Transnational Higher Education in Selected Private Colleges in Oman: Academic Staff

Perceptions and Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of Transnational Higher Education (TNE) in Oman by investigating the implementation of TNE programmes hosted by two Omani private colleges. TNE in private Higher Education (HE) is the outcome of government policy requiring all private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to establish collaborative partnerships with credible international universities; the latter being responsible for awarding the degrees. With the private HE sector in Oman currently accommodating about 50 percent of the new students entering the national HE system, it was important to examine issues around the nature of institutional partnerships; curriculum development; academic impact (teaching and learning, and quality of education) as well as problems or challenges faced in the delivery of TNE programmes by private local HE colleges. By recognising the dearth of research in this area, this qualitative study focused on the perceptions and experiences of academic staff regarding TNE in Oman. It also examined the policy drivers for TNE in Oman and its implications at the national and institutional levels, in order to understand the political and economic context in which these institutions were operating in. Data were generated primarily through the use of semi-structured interviews carried out with 27 academic staff from two selected private colleges. The data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis which enabled the identification of various key themes from the data. The study confirmed that the provision of TNE by private colleges is driven by government policy which seeks to accelerate the building of national capacity through the provision of good quality HE. The academic staff were generally satisfied with the provision of TNE programmes, however, the study highlighted that the implementation of TNE programmes was affected by a number of factors including, financial constraints; socio-cultural challenges; and ineffective communication among key stakeholders. The thesis further investigated participants' views regarding the ways in which the implementation of the existing TNE programmes could be improved. Participants identified that enhancing the role of the local colleges in the development of a quality culture and rethinking of the role of the foreign partner Universities and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in the development of TNE programmes were key areas for policy and academic action.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HoD:	Head of Department
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
HE:	Higher Education
HEAC:	Higher Education Admission Centre
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutions
IBCs:	International Branch Campuses
INQAAHE:	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MOHE:	Ministry of Higher Education
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Agency
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ROSQA:	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance
SQU:	Sultan Qaboos University
TNE:	Transnational Education
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA:	United States of America
WTO:	World Trade Organisation

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their encouragement and constant emotional support during my study in the UK. It is also dedicated to the pure spirit of my mother who brought me to this life, and to my father who encouraged me endlessly throughout my stay in the UK. They are the most important people in my world and I dedicate this thesis to them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education (HE) is not a new phenomenon. Historically, the event can be traced to pre-medieval times where scholars and students moved considerable distances to learn at world-class institutions (Rizvi, 2011). However, recent developments in technology and the emphasis on global knowledge exchange, including the free movement of goods and people, have given rise to various new forms and modes of transnational education (TNE) within the higher education sector. A considerable number of scholars, including Cremonini, Epping, Westerheijden and Vogelsang (2012); and Marginson and der Wende, (2007) all consider TNE as the pinnacle of internationalisation of HE. The term TNE refers to educational activities that cross national jurisdictional borders by institutions, programme and course materials (Knight, 2010). Programme mobility and institutional movement are two fast-growing forms of TNE (Hénard, Diamond & Roseveare, 2012). With these, students can study international curricula and obtain western degrees without leaving their home countries.

TNE is complex and multifaceted (Willis & Taylor, 2014). This study, therefore, investigates TNE in Oman, a country that currently hosts more than 250 TNE programmes. It seeks to highlight the complexities of this phenomenon by exploring the experiences of academic staff working in two private colleges affiliated to two different Universities in the United Kingdom (UK). This study uses a qualitative research design focusing on eliciting the perceptions of academic staff regarding the delivery of TNE programmes within two private HE colleges in Oman. In addition, the study focuses on understanding the problems and challenges faced in the implementation of TNE. In this thesis, TNE refers to the academic programmes,

curricula, materials, and educational pedagogy transferred from UK-based Universities to private colleges in Oman.

The introduction of this study is organised as follows: a brief introduction is provided together with the context of the research. This is followed by the research problem, aim, objectives, and research questions. Also included in this section is the justification of the study, research design and methods, including the researcher's positionality. A discussion of the ethical considerations and contribution to knowledge is then provided, before concluding with the organisation of the thesis and a summary.

1.2. Background of the Study

Sultan Qaboos has been Oman's leader since 1970. His government has the responsibility of providing free education and health services for all its citizens. This arrangement is aimed at ensuring the country's development and modernisation process. Providing public higher education is included in this responsibility in that secondary school leavers seeking to pursue higher education are either accommodated in public higher education institutions (HEIs) or given scholarships to study abroad. However, since the early 1990s, pressure from the ever-increasing numbers of secondary school leavers and the corresponding increase in demand for higher education, and strict financial and austerity measures enacted due to a significant reduction in oil revenues, have prompted the government to encourage the promotion and development of private HEIs (Harthy, 2011; Al-Barwani, Ameen & Chapman, 2010; Al-Shmeli, 2009; Al-Lamki, 2006). In short, the government has responded to the socio-economic demand for higher education by adopting a policy which encourages the private sector to invest in higher education.

Without a quality assurance system in place, the policy required all private HEIs to establish collaborative partnerships with credible international universities: the international partners are responsible for assuring the quality of instruction and institutional operations within the local colleges. The official guidelines relating to private colleges establishment state that all private colleges in the Sultanate are

required to maintain academic affiliation to a reputable international institution to receive the compulsory license (MOHE, 2005). Hence, all private HEIs in Oman are required to have a permit (license) prior to the commencement of their operations.

The first private college opened in 1994, and in 2016, 27 private universities and colleges were operating in the country with a total of 47,145 students (HEAC, 2016). The number of students in these institutions represents 44% of the total number of students enrolled in higher education sector in Oman. Private HEIs continue to play a significant role by accommodating about 50% of the secondary school leavers seeking HE each year over the last five years (ibid.). The government supports admission to these local colleges and universities by providing 'internal scholarships', and therefore, the vast majority of students enrolled in these institutions are Omani citizens.

As mentioned earlier, a combination of factors led the Omani government to promote academic partnerships between local HEIs and foreign Universities, but the need for a quick response to the demand for higher education and provision of a good quality higher education were among the main reasons for this policy (Al-Barwani et al., 2010). Harthy (2011) argues that students can benefit from such an arrangement by receiving good quality education equivalent to that provided by the foreign institutions. Within the framework of Government's effort to develop human resources, the government supports private HEIs directly and indirectly and this includes the provision of land to build private colleges and universities, tax exemptions, and providing grants for Omani students to study in these HEIs under internal scholarship scheme mentioned above.

However, regardless of government support and the reputation of TNE programmes that are offered in these private HEIs, a set of problems and challenges have been experienced (Al-Barwani et al., 2010). Some of the problems include doubt about the relevance of the programmes to the Omani socio-economic context, academic standards, and critiquing the economic logic of private HEIs that host these TNE programmes (Issan, 2016; Trevor-Roper, Razvi & Goodliffe, 2013; Harthy, 2011). For instance, Harthy (2011) questions the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships

3

between local and foreign universities and points out the need for looking at the local realities of TNE provision. From an international perspective, the experience of TNE in many countries shows that curriculum should undergo revisions when being transplanted into foreign contexts, especially when the content of subjects is likely to be in conflict with religious or societal norms, as may be the case in Oman with its adherence to the tenets of Islam. In addition, there is a need for professional development of transnational academic staff as well as the collaborative development of a flexible curriculum delivered for the maximum advantage (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Stella & Bhushan, 2011; Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Leask, 2004). Therefore, the general background to this study is the increasing interest in the TNE as a tool for providing HE and the growing awareness of the quality of this form of HE internationally and within the Omani context. It is against this background that this study aims to contribute useful insights required to address the real-world problem of TNE, from policy all the way to implementation.

I was in charge of private HEIs and TNE academic programme implementation in these institutions as a director in the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Oman for 15 years. During that time, I had freedom of access to a variety of policy documents, academic papers as well as opportunities to meet with students, administrative and academic staff members who expressed their opinions and concerns regarding TNE. This is the inspiration behind this study.

As indicated above, the pursuit of this study has been a result of my personal interest in the field of TNE. On the other hand, I can confirm that my personal interests in TNE have been enhanced by my involvement in the Directorate of Private Universities and Colleges in the MOHE. I wanted to contribute to this developing body of TNE research worldwide in general and in Oman in particular.

The following sections present further details about the research rationale and my positionality which highlights my role as a director of the Educational Services Department in the MOHE.

1.3. Research Problem

Previous studies indicate that while TNE has the potential to build capacity and support quality assurance processes in hosting countries, there is the danger of a lower quality of education being provided and a variety of issues manifesting in the HE system of hosting countries (Stafford & Taylor, 2016). It is likely that this can result in inadequate academic programme design and the use of teaching and assessments that are incompatible with the hosting countries' sociocultural context (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011).

In Oman, the landscape of TNE is rapidly evolving as a consequence of national policy and socioeconomic demands. Foreign providers offer their academic programmes through affiliation agreements with Omani private colleges, with these colleges taking responsibility for student and staff recruitment, providing teaching and learning equipment, and building the necessary infrastructure for their schools. The sending institutions for their part provide the educational programmes and focus on enhancing the quality assurance in the Omani partner colleges. However, criticisms have been levelled at the quality of TNE and programme relevance by stakeholders including staff, students, and captains of industry in both Oman and the vast majority of other receiving countries (Issan, 2016; Trevor-Roper et al., 2013; Harthy, 2011; Ameen, Chapman & Al- Barwani, 2010). However, limited research has been conducted on TNE in Oman and the implementation of academic programmes in the private colleges. In other words, we know little about TNE programme implementation and the ability of Omani private colleges to host and deliver these academic programmes. This empirical study, therefore, aims to fill the existing gap by exploring the phenomenon of TNE and the issues surrounding the implementation of academic programmes within the context of Omani private colleges.

1.4. Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the TNE in Oman and the implementation of TNE programmes that are hosted by two Omani private

colleges. This understanding can be categorised into the following: (1) issues surrounding the partnerships between local and foreign HEIs; (2) Curriculum relevance; (3) Academic impact (teaching & learning, and assessment); (4) The level of quality in the provision of education; (5) Any additional problems or challenges facing the delivery of such programmes. Additionally, an understanding of TNE policy in Oman and its implications at the institutional level is essential. This must also be combined with an understanding of the political and socioeconomic context in which these institutions operate. Therefore, the study seeks to:

I. Develop an understanding of TNE policy in Oman and its implications at institutional level;

II. Explore academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding TNE in Omani private HEIs;

III. Identify the key factors that impact the implementation of TNE programmes in private HEIs in Oman;

IV. Develop an understanding of the concerns of academic staff regarding the delivery of TNE programmes in Omani private HEIs;

V. Identify measures that can be taken to improve TNE in private HEIs in Oman.

1.5. Research Questions

Based on the context of this study and the rationale, aims, and objectives expressed above, there is one main research question supplemented by four sub-questions.

Main research question:

What are the academics' experiences and perceptions of transnational education in Omani private colleges?

Sub-research questions:

- How has transnational education policy in Oman been implemented at the national and institutional levels?
- What are the academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges?

- From an academic staff perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in private colleges in Oman?

- From an academic staff perspective, what measures can be taken to improve TNE in private colleges in Oman?

1.6. Justification of Study

Expanding opportunities to access HE and the provision of high-quality education is a top priority for the Government of Oman, which considers education to be a potent tool for the country's socio-economic development agenda (Ameen, 2013). As stated by Cremonini et al. (2012), TNE is a critical component of HE expansion and enhancement of quality assurance in most developing countries worldwide. The published literature points to certain factors regarding quality assurance and recognition of courses which raise barriers to successful TNE activities (McNamara, J., & Knight, J. 2014; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Thus, the implementation of TNE programmes is usually fraught with problems, as Fallshaw (2003, p.2) explains:

> When programmes are designed in one place, and delivered in another country, ensuring quality can become problematic. This is hardly surprising when account is taken of the nature of the organisation of universities, the cultural settings, how control is exercised over what happens, and how quality is defined and measured.

