "their writing and reading skills; whereby the English, as a language of instruction in the university, "is a foreign language for almost all enrolled students." However, Beth does not share the same concerns; for her the main challenge that she is facing in her teaching "is the heavy workload" in relation to the "very high expectations" that they set for their students. Therefore, from her perspective, such a workload hinders the teachers from providing all kind of support for their students to meet their expectations.

From another perspective, the main challenge that Fred is facing is "being fascinated by technology." Fred feels that the management in HEIs "put so much emphasis on technology, at the expense of quality; quality of the teacher. You have to be prepared, you have to be a knowledgeable, you have to be an inspiring teacher [in the first place]. [Technology] is just like the tools that teachers can use effectively or ineffectively." Fred adds that technology is important as long as it "serves teaching." However, teachers and HEIs' administration need to be cautious about the objective and use of technology. "With technology, we're forgetting the human element…. there's no substitute or replacement for the teacher. So [our university] likes the idea of technology; and if you know about technology, you know everything." Another challenge that Fred is concerned about is the evaluation of instruction that students do. Fred believes that students are not qualified to evaluate the instruction or the instructors; "students are subjective" in their evaluation as they are "grade oriented." Accordingly, he suggested that HEIs should either ask their teachers "to prepare their own portfolio as a self- evaluative tool" that document their work and reveal their growth, or ask "peers to evaluate each other." This matter led Fred to claim that he does not "feel supported in dealing with some students who give [me] a hard time."

Koreena has totally different concerns and therefore is facing different challenges. Koreena's main challenge in teaching is manifested in the competencies of the students enrolled in the field of design. This challenge is mainly related to the absence of specific admission criteria that are specific to the School of Design and through which "they can be more selective in admitting more eligible students to study design." Based on providing "equal opportunities to all applicants" the admission criteria to be admitted to the "math discipline are the same criteria as those for design." Consequently, the university accepts students for the Design and Architecture "based on their SAT scores" and these "students barely know how to draw…. this is the problem." Accordingly, Koreena suggests that special criteria need to be developed to the School of Design and Architecture whereby students need to submit a portfolio that includes their own art work.

Jakie is still facing a completely different kind of challenge. Jakie is actually scared from the "quick development in technology, in communication, and all the theories." This fast change that is happening at many levels entails "continuous updating of knowledge" otherwise teachers "will be lost." Consequently, this is an additional effort that is put on the burden of the teachers in HEIs who are entitled to be up to date not only in regard to the content knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching, but also in terms of technology and the ways of integrating technology in education, as well as in regard of adapting available learning theories to accommodate the occurring changes.

Interpretation of Results

This pilot study was based on the following three research questions:

1) How do teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think of Teaching Excellence?
2) What are the possible means that teachers in HEIs in Lebanon think can best lead to Teaching Excellence ?

3) What are the characteristic that teachers in HEIs think teachers ought to have to lead to Teaching Excellence?

The responses received for these three research questions were comprehensively shown in the findings. The general finding in this pilot study revealed that teachers perceived that TE is manifested in the teachers' practices which are best intended to provide high quality teaching to the students. These perceived practices at the level of students and teachers concurred with teachers' perception that communicating the message to the students, engaging the students, meeting the needs and interests of the students, building the critical minds of the students, developing the teachers professionally, and having special characteristics as means or requirements to attain teaching excellence.

First, it is worth starting with an observation that the researcher could find from the interviews that the two participant teachers who work at one of the Universities with foreign origin and follows the American pattern, were familiar with the "Teaching Excellence" as a term, concept and practice. However, this does not apply to the other participant teachers who work at the other University which is also foreign and follows the American pattern or works at still the last selected University which is a foreign university but follows the Egyptian pattern. The term Teaching Excellence is clearly announced at the first University with foreign origin and follows the American pattern due to the existence of a "Center of Teaching and Learning" in the University and it happened that these two participant teachers work in that center. Moreover, the participant teacher Frank is the one who founded this center and headed it for a couple of years, while the participant teacher Beth is now "a social director for the Center of Teaching and Learning" and shows enthusiasm to achieve the center's mission of excellence. However, similar centers do not exist in the other universities of the other participant teachers. Consequently, for another

participant teacher Fred, the term Teaching Excellence is a "cliché" word which just belongs to mission and vision statements and there is no clear strategy built in the University where Fred works that informs teachers the "what" and the "how" of excellence in teaching. This is evident in the following extract from Fred pertaining to the use of the term Teaching Excellence:

> "We only use the term [Teaching Excellence] when we write missions, and objectives…. But we use it as a cliché term. It doesn't mean anything for anyone, but they expect you to use it because, you have to use it. You cannot say we're teaching [only], you have to say excellent teaching. But the question is we are not held accountable to excellence. Is the job that we're doing really excellent? I don't think so; so we just have to use it; it's on paper, but I really don't think we implement it. We don't go by it, we use it, and then we forget about it in many ways. It's just a cliché term that belongs to catalogues, websites, and to brochures. I don't feel we're enforcing it in any way, so nobody has ever asked, or told us how we do things, in an excellent way".

In this part of the pilot study the findings will be interpreted, and synthesized. Accordingly, the interpretation, and synthesis will be structured around three categories that are directly related to the research questions of this pilot study which in turn are focused on the teachers' perceptions of the:

1- Meaning of teaching excellence (Research Question 1)

2- Characteristics of excellent teachers (Research Question 2)

3- Means to attain teaching excellence (Research Question 3)

Evidently, these three categories are aligned with the three research questions and

which were initially used for coding the collected data and displaying the results or findings of this pilot study, and also tightly connected to each other and to the main topic of the study. To have a specific perception of teaching "excellence' entails teachers having corresponding "excellent" characteristics that help them identify the "excellent" means to utilize to ensure attaining "teaching excellence."

At the level of analysis, the researcher looked thoroughly for patterns in the responses of the participants and for related patterns within the three categories mentioned above. At the interpretation and synthesis levels the researcher sought for themes that are related to the theoretical framework on which this study is based and was open for the emergence of new themes.

After presenting the findings in the form of codes and categories to reduce the collected data from the interviews, interpretive connotations to these findings will be provided. In the findings part of this study, the collected data was analysed or broken down into pieces of the same meaning to form categories that are directly related to the research questions. The interpretation section will reconstruct the data that was broken down in a way to offer a holistic understanding of the perceptions of the participant teachers of Teaching Excellence. During the analysis process the three analytic categories, listed above, which are directly related to the research questions and inform the main topic of this research study, continued to guide the analysis. However, what guided the interpretation process are the four understandings of Teaching Excellence that were proposed by Skelton and which constitute the theoretical framework.

Accordingly, the following discussion considers the literature on higher education in general and on Teaching Excellence in HEIs in particular. The implications of the interpretation will inform the perceptions of Teaching Excellence that teachers in HEIs in

Lebanon have in an attempt to examine the researcher assumption at the beginning of this study. The assumption states that teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence in HEIs belongs to one of the four understandings proposed by Skelton (2005) while leaving a room for exploring a new perception that the participant teachers may have.

Category 1: Meaning of Teaching Excellence

The first research question seeks to determine how the participant teachers understand the meaning of Teaching Excellence which is actually the topic of this study. Based on the findings presented in the Findings part of this pilot study, it was clearly indicated that the students were the in the heart of all the responses of the participant teachers. This was evident in the first analytic category and its respective four subcategories which constituted the final set of codes following the process of data reduction. The four sub-categories: communicating the message to the students, engaging the students, meeting the needs and interests of the students, and building the critical minds of the students all indicate that the participant teachers perceive Teaching Excellence in accordance with the quality of teaching they can provide to their students with their various needs, learning styles and interests.

This is perceived to be happening chiefly through the means of how teachers can connect and communicate with their students. This appears clearly in the responses of the participant teachers who work in different contexts and whose responses focused on translating their perceptions of Teaching Excellence into practices that teachers do on or off stage. These practices emphasized the significance of the ability of the teachers, who need in the first place to be knowledgeable in the taught subject matter, to communicate the intended knowledge to their respective students making sure to reach them all by addressing all their learning styles, needs and interests. This entails that the teachers need

to be motivated to educate themselves about the various existing learning theories, read and research to update their information about the subject matter they teach, and ready to seek various strategies that can be employed in the classroom to ensure communicating the intended knowledge of predetermined learning outcomes to all students with their individual differences and thus meeting their various interests and needs.