Since the establishment of international academic partnerships between Omani and foreign HEIs, there has been no thorough evaluation of the implementation of TNE in its current domestic form (Baporikar & Ali Shah, 2012; Ameen et al., 2010; Wilkinson & Al Hajry, 2007). Indeed, only a very limited number of studies exist (to the best knowledge of the researcher) regarding the implementation of academic programmes both worldwide and in Oman. This is echoed by Dunn and Wallace (2005) and Clarke, Johal, Sharp and Quinn (2016) who state that there is a gap in the professional development of TNE as regards designing, adapting, and implementing efficient curriculum materials for delivery in multiple contexts. The few studies conducted on private higher education in Oman seek to establish the challenges that

private HEIs face, including funding, quality assurance, equity and employability of graduates (Ameen, 2013; Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Brandenburg, 2012; Al-Shmeli 2009; Al-Lamki, 2006). Harthy (2011) poses some questions which I have found intriguing in reference to the implementation of the international programmes in private HEIs in Oman. Some of these regard the relevance of the delivery of programmes, the quality of education provision, compatibility of TNE with the existing education system and the country's social values, and the adequacy of local institutions to deliver the international academic programmes. In response to these calls, there is a need for more thorough studies on the implementation of TNE programmes in Oman. This research, therefore, explores the topic from the perspective of academic staff employed in private HE institutions.

Further guidance on such research has been provided by Waterval, Frambach, Driessen, and Scherpbier (2014), who argue that it should be conducted to shed light on TNE management and implementation. They assert that this is of particular importance given the cross-cultural context of many programmes. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the challenges or obstacles that face the implementation of TNE in the Omani context should be studied in order to aid the sector in reaching its intended goals. One of the primary measures for improving educational quality in TNE programmes is the study of contextual realities and development of appropriate actions based on any conclusions reached (O'Donoghue, 2007). In addition, those responsible for the delivery of cross-border higher education, such as academic staff, have thus far not been able to voice their perceptions and experiences of delivering programmes through private HEIs. Therefore, my research is designed to explore academic staff perceptions of TNE and their experiences of the academic programmes being delivered by Omani private colleges. The study also seeks to provide a platform for these important stakeholders to share their experiences of the delivery of transnational programmes and reflect on their practice.

1.7. Research Design and Method

The study explores academic staff perceptions of the TNE in Oman and examines their experiences delivering first degree programmes in two Omani private colleges.

These colleges are affiliated with English universities and were among the first to establish themselves in Oman. I sought the academic staff perspectives via (27) semi-structured interviews. To gain an 'in-depth understanding' of these individual views, I located my research in the historical, political, cultural and economic context of Oman, examining the implementation of TNE in Omani private colleges, and the international literature on TNE. Documentary analysis was also carried out, first, on government documents, such as royal decrees, ministerial resolutions, decisions, policy documents, and statistical records; and second, on institutional records that were collected during site visits or via the MOHE.

I adopted a qualitative paradigm and analysed my data thematically. This approach places the researcher in the role of primary data gatherer, in which carefully considered questions are formulated, aimed at comprehending phenomena through the lens of individual views and experiences. According to Creswell (2012), exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central event is best achieved through qualitative study. Additional data gathering methods often used in this approach are reviews of documents and other records, and on-site observation. This approach assumes that the researcher is equipped with the necessary interactional, adaptive, and judgmental abilities to gather adequate data. Schwandt (1994) has stated that an interpretive approach provides a deep insight into "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (p.118), as is shown by this present study.

1.8. Significance of the Study

Currently, there is a growing interest in the provision of TNE and privatisation of higher education within the Gulf States (Al-Khalifa, 2016; Wilkins, 2011; Altbach, 2010; Coffman, 2003). However, there is a shortage of research on national policies regarding TNE and their impact on the institutions and programmes in receiving countries (Knight, 2010; Zajda & Rust, 2016). This is particularly true of the implementation of TNE programmes in private HEIs in Oman. According to Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2011), empirical studies of Middle Eastern and Gulf State TNE provision are vital. The reasons provided are worth quoting at length:

> …there are several areas where more research is sorely needed and where regional influences would be particularly helpful in developing a more comprehensive understanding of local transformations. Comparative work involving opinion of [….] faculty, and administrators [….] can help investigate general attitudes toward the new campuses [….], faculty motivation for accepting positions, and other opinions about the sites [….] whether the experience of teaching in the region has an impact on faculty members' opinions of the region or understandings of Islam and Islamic culture, for example. Similarly, we need additional research on the social context in which these institutions are established. (p. 196)

In this respect, the study findings contribute to the ongoing dialogue in the literature on the benefits and challenges of TNE and the suitability of academic programmes designed in 'Western cultures' appropriate to 'non-Western cultures.' As Knight (2010) argues, "it is clear that the new types of providers, partnerships, awards, and delivery modes are challenging national and international policies and regulatory frameworks and that there are more questions than answers at present" (p.52). Findings from other studies suggest that TNE is fraught with complexities and challenges, as it entails different contexts, cultures, individuals, and modes of delivery (Varghese, 2011; Smith, 2010; Chetro-Szivos, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to illuminate critical issues to researchers and practitioners, especially in Middle Eastern countries. The area I have chosen to study is vitally important to Oman, a country that hosts more than 250 TNE programmes in 27 private HEIs.

At this stage of HE development, the government is now more interested in quality enhancement and promotion of the delivery of high-quality education to meet socio-economic demands which converge with the more global trend of increased HE demand (Zajda & Rust, 2016). In this respect, I hope that the findings from this study, which are based on experiences and perceptions of a sample of academic staff, will provide constructive guidance to various stakeholders. The study generates data that can enhance different stakeholders' understanding of the issues surrounding TNE and the implementation of academic programmes in a context where TNE has been mostly unexplored. Therefore, this study aims to develop an understanding of transnational education from policy to implementation. Although the current research

focuses on the delivery of TNE in private colleges in Oman, I hope that this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge within the area of TNE, and more broadly, ultimately benefitting other researchers internationally.

1.9. Positionality

A researcher's background, beliefs, and values can influence the research process, including the choice of the research topic and the methodology (Sikes, 2004). Hammond and Wellington (2013) support this view by pointing out that "positionality is important because it helps us see the barriers and the limits of understanding" (p.118). In line with this observation, I will now expand on my positionality, that is, the relevant historical background and philosophical positioning informing my research and how my work experience influenced my choice of the research topic and impacted the conduct of the study. The following section focuses on my life experience in terms of academic study and work relevant to this research. I also provide a summary of my ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding my research.

1.9.1. My Professional Experience

I graduated from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the only public university in Oman, in 1997. One year after my graduation, I started working in the MOHE in Oman as an administrative member of staff within the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges. Seven years later, I received a scholarship to pursue further studies and decided to engage in an MA programme in Higher Education at Kassel University in Germany. During this time, I developed an interest in internationalisation of higher education and decided to carry out a research project with the following title: 'Internationalisation of higher education in Oman: challenges and opportunities'. This study helped me to understand some of the issues surrounding internationalisation of higher education, particularly in Oman. After graduating, I was appointed Deputy Director of the Department of Institutional and Programmes Licensing within the MOHE. As such, I was responsible for coordinating and appraising applications for the establishment of new private HEIs

and international programmes in Oman. Two years later, I was appointed Director of Educational Services within the same Directorate.

Working in the MOHE provided me with opportunities to be involved with many studies and projects related to higher education in the country, in general, and the private higher education sector, in particular. I was involved in many projects and committees inside and outside the MOHE. My own experience and involvement in private HEIs in Oman over the past 15 years has exposed me to a variety of issues and problems associated with delivery of TNE in these institutions. My personal experience has shown me that some of the top administrative staff in these private HEIs are not able to balance their finances. This was due to the financial burdens associated with running TNE programmes with the limited role of partner University as well as low quality student intake which added extra work for staff. In my position as a director in the MOHE, I also received many complaints and claims from parents, students, staff and industry regarding the quality of teaching, unfair treatment, non-transparent policies and regulation, and business diminution of these private institutions in terms of academic standards.

Over the course of my professional and academic career, I have acquired many personal attributes and skills that help me to see the world from a variety of perspectives. My understanding of international education has been aided through attendance of various educational conferences, workshops, and seminars. These were both at the national and international level in countries including Germany, Australia, India, The Netherlands, and the USA. In 2012, I was awarded a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies in the UK by the MOHE in Oman, which I began in October 2013. Given the experiences I have had in my career in higher education for the past 15 years, I chose to pursue research into TNE at the doctoral level.

1.9.2. My Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

A research paradigm includes a set of philosophical assumptions of the nature of reality (ontology) and how to understand it. In other words, how the researcher knows what he/she knows (epistemology) (Creswell, 2012; May & Williams, 2002).

As a researcher in social science, I understand that making my positionality explicit is necessary for evidencing the trustworthiness of my research. It is therefore vital for me to highlight my ontological and epistemological assumptions (part of my positionality).

I agree with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.8) that "a much softer, personal and humanely created kind [of researcher] will select [appropriate methods] from a comparable range of recent and emerging techniques-accounts, participant observation and personal constructs". Here, the term "socially constructed world" relates to the fact that there are as many subjective perceptions of the world as there are observers of it. Taking this belief as a starting point, investigation of the social world must be undertaken so as to gather as many of these varying views as possible, building an understanding of phenomena which is not restricted by pre-categorisation of meaning or coloured by assumptions. Overall, employing the appropriate methodology to gather views and perceptions of social phenomenon (e.g., Transnational Education and foreign partnership) is required to obtain credible and useful conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

1.10. Ethical Considerations

In considering research ethics, I ensured that I followed all ethical protocols during the different stages of the study. The research also complied with the requirements of the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Sheffield as well as adhering to the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (2011). The participants who took part in interviews did so freely and securely. All information is confidential, and identities all participants, as well as that of the colleges, are all anonymised. Participants signed a consent sheet, and they had the right to withdraw at any time.

1. 11. Contribution to Knowledge

This study addresses the gap in the literature regarding issues of TNE implementation and attempts to contribute to four main areas of understanding.

Firstly, it seeks to expand on current and past TNE research by exploring TNE in Oman so as to contribute to a better understanding of the role of social, political and economic factors in shaping and enabling TNE in different contexts. Secondly, it considers perspectives of academic staff regarding the partnerships between Omani and UK HEIs and the key factors that affect the implementation of the TNE programmes in the Omani context. It is hoped that the findings provide valuable insights into the challenges and obstacles facing TNE in countries that have similar social, political and economic conditions. Thirdly, by determining specific measures that can be taken to improve TNE in private HEIs in Oman, this study makes significant contributions to the potential for TNE improvement in Oman through the insights of the academic staff who play an important role in TNE programme implementation. Finally, the findings from this study can be a useful data source for programme design, reviewing methods of teaching and assessment, and evaluation of the academic partnerships between Omani and foreign HEIs.

1.13. Structure and Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters as highlighted below:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides background information on the research project. It highlights the research aim, questions and objectives of the research and sets out its significance, approach and the problems addressed in my study.

Chapter Two: Background and Context of the Study

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the context of my study of the higher education system in Oman and the development of the policy of privatisation. The chapter focuses on the emergence of TNE and the different modes of the academic partnership between Omani and foreign HEIs. It further discusses the roles and contributions of private HEIs in the development of the HE sector in the country. Finally, the chapter identifies and addresses quality assurance as a significant issue in private HEIs in Oman.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

In the literature review, I focus on the development of internationalisation and transnational education. There is a section on motivation and rationale for TNE as well as modes of TNE and forms of programmes mobility. The chapter also discusses the challenges and key benefits of TNE, and it critiques issues relevant to the quality of TNE. The review ends with a presentation of the experiences of academic staff in TNE, and the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology

The focus of chapter four is to describe, analyse and justify the approaches used to address the research questions. There is a discussion of the research design, how participants were selected and how data was collected, along with the ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis approach adopted in the study; namely, a thematic approach.

Chapter Five: TNE Policy in Oman and its Implications at National and Institutional Levels

This chapter analyses the TNE policy in Oman and its implications at a national and institutional level. Through a combination of policy document reviews, academic staff experiences, and my 15 years of work experience in the MOHE, I provide a contextual account of the gap between TNE policy intentions and national and institutional realities.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents an analysis and synthesis of the emerging categories and themes from the interview data based on my research questions.

Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings

The focus of this chapter is to combine the findings from previous studies available in the literature on TNE and programme delivery with the main findings from my research and to critically analyse these with specific reference to their implications for the improvement of TNE provision in Oman.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents conclusions, policy implications, and recommendations based on the findings of the research. The chapter also addresses the strengths and limitations of the study and offers suggestions for further research, ending with a critical reflection of my overall research journey.

1.14. Chapter Conclusion

The government of Oman considers the provision of TNE as a cost-effective means to enhance the quality of higher education in the country. However, this creative solution to the problem has led to the emergence of challenges and obstacles in the country's higher education system. This chapter has introduced my research background, the rationale for the study and my positionality. I have discussed the aim and objectives the main research question together with the sub-questions. I have also presented a summary of the methodology and ethical issues considered in the conduct of the study and the significance of my research. This is followed by a short summary of all the chapters in the study. In the following chapter, I focus on the context of the research, the Omani higher education system, with particular reference to the development of private HEIs and TNE activities within the country.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.1. Introduction

The introductory chapter provided an overview of the study. Following on from this, Chapter Two sheds some light on the context of the Omani education system. More specifically, it focuses on the structure of the Omani higher education system and the development of Omani private higher education institutions (HEIs), including the provision of transnational education (TNE). It concludes with an explanation of the quality assurance process in terms of Omani private higher education. Stake (2010) provides the importance of clarifying the contextual background in a qualitative study by arguing that interpretations of a study depend primarily on an in-depth understanding of the context, the situation and the conditions of the research. This chapter, therefore, provides such information to help readers to contextualise the overall interpretation of the study's findings.

2.2. The Sultanate of Oman

Beginning with a brief presentation of the geographical context of the study, the Sultanate of Oman is located in the Arabian Peninsula. It covers an area of 309,500 km², making it the third largest country on the Peninsula. Oman shares borders with the Republic of Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and is non-secular, with Islam as its official religion and Arabic as its official language. As regards its economy, Oman depends mainly on revenue generated from oil sales, a commodity which contributes to a significant share of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A World Bank report of 2013 states that the country

received $90.1 billion from oil in that year. This figure translates into a relatively high GDP per capita due to Oman's population of 4,643,345 million, in which 45 % are expatriates, primarily from the Indian sub-continent (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2017). The high proportion of expatriates in the country's workforce appears to be creating social tension in the nation with mounting pressure on the government to replace them with Omani nationals. Brandenburg (2012) and Al-Lamki (2006) appear to suggest that this is a problem not only for Oman but across the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, there is much expectation for providers of higher education in the country to train and equip graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the country's workforce needs.

Oman's recent history has witnessed significant political and economic isolation for geopolitical reasons; however, when the current leader, Sultan Qaboos, came to power in 1970, he established a framework for a modern Oman enabling the country to fully integrate within the global economic and political spheres. Al-Lamki (2002) asserts that the new policy caused significant economic and social changes, especially in the education and health sectors. The following section focuses on the structure and developments in the former of these.

2.3. Overview of the Education System

In 1970, a formal education system was established in the Sultanate of Oman under the direction of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, with the adoption of a national mass education policy which required heavy investment in basic education (Carroll & Palermo, 2006). In contrast, the higher education system is relatively young, with the first public university being established in 1986. Following this, the higher education sector was fundamentally transformed with the establishment of a number of private higher education institutions (HEIs) in the 1990s. Ameen (2013); Al-Shmeli (2009) and Al-Lamki (2006) all suggest that the surge in the establishment of private higher institutions in the country came as a response to socioeconomic developments taking place in the country.

As mentioned, the education system in Oman has two main components: Basic (general) Education and Higher Education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing and monitoring the basic sector as well as for providing equal educational opportunities in the form of free education for all children. The Basic Statute of State (constitution) provides guidelines associated with education. Article 13 of the Basic Statute of State (1996, p.7), which address education matters, states the following:

- Education is a cornerstone for the progress of society which the state fosters and endeavours to spread and make accessible to all.
- Education aims to raise and develop the general cultural standard, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of research, respond to the requirement of economic and social plans, build a generation that is physically and morally strong and takes pride in its nation and heritage and preserves its achievements.
- The state provides public education, works to combat illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under its supervision and according to the provision of the law.
- The state fosters and preserves the national heritage, encourages the sciences, arts, literature, scientific research, and assists in their propagation.

Primary and secondary education is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 18. As a result, the government has set goals to expand the provision of education in the last three decades to provide more access to both primary and secondary schools (Coffman, 2003). Indeed, the Human Development Report of 2016 named Oman as one of the countries in the world with the highest human development and net enrolment of 94.8 % in 2015 for children in school (UNDP, 2016, p.230).

The higher education sector, on the other hand, covers all post-secondary education leading to the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees. This sector, which includes higher education institutions and Teacher Training Institutes, was initiated more recently than basic education, in 1977 (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). At the

beginning of the 1980s, a number of Health Institutes and Colleges of Technologies were opened throughout the Sultanate. These institutes began offering programs in health sciences and technical disciplines, respectively. As mentioned above, the establishment of SQU in 1986 and the introduction of private HEIs in the 1990s was a fundamental step towards the development of the higher education sector in the Sultanate (Al-Lamki, 2006).

Unlike basic education, higher education institutions are governed and financed by a variety of government regulatory structures and authorities. The Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Health are responsible for higher institutions in the technical and health sectors, respectively. Overall responsibility for Sultan Qaboos University (the only public university in Oman) lies with the Ministers' Council, and the Central Bank of Oman is responsible for the establishment and governance of the College of Banking and Financial Studies. The Royal Police of Oman and the Ministry of Defence are responsible for establishing and running their own professional education institutions. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has a more overarching impact on the HE sector in the country with oversight responsibilities for six public colleges and all private universities and colleges. This Ministry is also responsible for internal and external scholarships, and the building of an academic and cultural relationships with all regional and international public and private bodies.

The running of specialised institutions means the HE sector in Oman does not operate under one unified and centrally body but several different agencies with different rules and regulations. According to Al-Lamki (2002), one of the main reasons for this diversity of oversight responsibility of HEIs is the desire to train sufficient numbers of skilled Omani nationals in various sectors so that they can contribute to the process of - Omanisation - replacing foreign workers with Omanis. However, in an attempt to rationalise the management of the higher education sector, Royal Decree 65/98 established the Council of Education in 1998 (MOHE, 2005). Since its establishment, the Council has been responsible for formulating public policies in both basic and higher education sectors (ibid). In addition to these responsibilities, the Council provides and manages the general strategies, policies,

and objectives of the entire education system. As part of this responsibility, it continuously reviews the challenges encountering HE and proposes appropriate solutions. For instance, it considers applications for the establishment of new private colleges and universities (ibid). The Council, therefore, has to respond to the expansion of different types of HE in Oman as well as ensuring the quality of education. To this end, the Omani Academic Accreditation Agency (OAAA) was established in 2000 to carry out quality assurance and accreditation processes in all HEIs operating in the country (Carroll & Palermo, 2006).

2.4. Developments in Higher Education

The expansion of primary education has been a top priority of the national education policy since the 1970s (Harthy, 2011; Al-lamky, 2002). Since then, efforts have been made to offer education to all young people to reverse the trend of low literacy rates, improve living standards, and decrease urban-rural inequalities. Thus, students who completed their secondary schooling and were willing to move onto higher and further education were provided the opportunity to study outside Oman, especially given the lack of native HE institutions. Specifically, the government offered scholarships for students to study in Egypt, Jordan, USA, and the United Kingdom (Al-Shmeli, 2009). However, as the provision of general education in the country moved towards 100%, the focus shifted from sending students outside the country to within Oman itself. It became necessary for the government to support the establishment of HEIs to spur national development and economic growth. Consequently, in 1977 the country established the first HEIs. These were Teacher Training Institutes aimed at training Omanis to be school teachers (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). During the 1980s and 90s, the sector witnessed an incredible growth in the number of public HEIs, including fourteen Health Institutes, seven Technical Industrial Colleges, six Colleges of Education (later becoming known as Colleges of Applied Sciences) and one Institute of Banking and Financial Sciences. The establishment of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 1986, as the first state university, became the cornerstone of the HE landscape in Oman.

Despite this growth in the number of public HEIs in the country, the number of school leavers able to access domestic HE remained very limited. Indeed, Harthy, (2011), Al-Barwani et al., (2010), Al-Shmeli (2009), Wilkinson and Al-Hajry (2007) all discuss the challenges of broadening access during the closing decades of the 20th century. However, in 1995, the government responded to demands for more access to HE by allowing the private sector to invest in HE through the establishment of private colleges and fulfilling job markets needs in the Sultanate for a qualified and well-trained cadre (Al-Lamki, 2006; MOHE, 2005). The HE sector grew rapidly following this decree, as more private HEIs were established in an effort to address demographic, social and economic demands. According to the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), the number of Omani HEIs increased to 63, with 27 being private institutions during the 2015/2016 academic year (HEAC, 2016). Table (1) provides details of a number of these Omani HEIs and the degrees they award.

Table 1

Higher Education Institutions in Oman and their Regulatory Bodies

Regulatory Bodies	Institution	Awards	Number of institutions *
Ministers' Council	Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)	Diploma, Bachelor, Master, and PhD	1
Ministry of Higher Education	Colleges of Applied Sciences	Bachelor	6
	Private universities and colleges	Diploma, Bachelor and Master	27
Ministry of Manpower	Technical colleges	Diploma and Bachelor	6
Ministry of Health	Health institutes	Diploma	16
Central Bank	College of Banking and Financial Studies	Diploma, Bachelor and Master	1

Ministry of Awqaf* & Religious Affairs (Endowments)	Islamic studies institutes	Bachelor	1

* Excluding military & security HEIs and vocational training centres and institutes

Source: HEAC (2016).

In sum, the higher education system in Oman was established 35 years ago, around the time that similar HE initiatives were beginning in the other Gulf States (Coffman, 2003). Since its inception, the national HE system has expanded rapidly, with the government playing a dominant role in terms of both public and private HEI establishment. In particular, the establishment of private universities and colleges has rapidly accelerated the expansion of the HE sector in the country. Since this study focuses on TNE provision in private HEIs, it is essential to concentrate on these institutions only and to examine them from various perspectives: their development, functions, mode of TNE deliveries, and the types of degrees and programmes offered, all of which will be discussed in the following sections.

2.5. Development of Private Higher Education in Oman

The private HE sector in Oman is composed of colleges and universities. Private universities are granted degree-awarding powers, but are mandated as having to establish an academic partnership with a foreign university for quality assurance and consultancy purposes. They offer a wide range of programmes including Diplomas, Masters, and PhDs. Research is an essential activity within these private universities (OAAA, 2009; MOHE, 2005). In contrast, private colleges do not have any formal process which can be invoked in granting degree-awarding powers. They can only offer a maximum of three major fields of study in the form of Diplomas, Bachelor and Masters Programmes (OAAA, 2009; MOHE, 2005). Compared with private HEIs, the public university and colleges are not required to be affiliated with any foreign body and as such have the power and authority to grant awards.