In this regard, many educators acknowledge the existence of individual differences among students in higher education; and therefore, mastering and utilizing different teaching strategies to reach all students is considered essential for providing high quality teaching and thus ensuring better learning for all students (Arreola, 2007; Burgess, 2000; Chism, 1999; Duff, 2003; Horan, 1991; Macfarlane, 2007; Pekarsky, 2009). This is supported by the participant teacher Frank who considers that "matching the instructional strategies to student needs along with having the expertise in the content matter improves the quality of teaching" and an indicator of teaching excellence. Beth seems to be highly concerned to be successful with her students. This success can be enhanced through reflecting on her teaching (Brookfield, 1995; Kember; 2002; Palmer, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Shon, 1983; Terenzini, 1999) whereby she explained that "I always reflect on my teaching to check to what extent I have been successful with my students." For Beth, reflection is one of the essential means to attain teaching excellence. Jakie from her perspective agrees that addressing students' needs and interests is a sign of teaching excellence; nevertheless, she considers that reaching the students can be done through effective communication with them. In this regard she declares that "the [teacher's] ability to effectively interact with the students" is an indicator of Teaching Excellence which fall under the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Fred also supports considering meeting students' needs and interests as indicator of TE (Skelton, 2005). However, he believes that this can

best be done by "*skilling* the students and giving them the access to knowledge." This means that the participant teacher Fred relates Teaching Excellence to the teachers' ability to provide their students with access to the knowledge not for the knowledge itself but to be able to use this knowledge and sharpen their skills to use them in their profession. This spots the light on the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence and its chief feature to make the knowledge, skills, and the universities themselves available to serve the market. When students acquire the requisite skills they will use these skills to learn following the Chinese proverb which requests not to give me a fish but teach me how to fish. Finally, Koreena from her own perspective declares that one of the essential indicators of Teaching Excellence is to "develop different strategies to teach all my students in different ways in order not to be in a static position." This again positions the students in the heart of Teaching Excellence, psychologized, as perceived by the participant teachers.

Accordingly, considering the implications of literature and the perceptions of teachers on this particular aspect, it can be concluded that one of the primary indicators of Teaching Excellence according to the participant teachers is that the teachers in higher education need to be acquainted with the various teaching strategies and make themselves ready to employ these strategies as appropriate in order to address all students with their different learning styles and therefore attaining Teaching Excellence.

This concern in building relationship with the students to understand their various learning styles and meeting their needs and interests brings the question about the move from elitism to the massification. Massification, which opens the door for all eligible individuals to get into HEIs, questions the ability of the teachers to address the increasing needs of the increasing number of students enrolled in higher education.

In accordance to this point, one of the suggested learning- teaching strategies to be

employed in classrooms is the Student-Centered Learning (SCL) that ensures reaching all students while considering their individual differences and engaging them in their own learning. Educators like Light, Calkins, Luna, & Drane (2009), Postareff, Lindblom-Ylanne & Nevgi, (2007) and Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse (1999) emphasize the importance of employing the student centered learning strategies. SCL strategies are based on positioning the student at the center of the leaning-teaching process, whereby teachers are entitled to tailor instructional strategies that engage the students in their own learning that render them active players in their learning instead of passive recipients. This was explicitly announced by the five participant teachers who either consider SCL as their teaching philosophy, which applies to Frank and Beth, or consider engaging the students in their own learning through group or team work not only to communicate a message but also to empower the students to experience, explore and interpret the information from different perspectives when shared with other students, which applies to Koreena, Fred and Jakie.

Accordingly, the participant teachers agreed that the utilization of SCL strategies is the main means that teachers can use to attain teaching excellence. This was clearly expressed by Frank who stated that “when I say that my philosophy [in teaching] is student-centered, this means this is what I do in the classroom, but this requires that I know the subject matter and requires that I know how to plan to deliver the content matter” and by Beth who declared that “I'm a strong believer in student-centered classes, in terms of activities, in terms of course content, in terms of assessment.”

From another perspective, although the other participant teachers did not explicitly or literally mention the term student-centered in their responses, they affirmed that the utilization of group work or team work as a main teaching strategy in their classes to ensure the active engagement of students in their learning is a means of attaining teaching

excellence. Accordingly, Fred was very firm about the importance of using group or cooperative work among students when he explained that giving the students the opportunity to sit together and discuss a certain topic does not only help them learn more about that topic, but also enhances the team work spirit among them to improve their communication skills. In this regard he confirmed that “I insist on pair work, and I insist on, group work, not because they have to learn a concept only, but because they have to learn how to communicate, how to do team work, and, it's not part of our culture.” For Koreena “teamwork is very encouraging, as it helps students to learn from each other.” Jakie states that “to know the others, to be open, and have an open view to the others, to the outside,...where working in groups can be a chance to expose students to; through this we can reach this excellence.”

It is significant to mention here that the participant teachers were highly concerned about building critical minds and helping the students to think critically as well as addressing taught topics from different perspectives. This entails that teachers need to broaden the scope of discussions in the classroom to include political and societal related issues; however, all participant teachers expressed their disagreement to this practice due to the political situation in Lebanon, the context of this study. As mentioned earlier, addressing such issues in the classrooms is prohibited by the administrations of the HEIs in Lebanon. Supporting this claim Jakie declares that discussing political or sensitive issues is not allowed in our University “Because we had a problem in 2007 where there was a big fight in the university, because of politics and students from the university were killed.” Eventually, in this specific regard, what applies to this University applies to other HEIs in Lebanon, due to the diversity in religiously affiliated political parties.

At this point, it is important to explain the perceptions of the participant teachers

about teaching critical thinking and building critical minds. Teaching students critical thinking seems to be of a concern to all participant teachers and to them it is one of the main features of Teaching Excellence. However, this perception does not match with the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence that Skelton proposed. As all participant teachers agree that they do not and cannot allow their students to discuss any political or societal issue whether sensitive or not due to the current political and religious situation of Lebanon, the context of this study, this totally contradicts with the basic feature of Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence according to Skelton (2005). Consequently, teaching critical thinking and building critical minds cannot indicate that the perception of the participant teachers belongs to the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. For the participant teachers, teaching critical thinking and building critical minds to attain Teaching Excellence can be done when the teacher succeeds to make knowledge accessible to students and provides them with all needed skills that enable them not only to access the offered knowledge but also to use it skilfully and throughout their life which makes them life-long learners. "*Skilling* the students to enable them use the knowledge in different situations helps build critical thinker" this what was expressed explicitly by Fred. Fred adds that 'Excellence is not just lecturing, or communicating the information, but it's skilling the students by providing them certain quality skills that [can be used] lifelong, [and] have lifelong effects, long lasting… you give them, the methods, techniques, skills, competencies… you don't just give them information". This relates to the teachers concerns to meet the students' needs and prepare them for their future. Accordingly, this perception of Teaching Excellence is more likely to be related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) and Harrison (2002). Moreover, also this may also indicate a perception which is more related to the

neoliberal view of universities as expressed by Barnett (2003). Barnett (2003) illustrates that the universities are building tight relationships with the economy and the market. This is reflected on the one hand by what Barnett (2003) calls adopting an entrepreneurial ideology and by providing the students with the needed knowledge and skills that empower them in their future careers. Moreover, this is also reflected and the introduction of new disciplines that provide the students with new skills for the new careers in the market as the participant teachers expressed different times. Nevertheless, not only satisfying the market demands is not explicitly expressed by the participant teachers and considered as a concern that needs to be considered at the administration level, it is also an issue that is not considered to be related to Teaching Excellence.

Category 2: Characteristics of Excellent Teachers

The second research question sought to determine the characteristics of excellent teachers from the perspectives of the participant teachers. Similar to the findings of the first analytic category, and considering the presented findings which are based on the responses collected for the second research question, it was also clearly indicated that the students were in the core of all the responses of the participant teachers which is directly related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence (Skelton, 2005). This was evident in the second analytic category and its respective two subcategories which constituted the final set of codes following the process of data reduction. The two sub-categories: characteristics of excellent teachers and developing teachers professionally indicate that the participant teachers perceive Teaching Excellence in accordance with the quality of teaching they can provide to their students in order to meet their needs.

In regard to this analytic category and through the responses of the participant teachers, the researcher observed that the responses for the second research question “what

are the characteristics of excellent teachers?" and those for the first research question "what does the term teaching excellence mean to you?" complement and supplement each other. All responses centred on the skills and the characteristics that teachers should have to better reach the students, address their needs and meet their interests. Accordingly, excellent teachers are those who can "motivate their students", are "able to inspire their students", and can "spark in them the curiosity to learn", as Beth noticed while being themselves "continuous learners" as Frank declared to face the inevitable occurring changes in the world. Talking about teachers being continuous learners, entails discussing the available opportunities that teachers have for professional development.