Tracking the development of private HEIs in Oman requires distinguishing between two main phases. The first phase is based on the Royal Decree issued in 1995, which allowed the private sector to establish private colleges (Al-Lamki, 2006; MOHE,

2005). These private colleges are allowed to provide TNE programmes in partnership with foreign affiliated universities up to Diploma level (two years courses following secondary school graduation). In this sense, students who wish to pursue higher education can transfer their diploma to an overseas affiliated university to obtain a Bachelor Degree. It seems likely that the government restricted private HEIs in this fashion in order to evaluate and review the function of private HEIs prior to allowing a more relaxed approach to qualification awarding.

The initiation of the second phase in 1999 was seen as a fundamental step in the development of the Omani private HE sector. A Royal Decree No. 42/99 was issued to allow the establishment of new local private colleges to offer courses that led to Bachelor Degrees with reputable foreign universities (MOHE, 2005). In addition, this phase also provided a pathway to the existing private colleges to upgrade their offered programmes to Bachelor level in affiliation with foreign partner Universities. Since then, private colleges have offered various courses and programmes up to Master level. In this phase, another crucial Royal Decree No. 41/99 was issued in 1999 allowing the establishment of private universities with degree awarding powers. However, as mentioned above, for quality assurance and consultancy reasons, the private universities were required to establish a partnership with foreign universities (ibid). The first Omani private university following this decree was established in 2001. Since that time, the number of private HEIs has increased gradually and by the 2015/2016 academic year, there were 27 private universities and colleges located throughout the country.

The current data indicates that private higher institutions account for 44.4 % of the 63 HEIs in the country (HEAC, 2016). Figure 1 shows the development of the private HE sector in Oman between 1995 and 2016. As can be seen, the most significant growth in numbers of private institutions occurred between the academic years commencing 2000/2001 and 2003/2004. The main reason for the increase in the numbers of HEIs in 2000 appears to be the new Decrees in 1999 which allowed private colleges to offer Bachelor degrees and encouraged investment in private universities.

Figure 1

Development of Private HEIs, 1995/1996

2015/2016

Development of private HEIs in Oman, 1995/1996 - 2015/2016
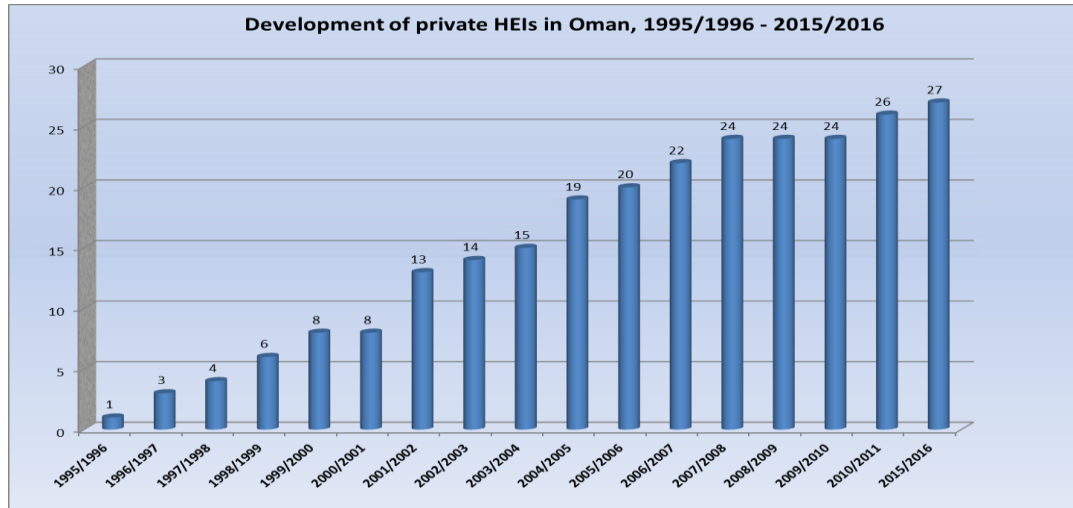
Source: MOHE, 2016

In order to encourage the establishment of private HEIs, the government created a 'public fund private providers agreement' which supports them directly and indirectly (Salerno, 2004). In essence, the government subsidises these institutions and in return, they help achieve the government's objectives of building national capacity (for more details on government support, see Section 5.3). The factors which initiated this public/private sector partnership are associated with the increasing number of primary education graduates and the need of economic development within the country. These two factors continue to have an enormous impact on the ongoing expansion of private HE and TNE programmes (Al-Shmeli, 2009). In addition, there is a global trend towards the involvement of the private domain in managing education. In this regard, the policy provided by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and contained in the International Agreement on Education (GATS) advocates the privatisation and liberalisation of the global HE sector (Kirk, 2015; de Wit, 2010; Knight, 2008; Teichler, 2004). Therefore, the expansion of profit and non-profit private HEIs has occurred in many countries due to the ever-increasing demand for university places (Kirk, 2015; Daniel, Kanwar & Uvalić-Trumbić, 2009). For instance, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, and the Gulf States are all witnessing a rapid increase in the numbers of founded institutions in this

sector as a response to increased student enrolment and a drop in government funding for higher education (Portnoi, Bagley & Rust, 2010). In some countries, such as Malaysia and Oman, private HEIs are far more numerous than public HEIs (McNamara & Knight; 2015; Wilkinson & Yussof, 2005).

Having detailed the context surrounding the expansion of HE provision in Oman, the following subsection explains the nature of international academic partnerships between Omani and foreign HEIs.

2.6. Types of Academic Partnerships

As mentioned, all TNE programmes provided in Oman must be delivered by local HEIs in partnership with accredited foreign universities. The main objective of the affiliation system is to address capacity building to offset the lack of local experience in designing academic programmes and assuring the quality of teaching and learning. The main roles of the foreign universities are to provide academic services. These include programme design, monitoring of assessment, and quality assurance. The local institutions provide the infrastructure and teaching staff, administer programmes, and recruit and support students. The figures indicate that most private HEIs in Oman are affiliated with western universities located primarily in the USA, UK, and Australia. Table 2 details those private colleges with UK affiliation, their date and place of establishment, academic programmes offered, and the names of their UK collaborative partners. For a detailed presentation of all private universities and colleges in Oman, see Appendix 1.

Table 2

Private Colleges and their UK Collaborative Partner Universities

No.	University/ College	Year of Establishment	Location	Programmes Offered	Academic Affiliation
1	Majan College	1995	Muscat	Business, computer sciences, English language	University of Bedfordshire, UK
2	Caledonian College of Engineering	1996	Muscat	Engineering, science	Glasgow Caledonian University- UK
3	Muscat College	1997	Muscat	Computer science, business	Sterling- UK
4	International College of Engineering. & Management	1998	Muscat	Fire safety engineering, engineering, facilities management	University of Central Lancashire UK
5	Middle East College	2002	Muscat	Information technologies, electronics, design	Coventry university, UK
6	Gulf College	2004		Business & commerce, computer science	University of Staffordshire- UK University of Hull, UK

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (2016)

Although American and British institutions comprise a little under half of all Omani HEI affiliations at the undergraduate level, some of these foreign universities are tier two in their home nations, at best. For instance, the British institutions affiliated with the Omani undergraduate level are mostly 'Post-1992 Universities' (Brandenburg (2012). As a result, the five private Omani colleges do not have an affiliation with any of the institutions listed in the top 50 universities in the United Kingdom (Times University rankings website, 2017). Most post-1992 universities in the UK appear to focus their efforts on teaching and learning rather than research, the latter of which is an area of importance for the world's top universities. The American colleges affiliated with the Omani private institutions are also less focused on research. A review of the American University Rankings shows that they are not among the top 100 American universities (Brandenburg, 2012).

In contrast, there are six private Omani institutions affiliated to Arab (Egyptian, Lebanese, and Jordanian) universities. Of these, the Lebanese American University, the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo-Egypt are the best universities in their respective countries. Perhaps the discrepancy between the rankings of UK and American universities and those in the Arab region is primarily due to the perception that UK and America are amongst the best providers of HE. This appears to suggest that the rankings of individual universities in the UK and the US is of less importance to many private colleges in Oman when it comes to affiliation. Regarding the schools from Lebanon and Egypt where the quality of HE at the national level is not internationally respected, the fact that they have high ranking is more vital. Indeed, many countries in the Gulf and Asian regions believe in the superiority of western universities. For example, in Vietnam, the assumption is that 'western' HE provides excellence and high-quality education regardless of the institution which is offering the degree (Cremonini et al., 2012).

Regarding the cost of these affiliated agreements, there is limited information as there is little or no published or accessible in this regard. However, Chapman, Al-Barwani and Ameen (2007) appear to suggest that an affiliated organisation receives more than 100,000 US dollars per year for their oversight services. According to Al-Barwani et al., (2010), and Chapman et al., (2007) this affiliation has worked well for

some private Omani institutions due to the commitment and attentiveness of the Omani HEIs and assurance of quality and improvements received from their foreign partners. However, other affiliates have chosen a less rigorous arrangement, resulting in weaker quality assurance. Further information regarding the specifics of the relationship between Omani and foreign HE institutions is provided in the following section.

2.7. Modes of TNE Delivery in Omani Private HEIs

In Oman, the main components of TNE include programme mobility, quality assurance and accreditation, and acquisition of books and educational materials. Knight (2006b) suggests areas of classifications for TNE provision. These are; branch campuses, double/joint degree, twinning, franchised programme, validated programme, distance/open learning (e-learning), affiliation for quality assurance, and affiliate as a consultant. Trevor-Roper et al. (2013) expanded on these areas of classification and provided concrete examples using the Omani context. Table 3 shows both the initial rating of modes of delivery of TNE with their definitions and Trevor-Roper et al. (2013) examples in Omani private HEIs.

Table 3

Modes of TNE and Examples of Delivery in Omani Private HEIs

Mode	Definition	Examples in Oman
Branch Campuses	Foreign institution establishes a subsidiary, either on its own or jointly with a local provider, and delivery is entirely by the foreign university, leading to a degree from the latter.	e.g. Arab Open University (not yet audited)
Double/Joint Degree	Students pursue a program jointly offered by institutions in two countries. The qualification(s) can be either a degree that is jointly awarded or two separate degrees awarded by each partner institution.	e.g. Oman College of Management and Technology (degree is awarded jointly)
	Students pursue part of the program at the domestic institution and part in the partner foreign	(proposed) e.g. Mazoon College's

Twinning	institution. The degree is awarded by the foreign institution.	proposal to offer 2 years in Oman, 2 years in US affiliate
Twinning (localised)	This is a variation on the twinning model with the part delivered in Oman developed for the local context and validated by the affiliate with articulation to the foreign institution program; degree is awarded by affiliate.	e.g. International College of Engineering and Management
Franchised Programme	Learning programs designed by the foreign provider (franchiser) and delivered in the domestic institution (franchisee). The Student receives the qualification of the franchiser institution. Variations range from "full" to "part" franchise.	e.g. includes all MBAs offered by private colleges and university colleges
Validated Programme	A program established in a local HEI as equivalent to its own, leading to the award of a qualification from the latter [sending country].	e.g. Caledonian College of Engineering, Majan College, Middle East College.
Distance/Open Learning (e-learning)	Course is offered as distance learning (whether traditional or on-line) and could be with a local partner or entirely foreign. "Open Learning" also signifies that the program does not have the normal academic entry requirements.	e.g. Arab Open University (although has a face-to-face component in Oman)
Affiliation for Quality Assurance	Diplomas and degrees issued by the local institution, signed by an authorised signatory in the foreign institution with varying levels of quality assurance responsibilities	e.g. Modern College of Business and Science, Bayan College
Affiliate as Consultant	The foreign institution acting as advisor or consultant but the local HEI awarding certification.	e.g. Al Buraimi awards University College

Source : (Trevor-Roper, et al. 2013, p.5)

Table 3 shows nine modes of delivery which are present in Oman. Although different types of agreements provide various services and layers of responsibility, they all

share certain similarities. For instance, foreign partner institutions usually support the establishment of institutional policies, approve the curricula and grant or award the academic degrees while Omani private colleges are responsible for recruiting staff and students as well as building the necessary infrastructure for teaching and learning.