The literature is rich in perspectives and experiences that show the significance of the continuous training and professional development that teachers have during their teaching journey in improving teaching and thus helping teachers attain Teaching Excellence (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; NCATE, 2004; Resnick, 2005). In addition, it is significant to emphasize the importance of advanced training that teachers have in the form of professional development programs in improving teachers' teaching strategies and empower them to tailor special teaching strategies that best fit the learning styles of their students and better meet their needs (Cooper & Robinson, 2000; Smith, 2000). This claim is supported by the participant teachers; however, all of them agreed on the absence of a systematic professional development program in their institutions.

The participant teachers appreciate the positive influence of professional development not only in improving their teaching but consider it as one of the means through which they can attain teaching excellence. In this regard teacher Beth explains that "through professional development like attending conferences, presentations, and attending seminars, and at the same time, giving presentations in conferences, giving seminars, giving

workshops help you to update your knowledge to provide high quality teaching." Frank agrees that the professional development programs "definitely tends to improve teaching" however, it "can be done through other than workshops, … I think it can also be done through "Faulty Learning Communities." For Frank "Creating Faculty Learning Communities is very effective and continuous; each learning community [consists] of 8 to 12 teachers who meet almost every other week to do things related to teaching and learning. Learning communities continue to meet and work together throughout the whole academic year. This system needs to attend to the needs of the university faculty members and this is by itself opportunities for students, for faculty members to take their own initiatives to improve." These perspectives of the participant teachers Frank and Beth seem to concur because they teach in the same university and they have the same opportunities for professional development. Nevertheless, these perspectives differ from the perspectives of the other participant teachers who teach in other universities which either provide different kinds of opportunities for professional development or does not provide it at all. Accordingly, participant teachers Koreena and Fred who teach in the same university agree on the absence of a professional development program in their universities and therefore consider that engaging in professional development program is a personal initiative that is decided by the teachers themselves, although it is appreciated and valued by the administration. This applies to Jakie who relates "staying updated" to high quality teaching first and therefore to Teaching Excellence.

Moreover, considering the focus on "skilling" the students and providing them with the knowledge and skills that will empower them in their future profession, is related to the Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence although that is not explicitly announced by the participant teachers. This exactly applies for the participant teacher Fred

who considers the excellent teachers as the ones who provide their students with access to the knowledge and teach them the skills they need. This also was addressed by the participant teacher Beth who recommends that HEIs need to adjust their curricula according to the professions available in the labour market to maintain the sustainability of these institutions and better serve the community. This also was highlighted by the participant teacher Frank who declares that any HEI who does not make the labour market demand as one of its main concern will be threatening its continuity. The latter perceptions of the participant teachers, Frank and Beth, indicate a Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence, nevertheless they consider that this concern needs to be addressed by the HEI's administration and not by the teachers themselves. Accordingly, teachers' role will be confined to the classroom in which they do work to excel in conveying the intended knowledge contained in these labour market-designed curricula. Therefore, teachers would be directly satisfying the needs of their students and meeting their interests while indirectly meeting the market demands. This indicates the features of two different understandings proposed by Skelton: the psychologized and the performative.

Category 3: Means to Attain Teaching Excellence

Identifying the means through which teachers can attain teaching excellence revealed itself to be the most significant issue that teachers have about teaching excellence. This was evident in the responses of the participant teachers to the interview questions, whereby their responses for the first and second research questions, their perceptions of teaching excellence and the characteristics of excellent teachers, were addressed in terms of the practices that they see are "best" to attain teaching excellence and in terms of the characteristics that they perceive are "excellent" for the teachers to have to attain teaching excellence.

Therefore, the means that the participant teachers perceive are best practices to attain teaching excellence are available in the findings and the corresponding interpretation of the first two analytic groups that actually answer the first and second research questions.

Discussion

In reference to the findings and based on the related interpretations presented above and based on the theoretical framework that guides this research study, this study demonstrates that the perceptions of teaching excellence that the participant teachers in this pilot study seem to belong to two understandings of Teaching Excellence: Psychologized and the Perforamtive Understandings of Teaching Excellence.

To start with, it is crucial to note that the participant teachers' responses did not bluntly reveal their interest in meeting the labour market demands. Nevertheless, the responses of the participant teachers do not reveal their intention to provide their students with the needed knowledge and skills for the sake of the knowledge itself and for acquiring the wisdom behind it. On the contrary, the participant teachers' responses revealed their aim to empower the students and prepare them for their future career who excellently fit in the labour market armed with the new skills for the new or emerging professions. This discourse is a clear designation of having a Psychologized Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005). Moreover, although the participant teachers consider that meeting market demands is an administrative-related issue which is not related to Teaching Excellence, still this does not negate the performative discourse. This is clear especially in the response of the participant teacher Beth on the one hand, who declares that "meeting the market demands" is crucial for any one university and the curricula must be continuously adapted to the market needs, and to the participant teacher's response Frank on the other hand who announces that the "HEIs would be committing

suicide if they do not follow up with the changes of the market demands".

Another notion that the researcher emerged with after the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participant teachers; this notion denotes that the participant teachers' perceptions of Teaching Excellence does not fall under the umbrella of the Traditional Understanding of teaching excellence. This is revealed through the attack that they made on the first feature of the Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence which is "lecturing" and how much it needs to be avoided in order not to have boring classrooms. Considering elitism, the second feature of Traditional Understanding of teaching excellence, this issue was discussed in the "Context of the Study" part of this thesis whereby it explains the opportunity that individuals who are eligible for higher education have to access HEIs; and still this issue is dealt with at country level and not teachers' level. Giving equal opportunity for all eligible individuals to get in HEIs, brings into discussion the increase in the diversity among the students and their needs along with the increase in their number and how far teachers are able to meet their various needs and interests. In regard to the third feature of Traditional Understanding of Teaching Excellence, which talks about the need for the teacher to be highly knowledgeable in the taught subject matter, the participant teachers agree that being knowledgeable about the subject matter being taught is an aspect of Teaching Excellence and agree as well that this subject matter need to be communicated by different means other than lecturing.

The Psychologized Understanding of teaching excellence is mostly prevalent among the participant teachers' responses. The Psychologized Understanding is revealed through the emphasis on the importance of the relationship that the participant teachers identify as necessary to be built between them and their students to achieve their main objective of meeting their students' needs and interests. Achieving this objective greatly depends on a

respectful relationship between the students and their teachers, who render themselves available to their students, “interact effectively” with them, “inspire” them, “motivate” and guide them to make sure to “put them on the right track.” These teachers need to have specific characteristics, like being “continuous learner[s]” and “reflective” (Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Ramsden, 1998; Terenzini, 1999) in order to offer high quality teaching (Anderson, 1990; Lefrancois; 1997; Ornstein, 1995; Santrock, 2001). Achieving this objective is greatly related to consider the challenges that exist, like heavy workload, which reduces the optimum time that needs to be given to students. These teachers plan well to use various teaching strategies to reach all their students. Accordingly, they focus on Student-Centered Learning as one of the main interactive teaching strategies that they employ in their classes which allows the students to actively engage in their own learning and be active players in the learning-teaching process thus leading to teaching excellence (Light, Calkins, Luna, & Drane, 2009; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylanne & Nevgi, 2007; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999).

In addition, the participant teachers place high emphasis on the critical aspect of teaching and learning. In this regard, they perceive that teaching excellence is related to the ability of teachers to expose their students to the various means of critical and creative thinking to “build critical minds.” This critical aspect of teaching and learning is revealed through their suggestion to “skill the students”, and give them access to the knowledge to interact with it in order to construct their own unique understanding. In addition, presenting knowledge from different perspectives or angles enabled the participant teachers to teach their students critical thinking skills and promote their divergent thinking (Skelton, 2005). However, a big question is raised here about how critical thinking skills can be taught in light of the restrictions drawn on the topics to be taught while avoiding tackling any

societal and political issue! This is related to the academic freedom that is awarded to the teachers in HEIs and fully investing in it, and therefore does not situate the teachers' perceptions under the umbrella of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence. Abandoning such vital topics from the discussion platform allowed for the students to express their opinion on, limits their ability to lead a change that is expected from them as they constitute the future generation of anyone society. Accessing knowledge as recommended by Skelton (2005) as part of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence means all knowledge and the wisdom behind it. Accordingly, this cuts across two understandings of Teaching Excellence which are more related to the psychologized and Psychologized Understandings of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) and not the Critical Understanding.

Nevertheless, comparing Skelton's and the literature explanations of teaching excellence with the participant teachers' responses to the critical features related questions, it can be indicated that the participants are aware of the significance of enhancing critical thinking, building critical minds, and promoting divergent thinking of their students. However, that seems not to be enough to demonstrate a Critical Understanding of teaching excellence. This is mainly due to the inability of the teachers to engage their students with discussions about sensitive societal or political issues. This is significant feature of the Critical Understanding of Teaching Excellence as explained by Skelton (2005) due to the relationship that exists between education and societies whereby the improvements or the changes that happen in the education is reflected in the societies. Yet, the teachers still do give the students ample of opportunities such as deciding on the topic of their projects and assignments, self-assessing their work using a pre-prepared rubric, and engaging in open discussion about a topic related to the taught subject matter away from sensitive issues. In

this regard, the participant teachers in this pilot study agree that they do not and cannot give their students the opportunity to discuss sensitive societal or political issues in their classes due to specific reasons related to the unique religious and political situation of Lebanon, the context of this study. Tackling such topics in the class is considered as taboo and restricted by the administration of all three universities where the participant teachers work.

In conclusion, meeting all aspects and features of the Psychologized Understanding of teaching excellence on the one hand, and pertaining to the performative discourse to prepare students that best fit the labour market, the researcher tends to propose a new understanding of teaching excellence which lies in between the psychologized and the Psychologized Understandings proposed by Skelton- named psycho-Psychologized Understanding of teaching excellence with more inclination or more weight being given to the Psychologized Understanding.

Appendix C: Sample Interview

Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education an Arab Country: The Case of Lebanon

Interviewee: Fred

1. Grand Tour questions

a. What do you teach?

Professor: I teach, ah, undergraduate and graduate courses, my undergraduate courses, do you want me to tell you their names?

Researcher: As you like; feel free Dr.

Professor: I teach a counseling course.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: I'm teaching new courses.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: I taught a course on differentiated instruction.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And, but, I usually teach counseling, and I teach the teacher training courses like practicum, I mean, when students go to see, where I observe them.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, they are student teachers, this is a senior year, and they spend it in schools training.

Researcher: Uha.

Professor: This is the second part of a, a yearlong course. The first part is observation where they observe, they co-operate with teachers, and this semester, the spring semester, it's a course I teach, they do some actual teaching.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: They do, their project, this is called the practice teaching course. And I teach, for the graduates, to the graduate courses, I teach special ed. Learning disabilities.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Dyslexia, and different learning disabilities, and a practicum course.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And, sometimes I teach psychology. I used to teach psychology more.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But, when we're expected to teach 4 courses, now they cut down our teaching load to 3, so I don't always get the chance to teach psychology. I love to teach psychology.

Researcher: Yes. interesting

Professor: It's my favorite, you know, it's my, it's my major as well.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You know, I mean I'm a counselor.

Researcher: Uha.

Professor: In the Spring, I teach, course in the Psychology department, Exceptional Child, and in the fall I teach, either Child Psychology or Intro to Psychology. This summer I'm teaching a Psychology class, Intro to Psychology.

Researcher: Aha, interesting courses, interesting courses.

Professor: Yeah.

Professor: This is a new course, this is the first time I teach it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And, ah, you know, I really, it was a rewarding experience, I enjoyed teaching it.

b. How many years have you been teaching in HE?

Professor: 17 years now

c. How many hours do you teach per week?

Professor: we are supposed to teach 9 to 12 hours per week; so three to four courses

d. What responsibilities do you have other than teaching?

Not at all; I only teach in the university

e. Please describe the sizes of your classes; small or large

Generally small, not more than 20 to 25 students in class so small right this is small class This is for undergrad classes but we have up to 12 in grad courses

2. What is your teaching philosophy? What theory mainly shapes your teaching philosophy?

Professor: Ah, I don't pretend, to have a philosophy.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: when I, started teaching, it wasn't like, I had some principles or guidelines, ah, I had some beliefs.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, I, I believe in doing, my, my, I do best to get the message across, to give my students the best information, tools, skills, strategies they need.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And, ah, I believe that it's not just a direct. learning that gets through, what the lecture is about, because it's never about lecturing, because students would not maintain, what you tell them for a long period of time, they will eventually forget. Ah, and you know, we were students once so we know what we remember and what we forget. We remember methodologies.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: We remember tools, but, but we don't remember, we don't remember content, unless you revisited them again. I remember everything in psychology, not because I have a great memory.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I remember because I teach it to my I taught it so many times over the years.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: So I know it inside out and backwards.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: You know, just because, because of the reinforcement. But basically, you have to teach your students, ah, content, knowledge, skills, tools, critical thinking, let them think for themselves.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Let them become lifelong learners, you try to push for that, but it's not always easy. So, I, I, try to make, I, I , try to avoid, boring lectures, it's not my style.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Still in the philosophy of teaching, I cannot deal with just talking and talking, and talking, and seeing student yawning and falling asleep,

3. What characteristics do you think excellent teachers should have?

Professor: Yeah, well, for me, an excellent teacher is not necessary a popular teacher.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Unfortunately, we have teacher who are very popular.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Who, and, and, ah, ah, clearly it has to do with their personality, with their charisma, with, ah, I don't know, some, some, ah, it's charisma, it's something, because

they, their classes, are fun, they're full of humor, they're full of this and that, but I don't believe they're excellent teachers. I don't believe they're effective.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: It's, it's what you learn, and, I, I, my belief is that, excellent teachers are not necessary popular one or the one who has charisma or sense of humour.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Um, and because students are typically driven, by grades, they're not driven by knowledge, they're driven by, the least number, or amount of assignments, and exams, ah, and the highest grade possible, they want, they want that ratio, if they can, not a lot of work, and, they highest grade possible. Least amount of work, with the highest grade, so any professor who can provide that, will be the great professor, the excellent professor, from the student's perspective. From my perspective.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Is the effective teacher who can instill the love of learning, make, make learning accessible, make it, ah, easy, someone who ah, who can relay the message, effectively, clarify things, give them tools to think about, challenge some of their assumptions, ah, you know, again, you can't do that in math, you can't do that in physics, you do it in social sciences, or I mean in my filed. You know, these are touchy fields, subjects, psychology, extra.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: But you can't do that in explaining equations, you know. So, I can not generalize that to other disciplines, but in my discipline, it's important to make them think differently, be critical, to give them tools, to give them know-how, Skilling the students to enable them use the knowledge in different situations helps build critical thinker because the content I

don't believe we're responsible for the content, because content comes and goes, they'll forget it eventually, you know, but if you can make it, if you can leave them with some, important concepts, ideas, ah, and that would last a long time, then that will be an achievement. And thank God I hear a lot of my students who say, you once said in class this, you once said in class that, so clearly it registered.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But, but the knowledge, the theories, the explanations, etc, nobody will remember them in the long term.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: So the excellent teacher is someone, also, who makes, ah, his, his, explanations, his evaluation, his assessments I mean, his exams, projects, whatever, relevant.

Researcher: Relevant.

Professor: Ah, and there are a learning experience in themselves, not just, it's not, it's not punishment, you know. And, ah, I try to be very very realistic about how to assess for example. I don't know if this is the place to talk about that.

Researcher: Yeah. No, no problem, go ahead.

Professor: Okay, ah, for example, being, you know, a specialist, in, in learning disabilities, and having taught psychology, etc, I believe, that, um, asking students to memorize, chapters and chapters, and then, it doesn't make any sense.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: Ah, so, I allow them to use for example, 2 pages of notes.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Because, you know, sometimes there are tricky terms, tricky concepts, tricky things, why not have them, that's, it's artificial to have memorize, and in real life, everything is..

Researcher: Accessible.

Professor: Is regularly available.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: So why do you want them to retain these things, which they will forget eventually.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Professor: You know, so the idea is that I try to be realistic, in this way. You can use notes, it's okay, 2 pages of notes.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: The past, I tried to make it open notes, but then I came to discover that most students did not study at all, so they would read the question, they would look for the information, they would read the information, try to understand it, and then answer the question, it would take them 15 minutes per question, so that didn't make any sense. So I said that's not a good strategy, so I tried the other strategy, which is just 2 pages of notes, and I noticed it is a win, win situation, because to prepare the notes, that means they're reinforcing.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Their ,their knowledge. Because you have to prepare them, so it's another way of studying, and then it's a, they get, you know, they don't have to rely on their memory, because memory fails and I know some people have a lousy memory, and it's okay, it's an ability, not everyone has the same ability.