Table 3 also shows that foreign independent international branch campuses (IBCs) do not exist in Oman due to the regularity framework which only allows foreign investment in HE with Omani partners with no less than 51% share ownership (Issan 2016; Martin, 2007). This level of regulation is common to countries such as China, which requires foreign partnership with local institutions (Healey, 2015). According to Knight (2009, p.119), Middle Eastern countries are sensitive to possible "loss of cultural identity" through international engagement, which might explain this restricted policy of not opening the HE sector to independent IBCs.

2.8. TNE Programmes Offered in Private HEIs

There are over 250 TNE programmes offered by Omani private HEIs, which account for 43% of the academic operations in tertiary education (HEAC, 2014). There is a strong tendency among both the Omani private universities and colleges to offer degrees and diplomas in the areas of accounting, human resources management, administration, computer sciences and financial management. However, specialised fields including, medicine, pharmacy, and nursing, are not commonly provided in the country mainly due to the cost involved and the difficulty of securing sufficient training places on such courses. Bloom and Rosovsky (2007) argue that investing in Engineering and Science courses, for instance, is costly and that the shortage of qualified staff together with the demand for high salaries make these courses unattractive for private HEI's. In the same vein, Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2011) also suggest that over 50% of TNE programmes offered in the Middle East are related to business with information technology forming another quarter. Most of the private HEIs - especially the profit-driven institutions - share standard features and they tend to offer similar programmes of study including business management, accounting and finance, and computer science (Teferra, 2007). Middlehurst and

Campbell (2003) seem to support the notion of the proliferation of non-specialised courses in HEI when stating that:

> Imported transnational education provision may focus on a relatively narrow range of subject areas which are 'cheap' and profitable to offer such as information sciences and technologies or business and management; this may lead to over provision in certain fields at the expense of others (p. 22).

As a result, most programmes offered in Omani private HEIs are information communication technology and business related. In terms of length of study, all Omani colleges and universities have to adhere to the national qualifications framework which requires the completion of Diploma and Bachelor degrees within two and four years, respectively. In this respect, these qualifications have to be equivalent to the degree in the provider's awarding universities. The language of instruction of TNE programmes is English because it is the second most spoken language in Oman and the language of business, nationally and internationally. Arabic, however, remains the language of instruction in general education.

2.9. Admission Policy in Private HEIs

The admission process to HEIs in Oman is centralised through the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), which was established in 2006 to manage the admission process and increase the capability of HEIs to recruit students. Prior to this, each individual institution managed its own admission process. With such a significant number of government scholarships available to students in both public and private HE sectors, students are now able to choose the institution of their choice according to the grades they obtain. All applicants must apply within a certain period and the results can be tracked online. The grades that the students achieve in their final examinations in secondary school determines the type of degree a student is likely to pursue. Another essential factor is the number of places that are available in a particular HE college and university.

Students choose to study either abroad or in public HEIs. For instance, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Colleges of Applied Sciences - both state

institutions - can select students with the highest grades. The public HEIs recruit about 50% of secondary school leavers in Oman. Students who are unsuccessful have the option to apply to a private HE. The state HEIs are, therefore, seen as national landmark institutions for the elite. Consequently, individual private universities and colleges have to accept those refused admission to the state HEIs. Due to the academic selection criteria, these unsuccessful students are considered weaker students who lack the necessary skills to tackle the challenges of tertiary education. This issue of student selection is also a challenge facing private HEIs in some Asian and other Middle Eastern countries (Hill, Cheong, Leong, & Fernandez-Chung, 2014; Fang, 2012; Dobos, 2011; Stella & Woodhouse, 2011). For example, a study conducted by Fang and Wang (2014) in China concluded that many Chinese students chose to study on TNE programmes due to their inability to gain admission to their local colleges or universities.

In recent years, the government of Oman has provided scholarships to approximately 11,500 newly admitted private university or college students each year (HEAC, 2016). This scholarship scheme only covers tuition fees which means that students and their parents are responsible for all the other costs including accommodation, living, and transportation costs. The provision of scholarships translates into the vast majority of students in private HEIs being funded (tuition fees) by governmental sources, and it appears the Omani education budget is sufficient to continue supporting these scholarships. Through this policy, the government aims to encourage and allow a significant proportion of Omani youth to pursue tertiary education. Furthermore, by providing scholarships on a priority basis according to income has meant that students from low-income families have as much opportunity as more economically privileged students to access this level of education, thus equalising access to private HE that would usually exclude these students from the system. Internationally, the expansion of access to private HE continues to raise issues of social equity, thus compelling some countries to provide student loans to help tertiary students pay for their education. For example, Chile and Mexico have introduced loan schemes so that more people are able to access private higher education (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). The availability of grants, as the

case in Oman, is considered a key factor in the retention of students with lower-income (Usher, 2006).

2.10. Student Enrolment in Private HEIs

According to HEAC (2016), 26,113 places were offered to secondary school leavers across the entire HE sector out of 33,366 applicants during the 2014/15 academic year. That same year, private HEIs admitted 38.6% of students with 80% of these being female. Since positions offered are based on academic merit, these numbers appear to indicate that female students in Oman are performing better than their male counterparts. However, these proportions are reversed in the public HEIs policy, where more male students are admitted to achieve a balance between the number of males and females in higher education (Harthy, 2011). Statistics from the HEAC (2016) shows that approximately 50% of students enrolled in public HEIs are female in spite of the fact that they obtain better grades than male students. Harthy (2011) appears to suggest that the existing admission policy was adopted as a result of increased number of females enrolled in higher education. The implementation of such a system indicates a cultural orientation aimed at balancing the male and female students in public institutions rather than the inability of female students to enter public HE.

In addition, the educational statistics of the 2014/2015 academic year show a total of 68,350 students enrolled in private HEIs. This amount represents about 51% of the total number of students enrolled in Omani HEIs that year (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2016). These statistics show the importance of this sector as well as government's capacity to build a strategy to absorb the increasing number of students seeking HE under the 'public-private partnership' policy (Robertson, 2008). Furthermore, it shows that the provision of 'internal scholarships' for Omani students wishing to study with TNE providers has also contributed immensely to the high numbers of students in higher education.

Regarding the courses studied, statistics show that about 82% of private HEI students study Engineering, Management and Commerce, Information Technology, and

Society and Culture degrees (HEAC, 2014). Figure 2 below shows the growth in student numbers from 1995/96 – 2014/2015.

Figure 2

Development of Students Enrolled in Private HEIs

1995/96 – 2014/2015
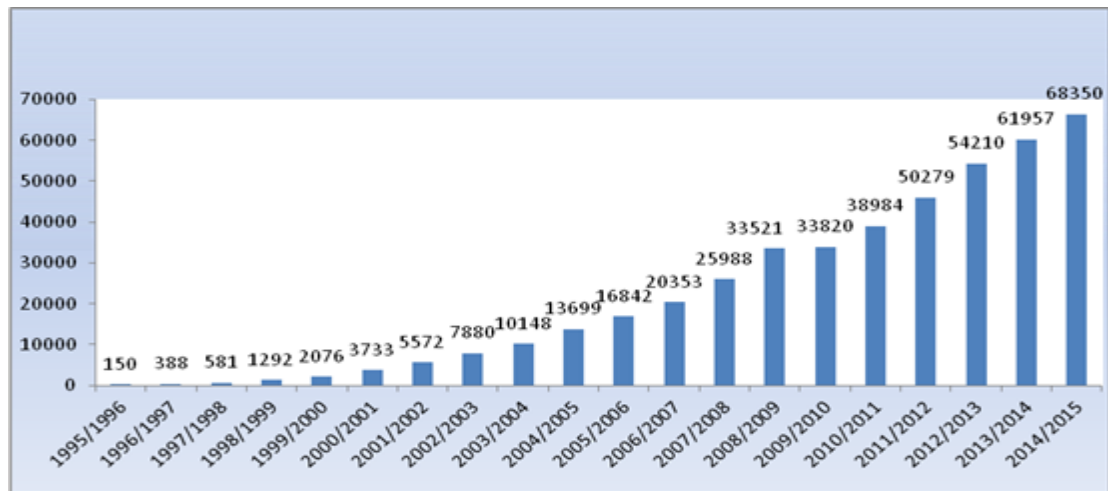
Source: HEAC, 2016

Figure (2) indicates that a total of 68,350 students enrolled in private institutions in 2015, and that the number of students has increased steadily over time. Recent statistics show that the percentage of school leavers entering HEIs in Oman is still growing. For example, the number of secondary school leavers who passed examinations in 2014/2015 was 33,366 of which 25,469 enrolled in HEIs (HEAC, 2016).

It can be concluded that there is an ever-increasing demand for private HE due to the high numbers of secondary school leavers every year, a fact reflected in the growth of private HEIs. Today, private HEIs represent the fastest-growing aspect of the HE sector worldwide. In line with that, it has been estimated that student enrolment in global private HE is approximately a third of total HE enrolment (Altbach et al., 2009). The private education sector in countries such as Mexico, Chile, and Brazil educates more than 50% of its students (Ibid.).

In Oman, however, despite the increasing number of students enrolled in these institutions, the proportion of international students' accommodated remains relatively small - only 5 out of the total registered (HEAC, 2016). My experience in the MOHE shows that a majority of international students enrolled in Omani private institutions are mainly from expatriate families working in Oman. This means these students are not in Oman for the sole purpose of educating themselves. It also shows that many do not see Oman as a higher education destination of choice.

2.11. Academic Staff in Private HEIs

The number of academic staff in the 2015/16 academic year employed in private HEIs was 2,691, with 17% of these being Omani (MOHE, 2016). This indicates that the country does not have enough locally trained or qualified staff to teach in higher education. Oman, as with other GCC states, relies heavily on foreign academic staff from the Indian sub-continent, the Philippines, and other Arab countries. The shortage of qualified Omanis in professional occupations has led the government to introduce a policy to encourage the replacement of foreign workers by Omani citizens through the 'Omanisation programme' of 1994 (Al-Lamki, 2000). However, Al-Lamki (2000) argues that the policy has caused many financial and managerial problems. Many colleges and universities continue to develop their academic staff well but struggle to retain them because of the vast gap in the working conditions between the private sector and the attractive public sector. In other words, most of the qualified Omani staff prefer to work for the state institutions due to higher salaries and associated benefits such as pensions and holiday allowance, benefits which are either absent from, or less generous in the private sector (Al-Hamadi, Budhwar & Shipton, 2007; Al-Lamki, 1998). Thus, the lack of highly qualified Omanis to fill the positions of academic staff has led private colleges and universities to recruit foreign academic staff, some of which are also underqualified from a western standpoint (Issan, 2016).

Although most of the academic staff in private HEIs are expats, the statistics indicates that the proportion of PhD holders in private colleges constitute over one third of the total academic staff, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3

Academic Staff in Private HEIs According to Level of Degree Held in 2015/16
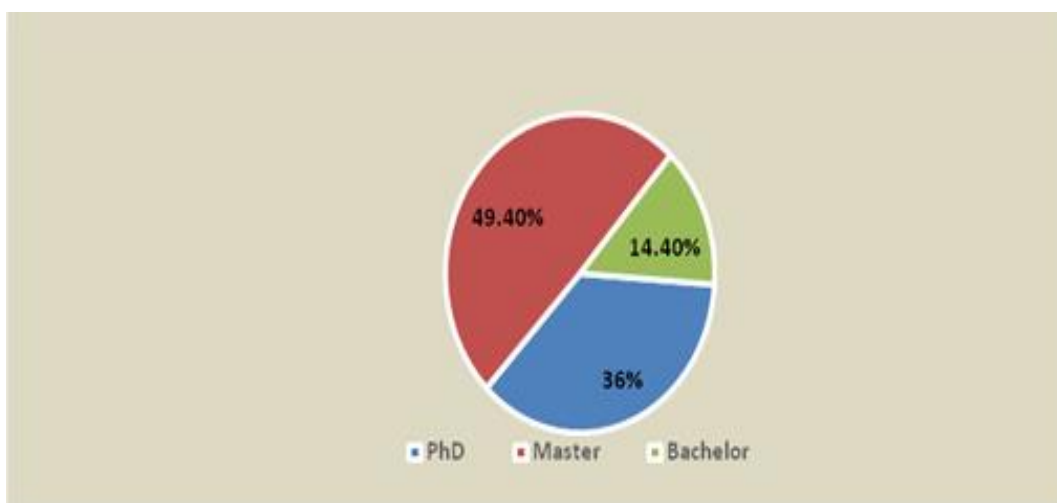
Source: MOHE, 2016

In comparison with the proportion of PhD holders in public colleges (Colleges of Applied Sciences), the number of academic staff with Masters qualifications is also relatively higher as Table 4 shows.

Table 4

Number of Academic Staff in the Colleges of Applied Sciences (Public)

According to the Degree Holder in 2015/16

College name	PhD	Master
College of Applied Sciences in Sohar	63	73
College of Applied Sciences in Nizwa	24	63
College of Applied Sciences in Ibri	32	79
College of Applied Sciences in Rustaq	56	92
College of Applied Sciences in Salalh	24	53

Source: MOHE, 2016

Therefore, statistics indicates that the proportion of academic staff who hold Doctorate qualifications in both private and public colleges is far less than those with Bachelor or Masters degrees. Given that private universities have been given guidance by the MOHE stating that the "majority of academic staff shall have PhD in their respective disciplines" (MOHE, 2005 article 10, p.26), this is clearly an area which must be addressed. This situation is not limited to Oman. In Malaysia, for instance, private colleges have fewer PhD holders compared with public universities (Wilkinson & Yussof, 2005). Several authors, including Altbach et al. (2009), have highlighted this issue in developing countries, stating that the rapid development of the HE sector has caused hurried recruitment of ill-qualified academic staff who often hold only Bachelor degrees.

2.12. Quality Assurance of TNE

Oman has, over the last twenty years, built a diversified HE system which has also witnessed a rapid growth in the private sector. In order to manage this growth, the government has established an independent Accreditation Council to be the "body responsible for the external quality assurance and quality enhancement of HE institutions and programmes" (Al Barwani & Osman, 2010, p.152). Consequently, the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) was established in 2000 to focus on accreditation and quality assurance issues in HE. In March 2008, OAAA issued the Quality Audit Manual. The quality assurance mechanisms contained within it consist of five types of practices; state approval (licensing), supervision, quality network, quality audit, and accreditation. The OAAA recently carried out the first accreditation process for quality auditing, which is the first part of a two-phase institutional accreditation process. Quality auditing evaluates the effectiveness of the quality assurance, and the quality enhancement process of an institution relates to its goals and objectives. Standards Assessment, which is the second phase of the institutional accreditation process, involves the evaluation of HEIs in terms of institutional standards set by the OAAA (Trevor -Roper, et al., 2013).

One of the most important documents issued by the Accreditation Authority is the 'Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education'

(ROSQA). This document includes the requirements for a new system of quality assurance in the Omani HE regarding the processes for evaluating accrediting HEIs, the national qualifications framework and a guideline regarding institution and programme accreditation (OAAA, 2004). The ROSQA document utilises quality assurance to refer to "a system of policies and procedures for review, assessment and follow up relating to the quality of performance" (OAAA, 2004, p.27). A critical aspect of the document is 'Oman's National Qualifications Framework'. This framework is designed to check the quality of programmes and awards offered by individual institutions to ensure they conform to the standards of respected international higher institutions.

From an international perspective, there is no agreement on any set of evaluative criteria for quality assurance (Ntshoe & Letseka, 2010). In the case of Oman, however, international quality assurance and foreign accreditation bodies are other forms of mechanisms used to "validate the quality of their degree programmes and provide some level of international credibility" (Altbach et al., 2009, p.61). The British Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) carries out quality audits of collaborative links between the HEIs in the UK and their partner organisations in other countries. Thus, the QAA evaluates the quality assurance of a number of the Omani private colleges that have official agreements with UK universities. These private colleges include Caledonian College of Engineering, Fire Safety Engineering College, and Muscat College (QAA, 2005). There are audits for providing information regarding the degree and nature of United Kingdom institutional maintenance of academic standards and the quality of education in their partnerships. In recent years, specialised programme accreditors, including the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), have evaluated Business and Engineering programmes in Omani private HEIs (Ross & Trevor-Roper, 2015).

However, the quality of education remains one of the leading concerns facing private HEIs in Oman, with Harthy (2011) stating that the "rapid growth of the private sector of HE often left behind a question of quality" (p.22). Portnoi et al. (2010) have shown that quality assurance mechanisms are limited to national universities in most

countries. Even when such quality assurance mechanisms exist, regulatory frames for accreditation or quality assurance "usually do not apply to providers outside the national education system" (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p.300). Al-Barwani et al.'s (2010) research of Omani private HEIs appears to support this notion by highlighting the quality of HE providers and funding problems as the two main challenges facing HE. A significant number of government officials, senior-level educators and private sector employers who took part in the study support this conclusion. The responses from the officials show that Oman must implement a more efficient system for quality assurance in HE. The study also indicated that the government holds the primary responsibility for such improvements as most private HEI is currently unable to invest in quality because of financial obligations towards their shareholders. The incomplete quality assurance mechanisms exacerbated by weak students is a significant problem facing Omani private HEIs.

2.13. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to locate my study within the context of Omani HE development, particularly transnational education and private HEIs. The socio-economic development in Oman since 1970 has translated into the general (pre-tertiary) education sector taking a proactive role in providing education for all, thereby reshaping the country in general, and the education sector in particular. The unprecedented growth of Oman's public general education system has outpaced the growth of the public HEIs. Consequently, the deficit of supply with the demand for HE is evident. Such discrepancy has created a considerable number of secondary school leavers fighting to obtain a place in public higher education institutions. In response, the Omani government approved the establishment of private HEIs in 1995. As a prerequisite for their creation, the programmes offered by these institutions had to be affiliated with HEIs in developed countries. The Government, through the MOHE, has the responsibility to supervise these institutions. With financial support and other government subsidies through scholarships, land, grants and tax exemptions, private HE in Oman has grown and developed significantly in the last three decades. To achieve an international standard, all private HEIs have to adopt international curricula, recruit international expatriate faculty, and use English

as the language of instruction. However, one of the more challenging tasks for the education system in Oman is sustaining the prospective expansion while maintaining quality (Wilkinson & Al-Hajry, 2007).

The next chapter addresses the literature which provides the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this research in general and transnational education in particular.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed Higher Education (HE) and transnational education (TNE) within the Omani context. Following on from this, the literature review addresses the key issues in the field of internationalisation in HE gleaned from published research. In terms of the necessity of providing such a review, Denscombe (2010) argues that new studies should build on existing knowledge to avoid unnecessary duplication. In the same vein, Wellington (2015) asserts that the job of the researcher is, figuratively speaking, not simply moulding their bricks, but ensuring that the blocks fit into the wall of the current understanding in a located domain. Thus, before conducting this study, I must review similar studies to mine based on the Omani context or elsewhere in the world to identify the gaps in knowledge and to gain insight into the methodological approaches that I could use for my study. I made use of different literature sources such as search engines, opportunistic searching, computerised databases, the snowballing method, library indexes and sources that have been proposed by both my supervisor and my colleagues.

This review opens with a discussion of the meaning, rationale, and approaches of internationalisation. It examines existing studies on TNE as a subset of educational internationalisation with a particular focus on the types of collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their foreign partners located in different countries. The chapter further examines the growth and benefits of TNE as well as critical challenges facing the implementation of TNE in hosting countries. A discussion of the impact of policies and socio-cultural issues on study programmes in local contexts follows this section. Since this research is aimed at developing an

understanding of quality issues surrounding the implementation of TNE, this literature review includes a discussion of the overarching problems in quality and quality assurance of TNE. There is a section on initiatives developed in selected western countries and international organisations such as UNESCO and OECD aimed at enhancing the quality of delivery of TNE. As my study also explores the experiences of academic staff in TNE, the chapter presents and discusses research related to the knowledge and experience of academic staff on international programmes. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the analytical framework that assisted in the analysis of my data and conceptualisation of the study of TNE. This study has a pragmatic orientation in order to produce useful knowledge to address a real-world problem from policy to implementation. Each theme will be discussed in more detail in the following sections with specific reference to how these issues have informed my topic and assisted in its conceptualisation.

3.2. Internationalisation of Higher Education

Internationalisation has been one of the most critical issues in higher education since the mid-1980s (Varghese, 2009). As an explanation for its importance, Marginson and der Wende (2007) argue that:

> In a networked global environment in which every university is visible to every other, the weight of the international dimension is increasing [and] it is no longer possible for nations or for individual higher education institutions to completely seal themselves off from global effects (p.5).

The increasing growth of internationalisation of HE is largely due to the increasing demand for higher education and the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) which cause the transfer of knowledge and information to be more intensive, rapid and frequent from one country to another (Altbach, 2013b; Knight 2007a; Scott, 2005; Teichler, 2004). Another factor contributing to this growth is the emergence of international trade agreements for services (including education) and governmental policies that are aimed at creating environments conducive for the development of collaborative partnerships between different HEIs (Zajda & Rust, 2016; Marginson & der Wende, 2007).

The phenomenon has a variety of terms including global education, and multicultural education among others (Knight, 2004; de Wit, 2002). However, the term 'internationalisation' gained popularity in the 1990s (Teichler, 2004; Knight, 2004), and it goes beyond the specific dimensions of students and staff movement (de Wit, Deca, & Hunter, 2015b). In an attempt to explain the difficulties of presenting a standard definition of internationalisation of education, Knight (2007b, p.207) states that the term means "different things to different people and in different countries". For some, internationalisation is conceptualised as awareness and commitment of HEIs to internationalise the curriculum, learning, teacher and student exchange, and joint research initiatives. For others, it is seen as an opportunity for HEIs to export their educational services to a new market in overseas countries (Knight, 2004; Yang, 2002). As a result, a variety of terminology is employed in the literature. These terms include "transnational" and "borderless" as well as "cross-border" education (de Wit, 2010; OECD 2007; Knight, 2005c). However, Knight (2005b) insists that the different terminologies are important as they denote subtle differences. Thus, she cautions against using the terms interchangeably. For the purpose of this research, perhaps the most relevant definition of internationalisation is provided by Knight (2005a): "the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (p.21). This definition most succinctly touches upon three key areas of consideration for internationalisation in education: (1) Teaching (2) Research and (3) Education as a service. These three areas are clearly interrelated and fall within the broader context of the international community and the global market. Thus, for a university to be considered international in outlook, its study programmes, evaluation processes and regulations must have an international dimension. Knight's definition also points to the importance of intercultural dynamics and their central role in internationalisation. In other words, internationalisation dictates the sensitive addition of multicultural communication into the teaching and learning process (Caruana & Ploner, 2010).