Researcher: It's a nice strategy; it's a nice strategy.

Professor: Yeah, I insist on pair work, and I insist on, group work, not because they have to learn a concept only, but because they have to learn how to communicate, how to do team work, and, it's not part of our culture.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Our students don't like to work together.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: They, they, they just don't know how to, Many students approach me and tell me "Can I work by myself?"

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: But that's, your missing the point.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: Yes you can work by yourself theoretically, what, but, you need to, to get some training; you need to be exposed to working with other people. Yes. Sometimes it's difficult to work with other people, sometimes there are conflicts that might arise, but, but that's life. You know, life is full of teamwork, and we, Lebanese, we don't know how to do that.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: So anyways, it's, it's, just to prepare them, for, for, real life.

4. What are the actions that you personally take to meet students' needs?

Professor: At a person level, in my case, because that's my field and I know about individual differences, I know that we're not similar, and I know the different abilities, different styles and I can't just teach, it's not like there's one way of learning.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And if you can't, follow that, then the problem is in you, not in me. No, if I sit and talk and talk for 50 minutes, and I see some students losing me, or getting bored, or not following, whatever, I cannot say it's their problem not mine, you should make an effort to follow me, No! I should say I should change, I should be more diverse, I should, go down to their level, you know, and I should change my strategies, so, so I can reach other everyone, not just a group of students, you know.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: So, ah, you know, it's, it's important that I keep that in mind, but no one asked me to do it, its, its, based on my own background and I wish all professors, in all disciplines, know about individual differences, about learning styles, about multiple intelligences, about differentiated instruction, they can't say that one's lazy and one's smart, enough with that, that he's serious, he's not, he's motivated, he's not, we cannot say that anymore. If the students are not motivated, we have to motivate them; it's part of our job.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I'm not saying we're fully responsible for that, but I'm saying we are at least partially responsible, but we cannot divorce ourselves from, that responsibility like some of my colleagues do, like, it's not my problem he's not concentrating, it's his problem, I can't say that it's his problem, I have to be more engaging, I have to figure out why he's not paying attention, and how can I reach out for, to him.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: That's what I believe.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So this is strictly personal, nobody tells me, nobody asked me to do that.

Researcher: Exactly.

5. How do you describe the relationship between you and your student?

Professor: “Sighs” Um, I am someone, who, who is a little, non-traditional, and, as a person, as a, as a, lecturer, as a professor, and as a person, I am not traditional, I am not like one of those teachers, and you cannot forget me easily, you may, my student either like me or hate me, but they cannot, they rarely indifferent.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Now, this is not something I chose, but this is how it is. Ah, because I, I can be perceived as sarcastic, I can be perceived as I don’t know what, too strict, and many students love me, and I feel like they like me more than I deserve it, thank God.

Researcher: Thank God.

Professor: and but, but, I know many students hate me, because they just miss-, misinterpret my sarcasm.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Once I had a student, it was last Fall, she told me “you’re so mean, you’re so I don’t know what”, I told her why am I mean, someone’s who mean would not give bonus quizzes, would not give the mid, the million things I do, so how, you know, but sometimes if you know, if you’re too concerned about the welfare of your students, if you try to see them happy, if you try to accommodate them, if you hate seeing them resentful, and you do so many things, you find, like the, like the, you know the saying, or the poetic verse that says “…….”.

Researcher: True.

Professor: I mean, I mean, I have princesses in my class.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's unbelievable. For example, a few years ago, when it was a Monday morning, we woke up; we heard that Jobran Twany was assassinated.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You were probably in Lebanon.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Professor: Now regardless of whether you like him, you don't like him, that doesn't matter, but it was a tragedy.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: For me, it was tragedy and I had a midterm in counseling that day, at 1 o'clock. I found a couple of students calling me, they said do we have the midterm, do we have this, do we have that, I told them do you know what I don't know, but the whole country is frustrated and I'm frustrated, so let's postpone it to Wednesday, which is usually welcome news, I mean.

Researcher: Yes, exactly.

Professor: In our university, like for students, to postpone a quiz. So I came to class and I said, they're all ready to take the exam, and I said I don't think, we're not going to do the exam today, we'll do it on Wednesday, and I expected you know, to hear sighs of relief.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: On the contrary, I heard "No, why", and I don't know what, I told them that some, some, students couldn't make it to the campus, because they were at the funeral

Researcher: True.

Professor: And we some are just, ah, they feel, like, frustrated, they feel, they feel, disturbed, they feel disturbed, they feel uncomfortable, I mean, they're too sad. "No, and

no", I said I mean, ladies, c'mon today a tragedy happened, "Who cares, who cares", I mean, it's too, it's too much.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: A lot of times you feel that it's just too much. I mean you do everything.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And they're not happy. I mean, so, I mean, you don't, you give them an inch, they want a mile, and I feel like get abused a lot like that, and sometimes, I get reports by my students that stop spoiling them, I mean, enough, even if they're not ever happy. So, I feel that sometimes I fa-, I fall in this trap of trying to satisfy my students, which gets me in trouble, because it backfires. Instead of it being, I, oh he's so kind, he's so nice, he's I don't know what, I become something else. But, or, or, I try to, be approachable, but I also have to tell you my dear that there's chemistry sometimes with certain groups. Like, this summer course, I feel I have a wonderful chemistry, with my students; but I have 30 of them,

Researcher: Oh.

Professor: It's going very smoothly, but I cannot say I have that all the time.

Researcher: True.

Professor: It's, it's, it's, like, like, I guess, performers, sometimes they have a lot of chemistry with an audience, and they do wonderfully, it's just, it's they give their best, and sometimes they have, poor chemistry, it's just, it's just, it kills their talent, you know, and I feel like in some cases, I just, I don't always have good chemistry.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: When, when I don't have good chemistry, I'm expected to have, you know, a kind of a mediocre, let's say, relationship with my students. When I have a good chemistry, when I have wonderful, wonderful, relationship. So it varies, but I am not one of those, I'm

sure, I'm controversial in some regards. But some think I'm mean and sarcastic, others think I'm funny and wonderful, and caring, and fair, and all that. I hear both.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: You know, so it depends. Aha, it depends, but I'm better, like Dr. Hania, my colleague, she's, she's more, I mean, she, she, she doesn't polarize her students, like most of the students like her a lot. Because she keeps a, like she's very, she has, she has certain standards, she's very kind, she's nice, and also she's forgiving, makes compromises.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But I cannot be like that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So it's different, it's a different way.

Researcher: Different personality.

Professor: It, it, definitely. I mean, It has to do, with how much your popular, it has to do with your personality strictly, and nothing to do, it has nothing to do with your teaching techniques.

6. What do you think are the actions/strategies that you must do to lead to Teaching Excellence?

Professor:. Engaging students in their own learning is number one. I have to engage them

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: I have to ask thoughtful questions, I have to make it, applicable, applicable to their life, and I also have to make my teaching, relevant.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: By giving them things, projects, assignments, sometimes bonus assignments, if it's not part of the regular assignments of the class. I grab every opportunity to challenge

them, if I feel that they have a concept, a topic, an opportunity, and it's not included in an exam, or a paper, or a project. I give them like, an extra assignment, like a bonus; because I feel it's a great opportunity for them to learn more.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: I'm just so concerned about my student learning, as much as possible.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And covering, you know, everything in the course.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Yeah, that's, pretty much what, what my teaching is. And, maybe, I could, I could, add that, I, I don't try to, I mean, I try to strike a balance, not only successfully between being popular, and being effective.

Researcher: Uha.

Professor: And sometimes the two are mutually exclusive. Because, if you try to be popular, that means you need to make compromises, on your teaching value.

Researcher: Um, okay, okay.

Professor: You have to be lenient, you have to be forgiving, you have to let go of things, and you have to lower your standards, because if you enforce your course policy, like attendance, you make enemies.

Researcher: With students?

Professor: yes and you make enemies from administrates, you become a pain in the neck, if you try to be by the book.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's really hard, when a student misses an exam, and you know, he or she doesn't deserve a make-up; however, you have to give them a make-up if you want good reviews, or good evaluation, and I have a problem with that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So, so I don't, as I said, not always successfully, I would like to, strike that balance, but I know that sometimes you can't do it successfully.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So, that I guess is, in a nutshell, my, my philosophy.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, great, great.

Professor: Yet I do use some lecturing, of course.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's something, the direct approach is important.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But I said, I, I don't, I try to make my lectures, ah, boring. Kind of, I try to make them engaging, and I, intersperse them with questions, discussions.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Maybe video-clips, maybe, whatever it is, maybe, ah, pair work, activities, group work, so, but I don't talk for an hour.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: That's for sure, you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I, I , so, there is a little bit of, I start by giving 10 minutes of lecturing, and then we have an application, and we, we do exercises, or depending on the course.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Or we do some, you know, I put a question on the board, and we discuss it, and we try to go around, and see how we can answer it. But, definitely you cannot avoid lecturing.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

7. What are the opportunities that your institution provides that you think will lead to Teaching Excellence?

Professor: I, I have a lot of um, um, freedom, in terms of my teaching.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Nobody, ever, you know I've been teaching for the past 16 years now, at our university.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And no, not once had, anyone told me, you know, you can't do this, you can't do that.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Well, they have, well, they have, maybe, maybe once, I should be, you know. Once a student, ah, said that she had complaint about me, because she was over anxious.

Researcher: Um.

Professor: And, a she said that she wanted to see power points, as if it's an entitlement, and I said well, I don’t believe power points, I mean, I, most of the time I use power points, but this particular course, I didn’t have the power points of the, of that book, that book didn’t come with the power point.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: So I did not use it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And of course in the past we didn't have power points.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But you know, the student was probably used to power points, and she, she was, she went to the chair, and said he doesn't have power points, as if it is a problem.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And I, so the chair, I expected the chair to dismiss her, instead the chair suggested that maybe I should have power points, and she said I can help you maybe, I can get you a graduate assistant.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: To help you prepare power points. But I told her I resent that because I don't think the power point a teacher makes, you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: In other words, it's, it's, how you, it's what you do to the power points, it's not the power points itself, that makes the lecture more interesting, anyway maybe, it wasn't interference, but like you know, a suggestion.

Researcher: Yes, exactly.

Professor: That really bothered me. So I get that freedom, of expression, and using whatever methodology, a and I've tried several methods, in the past, from teamwork, to this to that, so many things, and they, they don't interfere. They give me the best materials.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: From the best books, from the best resources, etc, you know, I, if, if I need to buy, ah, DVDs, if I need to buy, anything else, they support me with that, so I don't have a problem with them. That's, that's really great. So, I, I feel, I can experiment if I want, and I

can use all the resources that I have, to make my teaching, to improve my teaching basically.

Researcher: Great.

8. What does the term teaching excellence mean to you?

Professor: I think, ah, no, ah, in a way I answered it before. It's doing, it's, it's, being able to communicate, the information, the knowledge, which is in the books.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: That we have, to our students, in a, in a, accessible way. It should be accessible, it shouldn't be off-putting, it shouldn't be intimidating, it shouldn't be, discouraging, it should be, you know.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: it should be made somehow, easy. Ah, and it should be accompanied by critical thinking, you get the information, but it has to be accompanied by some interesting questions, you cannot just give information, the students will forget it. You should give students skills, tools, to think about them. So excellence in helping the student to think about the information you give from different angles and manipulating it in different ways.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: You should give them, ah, incentives, to, ah, to go, to go seek knowledge outside. Because I'm not, the provider of knowledge, I'm a facilitator.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's my, and I, and I, and I bet you, if they, if they read the b-, if they read the chapters, in advance, I think they are, they'll be, well understand the information, easily, but they, students, become passive, become dependent, they wait for us to give them the information, and we delude ourselves into thinking, that, oh, we explained, ah, ah, chapters,

and explained things, but the truth of the reading, reading lists, I put together things to do, assignments, projects. I think for me that's my biggest contribution, I don't believe my biggest contribution, is, is, talking in class, oh, you know, there's this chapter, and I explained it. That's not my contribution, because even if, even if, I explain it in a lousy way, many students can go back to the book and read it and understand it, you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Yeah so, excellence is not, just lecturing, or communicating the information, but it's in skilling the students and giving them the access to knowledge, quality, certain quality skills, that are life, lifelong, ah, that have lifelong effects, long lasting, you give them, meth-, techniques, skills, competencies, you don't just give them information. You know even if your, you know, you have the most boring way of giving out information.

Researcher: Okay..

Professor: You have to be inspiring, an excellent teacher is inspiring.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: An excellent teacher is, should be passionate, about what to teach, about what he or she teaches, ah, and be invested in it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: An excellent teacher, should also know, should take into consideration that students have different learning styles, and we should accommodate those learning styles. I cannot talk, talk, talk all the time, and, and expect all my students to follow me, it's unfair. Some are very visual, some are auditory, some are kinetic, some are in need of a lot of structure, some don't, etc, so we have different learning styles. We have to accommodate them, they have different abilities as well, you know, different skills, different etc, and how are we going to manage all of that, that's the biggest challenge.

9. Is the term "teaching excellence" emphasized or used in your institution?

Professor: Ah, no not really. I mean, we only use it, when you write missions, and objectives, and I don't know what.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: But we use it in such a treat, the term treat, treat it's a cliché term.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: It doesn't mean anything for anyone, but they expect you to put it because, you have to put it.

Researcher: Um.

Professor: You cannot say we're teaching you have to say excellent teaching.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: But the question is we are not held accountable to excellence. You know, are we really, what, what, the job that we're doing, is it really excellence?

Researcher: Um.

Professor: I don't think so, so we just have to put it, it's on, it's on paper, but I really don't think, we, we, we, we implement it. We only use the term when we write missions, and objectives…. But we use it as a cliché term. It doesn't mean anything for anyone, but they expect you to use it because, you have to use it. You cannot say we're teaching, you have to say excellent teaching. But the question is we are not held accountable to excellence. Is the job that we're doing really excellent? I don't think so; so we just have to use it; it's on paper, but I really don't think we implement it. We don't go by it, we use it, and then we forget about it in many ways. It's just a cliché term that belongs to catalogues, websites, and to brochures. I don't feel we're enforcing it in any way, so nobody has ever asked, or told us how we do things, in an excellent way.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Prove to us, prove to us, that you're excellent. It was never said.

Researcher: Yeah

Professor: You know, we have to write it down, that's all.

10. Why do you think it is important to seek excellence in teaching?

Professor: So, that, an indirect way of controlling standards, ah, but unfortunately many, many instructors get away with murder, they can be ineffective, they can be, you know, just, by the …, ah, force of their personality, or charisma, whatever it is, they can get away with not teaching anything subjective, these are shallow courses.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: You know, ah, and the proof is that we have a lot of English courses taught by instructors who make a lot of English mistakes, and, I mean, how, how will you expect excellence in a situation like that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, I think sometimes, they're, they miss the truth. They keep insisting on having PHDs, why do you need a PHD to teach an English, a, Language course, you know. You get, people, get people from England with a master's degree, that's more than enough.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: You know, when you teach basics, the basics of English.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You don't need someone with a PHD from, Oxford, or Harvard you know. Get someone who knows how to teach English! You know, the other courses are for, you know, maybe Literature majors, for advanced course, fine, you get the PHD. So, just, to, to assume that if I get a PHD, that's immediately excellence, that's a bad assumption.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: To assume, that every professor, regardless of his or her field, can teach, can teach, is, is a, is a misconception.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: We are, we are, okay, some of can teach, some of us cannot teach.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: You know, if you get a, a, a professor from, majoring in Finance, and with a PHD in Finance, and have him teach, what are the guarantees that he can teach Finance? You know, it's one thing to be good at Finance, and another thing is to teach it. You know.

Researcher: Exactly, exactly.

Professor: So I don't believe that these people are excellent teachers, who don't get any training on teaching.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: You know, we just assume the minute we get a PHD, we are born professors, that doesn't make any sense.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: In England, I believe, you need to get a teaching diploma, if you are to teach, right? In any, any, institution, at any level, that's what I heard, and that's a good strategy.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Because most of us are not trained teachers, or trained instructors.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So, ah, I think there is very little, importance given to the content, I mean nobody controls, ah, you know, controls, ah, standards or quality or, by quality I mean, excellence. So, it's just, it's just clichés, all on paper, but if something goes wrong, you

know, our university, tries to catch that, and tries to correct it. But I don't think, so, you know that you don't get people with major, major, violations, of, teaching codes, or whatever codes, ethics, etc. Yes, that, it's there, but to control excellence, I don't think anything is being done on that level.