Frølich and Veiga (2005) observe that "the internationalisation of higher education is a complex, multidimensional and often fragmented process" (p.9). According to

Knight (2005b), there is a need to distinguish between internationalisation within a home country and internationalisation abroad (otherwise known as TNE). The former denotes the process of integrating multiple cultural viewpoints within curricula, teaching, research and other service functions to prepare students to interact with an increasingly internationally-minded global community without having to travel abroad or outside their home country (de Wit, 2010; Knight, 2005b). The latter is perhaps the fastest growing sector involving migration of the composite elements of any educational institution (including materials, staff, and programmes) across borders, thus making higher education an integral part of the global knowledge economy (Knight, 2014). Teichler (2004) also ascribes to this latter definition, seeing internationalisation as the wholesale transfer of educational components from one country to another. Furthermore, Altbach (2007, p.121) argues that globalisation of education includes not only internationalisation but also "all the contemporary pressures on higher education, from massification to the growth of the private sector". In this regard, Lee, (2012, p.4) suggests, that 'massification,' 'diversification,' and 'internationalisation' of higher education have necessitated many changes in higher education institutions. This revision ought to focus on redesigning the academic programmes, reviewing the procedures for recruitment and management of staff, reformulating policies on recruitment and support services for students, and restructuring university management.

However, Altbach (2006) argues that internationalisation of higher education relates more to the field of cross-border activities and cooperation between countries and a commitment toward international education. der Wende (1997) argues that internationalisation is the process of improving higher education by adhering to newly created international standards. They are of the opinion that internationalisation ought to be responsive to the global environment, for example, through the development of quality improvement measures, ensuring students and staff develop the requisite competencies to succeed, and upgrading systems and services to meet these aims. Jeptoo and Razia (2012) share the view that the development of internationalised curricula and programmes requires supporting students and staff to develop the skills needed for the 21st century; that is, the transfer of knowledge and intercultural skills.

3. 3. Rationales for Internationalisation of HE

According to de wit (2011b; 2002), four broad rationales influence internationalisation. These are; (1) political (peace, security, and alliance); (2) Economic (global competition and the need to prepare students for employment within the context of an international labour market); (3) Academic (enhancement of the teaching and learning process and achieving excellence in research and scholarly activities); and (4) social-cultural (promoting equality, justice, and intercultural understanding). Knight (2008) suggests there are differences between concepts of internationalisation held by institutions and their home countries because organisations rationalise internationalisation differently to governments. According to Knight (ibid.) national rationales might include:

> Human resource development, strategic alliances, income generation/commercial trade, nation building, and social/cultural development and mutual understanding [whilst institutional rationales include] international branding and profile, quality enhancement/international standards, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances and knowledge production (p.25)

Understandably, different stakeholders hold different views on the nature and purpose of internationalisation depending on their goals. Knight (2007c), amongst others, agrees that there is a trend that is currently shifting away from student mobility to movement of programmes and providers to the students' home country. This reflects the case of Oman where TNE is seen as a method of accommodating Omani students seeking higher education as well as promoting the quality of HE. Therefore, the government supports private HEIs in their provision of TNE from franchising to validation by working with foreign partner Universities. Such support includes tax exemption, allocating land, and providing internal students scholarships (for details see section 5.3). This pattern supports the view that TNE activities is growing. As TNE constitutes the focus of my study, it is important to define the term

concretely. Such a definition has been provided in General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), an agreement which has influenced the nature of exchanges and partnerships in HEIs and which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

3. 4. WTO/GATS and International HE Activities Cross Border

The emergence of GATS, adopted in 1995 by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which incorporates the provision of education, has legitimised the commercialisation and commodification of higher education (Knight, 2003). de Wit (2010 a); Knight (2008) and Teichler (2004) appear to suggest a shift has mainly occurred in the perception and classification of higher education, from being a service provided to the public, to being a service to be traded. This has had wide-ranging consequences. For scholars such as de Wit (2011a), this shift has fundamentally altered the nature of exchanges and partnerships. Moreover, Knight (2006a) appears to suggest that GATS is responsible for the perception shift in terms of education being considered as a service, subject to the same market and trade rules as other economically based services. One of the prime criticisms of this shift is that, by identifying education as a form of international trade, the sector has surely become susceptible to being influenced by business-minded people interested in making a profit rather than educating for the sake of education itself (Varghese, 2009; der Wende, 1997). At the very least, many contemporary universities are now forced to rationalise their national context within a broader international agenda. As such, the internationalisation of higher education has caused a redefinition of the relationship between provision of such by different states and increased levels of border crossing by students (Knight, 2003).

There has been a significant increase in the establishment of international campuses affiliated with Western higher institutions in recent decades (Knight, 2014). In other words, as a direct consequence of GATS, TNE provision has burgeoned, with the opening of private facilities to meet the demand for higher education. This is especially the case in the southern hemisphere (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Martin, 2007).

3. 5. Transnational Education: An Overview

As highlighted earlier, internationalisation of HE has evolved since its inception. Prior to the 1990s, internationalisation of HE was characterised mainly by the exchange of teaching/research staff and the movement of students from one country to another. However, this has since changed and new forms of education provision, including TNE to international students, are being implemented. This is because TNE is seen as a subset of the internationalisation strategy of higher education (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2006a).

As mentioned earlier, various terms are often used interchangeably in literature to refer to TNE. These include the following; "offshore education," "cross-border education," and "borderless education" (Altbach, 2013b; Stella & Woodhouse, 2011; Knight, 2010; Stella, 2006; Woodhouse, 2006). The term "transnational education" is used hereafter due to its extensive use in the HE context in Oman. UNESCO and the Council of Europe's (2001) Code of Good Practice in the Provision of TNE provide the most wide-ranging yet succinct definition of TNE:

> All types and modes of delivery of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system. (p.1)

The definition offered by UNESCO and Council of Europe appears to be the standard definition used by a range of agencies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the British Council. One key feature of TNE is that one institution is responsible for awarding qualifications to students undertaking their studies in another educational institution. Additionally, the British Council refers to transnational education as situations where "students study towards a foreign qualification without leaving their home country" (British Council, 2013, p.6). According to this definition, students can study a foreign university programme without moving out of their own country. In this case, TNE is often seen as a strategic means for students to obtain western credentials without needing to

move to the country where the degree awarding institution is based. Knight (2010) describes these cross-border educational activities as "the physical or virtual movement of an education provider across a national border to establish a presence to provide education/training programmes and/or services to students and other clients" (p.52).

As indicated earlier, in its broadest definition, TNE can follow different arrangements. Programmes can be moved abroad or across institutions (programme mobility), and institutions (providers) can invest internationally (institutional mobility). As described by Knight (2013 b), "mobility has moved from people (students, faculty, and scholars) to program (twinning, franchise, virtual) to the provider (branch campus) mobility, and most recently to the concerted development of education hubs" (p.375).

In essence, transnational education involves varying degrees of collaboration between HEIs across borders. A number of factors, including the advancement of communication systems, liberalisation of education services through GATS, and the massification of higher education and economic globalisation, appear to have contributed to the demand for TNE (de Wit et al., 2015b; Knight, 2007c; Chapman, 2007; OECD, 2004 b). TNE activities have therefore become an increasingly significant element of HE in several nations in recent years (de Wit, Yemini & Martin, 2015a; Huang, 2006). However, the intensification of TNE has been fostered not only by the broader processes of internationalisation and globalisation but also by supply and demand or as Francois (2016) calls it, the "push-pull dynamic in both industrialised and developing countries" (p.14). The following sections provide more detail on these issues.

3.6. Drivers of TNE

Against the background of globalisation, many HEIs worldwide have become actively involved in internationalisation activities, resulting in a significant increase in the scale of operations in recent years (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The common drivers for both importing and exporting countries of TNE provision are their aims

and purposes. In general, by increasing the number of enrolments on overseas programmes, sending HEIs are motivated mainly by a desire to grow and diversify university revenues, in response to government funding cuts (Willis & Taylor, 2014; Vincent-Lancrin, 2007). Apart from financial goals, sending HEIs seek to take advantage of new markets to build research capacity, enhance cultural capital, and provide a strategic response to the global competition (Taylor, 2010). Universities and colleges in hosting countries are mainly interested in improving the quality of education and absorbing the increasing number of students seeking higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

However, the hosts and senders of TNE are motivated by a different set of rationales. In terms of the receivers, these comprise raising numbers of secondary school leavers and labour-market demand for graduates outstripping the number of graduates of the domestic higher education system (Bashir, 2007). Generally, there is an increase in demand for HE by students in developing countries. This demand has been caused by the lack of capacity to meet the growing market, as well as the desire of some students and their families for Western-based education (de Wit et al., 2015a; Knight, 2014; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Regions and countries which fit this profile include the Middle East (Qatar, Oman, UAE) and Asia (China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia) (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011; Kritz, 2006). In Oman for example, the economy and political factors have led to the establishment of private HEIs that provide foreign programmes in affiliation with credible HEIs abroad. In this case, it is worth mentioning that increasing private higher education has been considered as one of the more remarkable recent developments in higher education and, therefore, the involvement of private HEIs in TNE is seen elsewhere too (Zajda & Rust, 2016). For example, the vast majority of TNE activities of Australian Universities are carried out in partnership with private HEIs according to Lim (2008). Even in the case of IBCs, in general, they are registered as private education companies but operate with foreign for-profit joint venture partners (Wilkins, 2017; Healey, 2015).

In many Eastern countries, including Oman, institutions from English-speaking countries (for example, USA, UK, Australia) are taking advantage of this new era to deliver their programmes via local partner organisations. In this context, Williams

and Evans (2005) offer four main reasons why UK (and by extension, US, and Australian) HEIs have taken the initiative by responding quickly and efficiently to the threats and opportunities presented by globalisation. These four factors are academic independence, financial independence, financial stringency and the ability to offer programmes in English. It is, however, worth noting that traveling abroad for higher education has not ceased, but that students now have more opportunities than ever to study on international programmes in their home countries for degrees and awards accredited by foreign institutions (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011; Van Damme 2002).

3. 7. Modes of TNE and Forms of Programme Mobility

In TNE arrangements, foreign universities typically provide higher education services abroad in partnership with local institutions in a hosting country or individually as an international branch campus (IBCs). As mentioned in the previous section, this trend emerges and often develops when local HEIs appear unable to develop new programmes to respond to labour market demand, leading them to turn to foreign universities with established programmes (Altbach et al., 2009). However, there is no universally applicable model regarding how to approach and implement internationalisation activities. The GATS provides a useful framework to classify education services, known as 'modes of supply'. These fall into four categories: (1) people mobility, (2) providers, (3) programmes, and (4) projects or services (Knight, 2003). The four GATS categories outlined below apply to higher education (OECD, 2004 b, p.35):

    i.   **Cross-border supply:** This mode of supply sees both recipient and provider remain in their home countries without the need for movement. Distance education (e-learning and virtual universities) is an example of such a mode.

    ii.   **Consumption abroad:** This requires the recipient to travel to the suppliers' country as with students who go abroad to national institutions.

iii. **Commercial presence:** Where a foreign provider sets up an institution in the recipient country. Examples of this include satellite/branch campuses (including joint ventures with local institutions, generally referred to as transnational programmes).

iv. **The movement of natural persons:** This denotes the temporary movement of academic staff from the sending to receiving country.

Accordingly, member countries have committed to liberalisation of trade in education services via the four categories of GATS. International student mobility (Mode 2) remains the most common form of TNE in terms of student enrolment numbers. The transnational movement of educational programmes (Mode 3) is ranked second (Hou, Montgomery & McDowell, 2014). In the Omani case, transnational mobility of programmes (Mode 3) is the primary focus of higher education activity where the exporting countries deliver their education programmes through affiliated Omani private HEIs. According to Knight (2006b), the transnational mobility of programmes involves:

> …the movement of individual education/training courses and programmes across national borders through face-to-face, distance or a combination of these modes. Credits towards a qualification can be awarded by the sending foreign country provider or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly. (p.23)

Regarding the forms of TNE programme, Knight (2010) identifies the popular methods of TNE program mobility as the following:

• **Distance education:** This relies on the use of technologies to provide digitally-based education which does not require movement of institutions and people. It is also known as blended learning.