Researcher: Yeah.

11. What are the challenges that you face in teaching?

Professor: Well, um, .., the challenge, sometimes, are, I feel, at our university, and, and, and just in general, we, we are, drifting away, from, the core, and we're getting, taken, you know, what's the word, um, we're getting, ah, like, um, there's an expression, ah, carried away, is what I'm looking for. We're getting carried away, with, with, things that are, just dazzling, things that are tricky for show, like you know, technology.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You have smart boards, that makes your teaching better, if you have power points, if you have, why? If you have technology, if you have virtual, I don't know what. And yes, they put so much emphasis on that, at the expense of quality, you have, quality of a teacher, you have to be, a prepared teacher, you have to be a knowledgeable, you have to be an inspiring teacher before, these are just like the tools, that teachers can use them effectively, or ineffectively.

Researcher: Exactly.

Professor: But you cannot say that these tools, as a teacher I am expected to use technology, I, I, I can choose to use technology if I want, if I feel that it serves my teaching, but I think the trend, nowadays, and it's a misguided trend, is that technology, you know, like, the best thing that ever happened. Ah, it's not. And, and I don't like that, we're getting so, carried away, by technology, and we're forgetting the human element, preparing good teachers,

there's no substitute, there's no replacement for the teacher, that's my, so our university likes the idea of technology, and should know about technology, and you know, and all sorts of things.

Researcher: Everywhere, everywhere is driven by technology, every college.

Professor: Yeah, yeah, it's, it's, so much is taken away. Okay fine, that's one thing, the second thing is, ah, sometimes you know, the, I don't feel I get, the support I want, to deal with, some, some, students, you know, who, give me a hard time.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, and you know, as I said before, that sometimes you have to compromise, to, to get good ratings, to get good, evaluation, student evaluation, and, third, I don't believe that, I should be solely, evaluated, evaluated, by teachers, by students. I don't believe that students are qualified to evaluate me. I know, that's it's a source; I'm not saying they shouldn't. It's one source, but it shouldn't be the only source, you know, sometimes, students, are dismissed. For example, professors or instructors are dismissed, or they are, ah, ah, terminated because their evaluations are either low or high. That doesn't make any sense, you can easily manipulate evaluation, give them good grades, be flexible, be lenient, be this, be that, make jokes, waste time, and, you know, you get the highest evaluation. So, students are not, are not qualified, that, students are subjective, they're driven by one thing only, which is grades, I mean, grade oriented, it doesn't make any sense, and so, think anyone other universities put too much emphasis on student evaluation and I believe that the more reliable evaluation should be, to let the teachers to prepare their own portfolio as a self- evaluative tool and peer evaluation so ask peers to evaluate each other, should be, a portfolio evaluation, where I put together a portfolio of my teaching, and, and that would

make more sense, you know. So, ah, ah, I guess, I hope that I answered your question. But we do not feel supported in dealing with some students who give a hard time

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, portfolio is evaluative tool.

Professor: Absolutely, absolutely.

Researcher: Yeah.

12. What are the factors that influence the promotion of teachers in any University?

Professor: Research. I have to do research as a professor first and to maintain my job and to be promoted. Research is all what matters in promotion. How do you think I became an associate professor then?

a. Explain how promotion takes place at the University?

Professor: Research is the most important; when we apply for promotion this is the main thing that we depend on in addition to the years of experience in teaching.

Researcher: mentioning teaching, what are the criterion related to the quality for your teaching that is related to promotion?

Professor: Hmmmm.. I do know that it is there a criteria; teaching needs first to be measured and in the promotion criteria, we don't have clear indicators on how teaching practices are measured

b. How far do you think your workload affect the quality of your teaching?

Professor: Certainly, when you have 4 courses in a semester, it's more demanding on all levels.

Researcher: True.

Professor: In terms of preparation, etc. So, it's definitely, you know, more difficult.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: To accommodate, but, ah, but, you also have to keep in mind that at our university, we don't have a culture of, of visiting the professor during office hours that much, or at least not in my major.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: I mean, I rarely, I rarely find students in my office, unless they, they want to complain.

Researcher: Yeah "laughs".

Professor: Or they come towards the end of the semester to, to tell me oh I cannot get a C, I cannot get a D because I'm on probation and you know, that kind of, typically, that's what you get. But you rarely find a student coming to my office to ask a, a relevant question, or interesting, or whatever question, rarely, rarely.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: I mean, once a year maybe "laughs". I mean, unfortunately. So my office hours, unless, I don't know, some professors, make it, a, a requirement in some way, I don't know, what they do, so they have students working for them, because they, they give them extra information, or they force, in a way force them for a reason to come to their office. So they'll just see them lined up.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: But not because they're doing it voluntarily, you know. They're, they're doing it because there's something, there's a reason.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: But a student, for a student to voluntarily come to my office and ask me a question, that never happens, or it rarely happens.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, and, it rarely happens that they ask about the course content to begin with, it's rarely, it's rarely the case. Sometimes I get students asking me about a project, about a clarification about an assignment, but rarely about, the course content, you know.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, ah, so, I never felt that it was, it was never an issue in the past, it's certainly not an issue today, with the reduction of course of the course load. So, ah, but it's just more demanding, because you have to correct, you know, you have assignments, and stuff like for an extra course. Ah, that's quite, that's quite demanding.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So I'm glad, that we're down to 3 now, and obviously there's more time to do research, and do other things.

Researcher: Yeah.

c. Do you consider the promotion procedure fair?

Professor: I do not think it is the matter of fair or not; but, ah, it is so far clear

d. Can you suggest some indicators to be used to measure teaching?

Professor: I think as I mentioned before, through portfolio

13. How far do you give the students the opportunities to discuss sensitive societal or political issues?

Professor: No, I mean, in my field is, we're, we're far from politics, So, ah I don't raise political or societal issues in class, we don't deal with that maybe because the discipline that I teach is not related to politics

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, maybe because of our major, maybe I don't know, maybe because of the field, the discipline, but, related to, ah, self assessment and dealing with controversial society, or, or whatever it is that you said.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: Yeah, we do that at a time.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, I always try to, um, craft, or, my assignments, to make them relevant to something, it has to enriching in some way, it has to thought provoking, I mean, it has to challenge some of their assumptions. And, and my courses allow me to do that, because the content of the courses have to do with, you know, ah, ah, ah, psychology and education, and they have to do with these thing, sociological and not political per say, but, personal, ah, social, you know, or cultural, all sorts of things like that. So, this is the bread and butter of my teaching.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And they also have the chance to do self-evaluations.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Um, in many ways, they take tests, and in many, in most of the courses, they have to take some tests, vocational, personality, multiple intelligences, ah, personality type, so it's all sorts of things, we, we, have that all the time, or at least in my case.

Professor: It's not, it's not, it's not on my agenda.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I don't feel it, my role, I mean, yes, they, I need them to change something.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: To look at things differently, yes, yes, I can say that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, now, I'm looking, I'm looking back on that, yeah, in many ways I asked them to change, their perceptions, their attitude

Researcher: Yeah, maybe for example, in special education perceptive, maybe if you look at the current special education schools, or the type of inclusion that's there, maybe you, you don't like it, or have a different perspective regarding it, you expect your students to do the change in order to, or at least to change the perceptions of people, or, towards.

Professor: Yes.

Researcher: Towards this.

Professor: Yes, of course.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Yeah, that I do all the time, in class.

14. How necessary do you think is to satisfy the labor market?

Professor: Yeah, I mean, look, I don't believe that you know, today's universities are, ah, they're still playing a role, that they used to play years ago, like 50 years or 100 years ago. This is not a place for, to seek knowledge or wisdom, or whatever it is. It's just a, it's a place, it's ah, it's a diploma mill.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Where the people get the degree but they don't get education really.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's a place, it's something, they are consumers, our students have become consumers, they come in, they come in, they pay for a degree, you know, they, they don't come in to learn, it's not, they don't learn, they're not here to learn.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And the proof is that, the military have a lecture given by, ah, someone, a guest.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: You know, ah, and if you don't force your students, nobody, nobody shows up. Nobody is here, nobody seeks knowledge. You know, people have to come because they are required to come, they're required to attend, they're required, you know, you see sometimes, ah, ah, a bunch of students coming for a lecture, because their professors forced them to do that, or because they have a project based on it or something, an assignment, but they don't come, because they want to, they don't come at will. So that, that's one proof that they're not seekers of knowledge, they're seekers of degrees.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And these universities have become diploma mills.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Or assembly lines, or whatever it is. Like car, you buy a car, it's a product, so, these, these are, have become capitalistic in a way institutions, but they're not necessary intuitions of knowledge, knowledge of the pure sense or the old fashion sense, not anymore. Nowhere in the world I believe, very rarely.

Researcher: Yes.

15. In what ways do you think the disciplines/majors in your institutions satisfy the labour market?

Professor: I don't think there's any study, anything systematic done and there.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I think that is a big problem in Lebanon; we don't, we don't know. Ah, I don't know, nobody knows, the students chose a major, without any, any solid, or any reliable information.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Right, they just choose it because they, you know, their classmates are doing that, their friends are doing that, they hear from neighbors, parents, etc., that this is a good major, they steal away from other majors, because, because they hear it's not a good major or it's not in demand, or whatever. So, there's absolutely no scientific bases to choosing, any majors, and we don't know anything about the job market, we don't know anything about anything. So we're operating in the, like by, trial and error, we're operating in the dark, that's for sure.

16. In what ways do you think your own teaching satisfies the labour market?

Professor: now, in education, in my field, in my, in my departments, we are, it's a, it's a, an applied field, an applied discipline, it's not theoretical, it's not philosophy.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: So, yes, we have, we have, links with schools, where students do their internships, their practicums, etc. So yes, of course.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: We have, because, there's ah, ah, um, an applied, or, a clinical, or, ah, what do you want to call it, ah, practical component.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: So, they have to do these things. So that, for sure, we prepare them for the world of work.

Researcher: Aha.

17. Explain how your institution attend to the need of the market to a certain major?

Professor: Yeah, definitely. Like now, we have the establishment, of the school of design, Elie Saab school of Design.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: We, started offering courses in technology. We're investing in, ah, um, some, you know, some, software, not software, what do you call it, it's, it's a whole program, with, ah, for particular software development, or they call it, resolutions company.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: We have, we're having, many of our courses, you know, would have a, come, ah, ah, ah, what do you call it, ah, what do they call it, technological component, virtual schools, and virtual I don't know about other, departments, schools, other disciplines, I'm sure there's a link.

Researcher: Aha.

Additional questions related to professional development:

1. **Describe the professional development program in your institution?**

Professor: We don't have anything systematic, but every now and then, we have training in some, some aspects, like, ah, you know technology, typically, blackboard, and chair, chair point, and I don't know what.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, we have, um, I suppose it's technological, not, I can't see it as, anything else. Ah, I don't look at it, I mean, strictly there's no budget for professional. Yes, in a way they, the university allows me to travel, to participate in a conference.

Researcher: yeah.

Professor: With a paper, but that's not, I don't look at it, I mean professional development yes, because we're attending a conference.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: But if I am to attend, for example, a conference, in Lebanon, or abroad, just attend, they'll not support me, they will not pay for it.

Researcher: Ah, okay, only if you're presenting a paper?

Professor: Yeah, and that's professional development, because you're presenting a paper, not, it's important that you attend other lectures, and other, activities in the conference.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: A network, but, but, it's too bad because I know that in other universities, in Saint Joseph university, I have some colleagues who sent to, to certain countries, like France, just to attend the workshop.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: I, we don't have that in our university. So, if that's the condition, and if I am to attend a conference in Lebanon, for, for, for a fee, they will not pay for it.

Researcher: Aha, okay.

Professor: I have to pay out of pocket.

Professor: It's a personal decision, you have to do whatever it takes to bepromoted, especially with research, you have to invest in time, in money, and all sorts of resources, but I know some of my colleagues have ways, they know the system, and they can work around the system, and they can manage, to go places and get training, and have the university pay for it, now I don't know these tricks, I don't know, I'm not good at that.

Researcher: "laughs", Yeah.

Professor: I'm just not good, it's, it's, you know it's a skill.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: You know, that here there's someone who went to a conference, and then we discovered that it was paid for by our university, and this person wasn't even presenting, so how could it happen I don't know, but, it, it, it happens.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You know; I just don't know. But, in my case, yeah I have to do whatever it takes, to get promoted, and, I have to, but, I mean, usually, ah, when, when you are a PHD holder, when you are a, a professor, when you are academician, you, you don't wait for people to tell you to do these things. I mean, if you don't have that skill, and you don't have that drive, then maybe you shouldn't be a professor, to begin with.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: You know, if you don't have, the urge to read a new research done on a certain area, a certain area in my field, I do it because I'm interested and curious, not because someone is asking me to do it. So if I don't do this, I shouldn't be a professor, that makes me a lousy professor, and very far from being an excellent professor, you know the excellence, and to be up to date, and I have to do that because that's my discipline, and I have to be an expert on it. What makes me an expert is not standing in class and teaching, it's my knowing, it's my knowledge, you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It's the, you know, being part of the field, and attending all the activities that happen, all the, and being a, a, keeping abreast in all the changes of the new theories, of the etc. Ah, I guess that's, that's how I look at it.

2. Do you have a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in your institution?

Professor: No,

3. Does your university offer any kind of awards to appraise teachers' performance? Please explain

Professor: They have, they had a disastrous attempt.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: To, ah, to nominate and to make an award, to the best, the best professor or teacher.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Like teacher of the year.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It was a horrible experience, I did not, I mean, I did not, ah, apply to this exhibit. My colleague, my colleague, just, it was just a, I don't what to, I don't remember that was like 6, 7 years ago, I don't remember why it was such a disaster, ah, they couldn't, they couldn't agree on the criteria, they couldn't agree on so many things, like, my colleague who eventually won.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Um, she doesn't use technology in her class, at all.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And one of the criteria was using technology, and then she said what, why do I have to use technology to be the best teacher, it doesn't make any sense.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: Ah, but I don't know why it didn't continue, many, many people resented it, because, I think, they needed to see, ah, student's evaluation.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And I think, many did not have, like, you know, shinning evaluation.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: Ah, which is normal.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: And again, sometimes you cannot reconcile, which mean, excellence in teaching, and popularity, it's not easy to strike that balance, to be the most, because, you know, eventually they have to be, it's, it's another way of saying who is the most popular teacher of the year, that's how it is.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: It, it will go down to that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Professor: And I think many resented the concept, the principle, they decided to abolish that, that, that, award, and, and I supported that, because I don't believe in something becoming, ah, maybe you can choose the most popular teacher of the year, that's fine, but then the one with excellence in teaching, that's something else.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: You know, and this is why they have to use the other criteria, and you may not get that in one person, and, and I bet to you, you will not find that in one person. But I'm for anything, that, a center, I support, I endorse that, I endorse having a center that prepares teachers and professors to become, better at what they do, to give them new teaching strategies, ah, you know, and stuff like that.

Researcher: Aha.

Professor: Ah, so, ah, but once I should, I would like to end with a, a little personal experience I had last, ah, when was that, last, ah, November, December, November I think, it was in November, back in November. The Dean, the dean of the school of pharmacy

asked me, because I was referred to him, asked me to give a workshop to give faculty on Classroom Management because they were having some problems, and I told him, I, I would love to do that, and I did it, but, I, don't call it of me training them on classroom management, who am I to train the people, who am I to train my colleagues, let's call it a round table, let's call it a seminar where we chat, we exchange ideas, where we, you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Professor: Talk about our experiences, let's compare notes, let's hear what works, what doesn't work for you, let, let me tell you about what has worked for me, and I'll give you a little bit about scientific background, theoretical background on that, but you know, but I found that very helpful to me and to the others, because we were able to kind of, to talk about these things, colleague to colleague, we don't get to do that, we don't get to share things and compare notes.

Researcher: Yes.

Professor: We need a little from each other's experiences.

Researcher: Yeah, so you need maybe, you should go for starting Learning communities?

Professor: We do, definitely. We don't have that, and we need to learn from each other, and need guidance and ah,

Researcher: Actually, at AUB, it's, I mean, I, interviewed many, faculty members, around, 10, at AUB, and, it's seems that they love this learning communities. I mean, everybody was talking about it.

Thank you for your generous answers and for giving me this time to respond all my questions

I will send you the transcript of this interview to check it and feel free to add, modify, or delete anything.

I will share with you the results of this research study as soon as it is done