• **Franchising:** This is fast becoming the most common form of TNE, and it denotes the agreement made between one institution and another (either within the same country or internationally). It requires the external organisation to provide degrees or programmes for the home institution.

• **Programme articulation**: This specifically refers to an overseas university recognising the completed units of study in the programmes of local institutions. Typically, the local school teaches to the curriculum of the foreign university. Students studying in these local institutions can gain credits towards diplomas awarded or recognised by the college/institutions which can lead to further study. Programme articulation often leads to programme twinning (explained below) and granting of joint or double degrees.

• **Twinning**: Twinning agreements allow joint courses in institutions located in different countries in which these are identical. This usually involves completion of earlier years of the programme in the students' home country before the completion of the course in the awarding institution.

• **Branch campuses**: These are campuses of the leading university located in external countries, with either part or full ownership by the awarding institution. Courses are often identical in both campuses and are usually managed and delivered by temporarily relocated staff from the awarding body.

• **Offshore partnerships**: In this case, institutions from different countries offer programmes under an agreement. Usually, the admission criteria, curriculum, and assessment are monitored by the overseas university. The local institution handles student recruitment, tutorial support, and other services.

Aside from these categories, the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has provided their own categorisation of TNE activities of UK universities into three forms: (i) distance learning; (ii) international branch campuses; and (iii) global partnerships which include franchises and validated arrangements (British Council, 2016). In importing countries, different modes of TNE and forms of programmes mobility can be distinguished. Factors including government policies and the countries' economic climate play an essential role in both cases, that is, the exporting and importing countries when it comes to the determination of educational services across countries (Bashir, 2007). Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Mauritius, Qatar, and Dubai

are considered as regional hubs for international branch campuses that aim to attract international students to study in these foreign universities (Ibid.). On the other hand, countries such as Oman and China, where foreign institutions are not yet legally permitted to establish branch campuses independently, TNE provision can only occur through collaboration with a host country institution.

However, some argue that programme partnerships with local HEIs are more attractive for sending universities than opening branch campuses independently due to the relatively informal nature of such partnerships which allows them to sit outside domestic regulatory policies (British council, 2016; Kritz, 2006). According to Bashir (2007), defined policies and regulatory frameworks have facilitated the establishment of branch campuses, as foreign providers seek long-term operations and are, therefore, usually investing in stable and risk-free environments. A 2015 survey conducted by the European Association for International Education (EAIE) showed that European universities considered the establishment of new IBCs as their lowest priority due to the considerable financial and reputational risks. It was also found that strategic partnerships and student mobility featured more prominently in their strategies (Wilkins, 2016 b). These findings are particularly relevant to this research as it is mainly concerned with the movement of educational programmes from one country (UK) to another country (Oman) to build its private sector institutions through academic partnerships.

3. 8. Demand for Transnational Education

The literature suggests that the growth of TNE has occurred as a result of the developments in information technology, institutional and governmental policy decisions, and the pivotal role of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in issuing the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Together, these factors have allowed increased competition among educational institutions as they sought to generate more income through provision of TNE in the face of government funding cuts (Stella, 2011; Altbach, 2010; Knight, 2006a). However, comprehensive international statistics are not available as many countries do not collect data on programme and student numbers at the national level (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016;

Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Naidoo, 2009). This problem is compounded by the lack of an international naming standard to define forms and modes of TNE due to varying methods of data collection and categorisation (British Council, 2016; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Knight, 2010; Altbach, 2007).

However, existing data does show a steady growth in TNE globally, in both scale and scope (programme and student numbers and variety of modes and locations). Indeed, it has been estimated that the number of students enrolled in international education rose dramatically from 1.8 million in 2000 to 4.1 million in 2010. There is a prediction that this number will increase to 7.2 million in 2025, 70% of which will originate from Asia (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Knight, 2010). Knight (2007c) appears to suggest that the increasing numbers of students receiving an international education in their home countries via academic programmes and cross-border partnerships specifically, will continue to rise (Knight, 2007c). For example, more than 75% of UK HEIs are participating in different forms in the provision of TNE in more than 200 countries across the globe (Bischof, 2016). In 2005, one in four international students in Australia were enrolled offshore. Indeed, it has been projected that TNE activities are likely to outstrip onshore global business in the next ten years (Clayton, 2011). Another example is the growing number of IBCs globally from only 24 branch campuses in 2002 to almost 200 by 2012 (Knight, 2014). Garrett, Kinser, Lane and Merola (2016) report that the number of IBCs had further risen to 249 by the end of 2016.

From a national perspective, China has both the largest number of students who travel abroad for higher education and is the most significant importer of TNE (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). Similar growth trends are discernible in the Middle East and smaller Asian nations (Vincent-Lancrin, 2009). The Global Alliance for TNE estimates a 500,000 student yearly enrolment in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong by 2020 (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2011). Of the countries which provide this education, the UK is the most prominent. By 2014/2015, there were ninety-nine UK-based universities involved in the provision of TNE for 665,995 students studying outside the UK (British Council, 2016).

Institutions in other countries, such as Australia and Germany, have also recently ramped up their internationalisation efforts. In 2012, 80,458 international students enrolled in 394 TNE programmes in Australia. In that same year, there were 200 international double degree programmes with German institutions (British Council, 2013). Furthermore, the Middle East, for a decade now, has been a hub for satellite, offshore, and branch universities and programmes (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Wilkins, 2010). Indeed, the United Arab Emirates now hosts more branch campuses than any other nation. Globally, American, UK, and Australian universities account for the first, second and third largest number of IBCs, respectively (Salt and Wood, 2014; Knight 2013a). Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2011), referring to the Gulf States, in particular, have suggested that the "regional identities and regional economic, political, and cultural developments have all played a significant role in the rapid regional development of transnational higher education" (p. 195).

In Oman, the government policy of encouraging the establishment of private education institutions that provide TNE programmes in affiliation with credible foreign partner Universities has been instrumental in the growth of TNE activities. There are currently over 250 international academic programmes hosted in 27 private HEIs with affiliate agreements with universities in the UK, USA, Australia, India, and Germany (MOHE, 2016). For example, in 2014/15 Oman ranked fifth for countries hosting UK TNE in terms of students (British Council, 2016). At the same time, the number of students studying abroad has also increased. In the academic year 2013/2014, there were 1643 new scholarships allocated by the government for students to learn overseas as compared with 243 in 2010 (MOHE, 2013). Of these, 44% studied in the USA, 26% in the UK, 16.8% in Australia, and 5.5% in Ireland (MOHE Annual Report, 2014). The numbers of overseas scholarships has increased so significantly of late due to a government aim of educating more than half of 18–24-year-olds in higher education by 2020. According to Ameen et al. (2010), there were only 19% of this age group in higher education by 2010.

The growth and diversity of TNE provision worldwide is evidence of the growing demand for quality higher education and the opportunities this type of education brings. This phenomenon also brings with it challenges for both sending and

receiving countries (Knight, 2006b). The purpose of next two sections is to examine both the opportunities and challenges which developing countries face in this regard.

3. 9. The Key Benefits of TNE

The provision of TNE has tangible benefits to the students, participating educational institutions, as well as 'build the capacity' of a country. According to Vincent-Lancrin (2007), capacity building is multi-layered, occurring on the individual level, organisational level, sector/network level, society level, and global level. These will be discussed individually in this section. According to McBurnie and Ziguras (2011); and Taylor (2010), TNE helps to stimulate social and economic change by providing additional employment opportunities for local academics and administrators as well as enhancing the local HE system through opportunities to learn new best practices for teaching and learning. Local economies also benefit from the fresh injection of educated graduates ready to enter the skilled workforce. Chetro-Szivos (2010) agrees with this point, stating that such knowledge sharing contributes positively to the social and economic spheres as a result of the intellectual fostering of the population. This assertion is also the case of Oman, a country which has benefitted from a transnational education policy to increase access to international education for significant proportions of its young people (Ameen et al., 2010). Another benefit of TNE is its contribution to capacity building. By educating a more substantial proportion of the local population to a tertiary level and providing them with an international outlook, social development occurs as the people gain the skills needed for well-paid employment and, thus, become settled and productive members of society. Institutions also benefit from the enhancement of their international profile and diversification of their faculty and staff (Altbach, 2012; Lane, 2011a). Therefore, TNE can enhance teaching and learning practices at home institutions. At the level of HEIs, institutions can benefit from the enhancement of their international profile and diversification of their faculty and staff (Altbach, 2012; Stella & Woodhouse, 2011). Therefore, TNE can enhance teaching and learning as well as research practice at home institutions (Chetro-Szivos, 2010).

There is evidence that several countries in Asia including Malaysia, UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong and China, have benefited economically and socially from increased levels of TNE provision. Recently, the globally market-driven agendas of HE have led to the establishment of educational hubs in these countries. This development is seen as the transformation toward a knowledge-based economy and has promoted the higher education sector by inviting prestigious universities to establish branch campuses. Hence, top European and American institutions have opened branch campuses in these countries. The purpose of creating branch campuses is not only to accommodate local students in higher education but also as a strategy to attract international students worldwide (Lane, 2011b; OECD, 2007). Based on this political-economic approach, the government of Hong Kong, for example, has made significant changes in its higher education policy and introduced financial support to facilitate the education hub strategy. The University Grants Committee (UGC), the steering agency for higher education in Hong Kong, decided to gradually increase the number of students in 2004. To achieve this, it announced a further increase in the permitted proportion of non-local students from 10 to 20 percent in undergraduate programmes of publicly funded universities in 2010 (Lo, 2017, p.4). This policy was accompanied by changes in immigration laws to allow international students to work part-time, including participating in internship programmes during and after completion of their studies.

From a student perspective, studying on international programmes allows them to avoid the financial burdens of overseas fees and associated living costs. International courses are especially beneficial given the relatively low prices to be paid at locally based institutions (Wilkins, 2017; Hénard et al., 2012). Moreover, by obtaining a degree awarded by an overseas university, especially from English-speaking countries, these students become attractive to prospective employees. In other words, their employment opportunities become significantly broadened. Students also have the opportunity to study part-time and gain work experience, both of which are difficult in many overseas countries with stringent visa requirements (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2011; Huang, 2006).

Despite the perceived benefits of TNE discussed above, there is lack of literature on the impact of TNE on the receiving countries as TNE is mainly studied from the perspective of western educational institutions (Francois, 2016). The next section moves from the benefits to a full discussion of the criticisms which have been levelled against TNE.

3. 10. Main Critiques and Challenges of TNE

While TNE clearly presents opportunities for students, institutions and nations, there are a great number of challenges and negative impacts which have been raised in existing literature. These can affect both the receiving (host) and the exporting/sending country, as well as administrators, faculty and students. (Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Altbach, Yudkevich, & Rumbley, 2015; Boteju & Burnapp, 2011). One of the problems faced by the hosting country is the loss of control and power over the higher education sector. For example, despite enacting policies to regulate TNE provision in the country, the Chinese government has raised concerns over the quality of TNE programmes and the loss of Chinese educational sovereignty (Pyvis, 2011). Another negative impact appears to be the loss of cultural identity and educational autonomy. Some critics view TNE providers as a new form of colonisation where western educational programmes tend to dominate and affect the individual learners, institutions and the broader society (Rhein, 2016; Zajda & Rust, 2016; Shams & Huisman, 2012; Dunn & Wallace, 2006). In addition to the above, TNE programme implementation faces a number of contextual challenges. These include the "methods of delivery and student expectations, and the political context and legislative framework" (Stafford & Taylor, 2016, p. 627). The remainder of this section addresses criticisms levelled against TNE programmes according to broader categories.

Commercial perspective: Although education is commonly perceived as a public good, one criticism of TNE provision is that it tends to be commercially-oriented. As discussed earlier, the landscape of higher education is now greatly influenced by globalisation and GATS agreement. Education has increasingly become commodity driven by the market and profit-making motivations (Zajda & Rust, 2016). This has

been captured in a memorable phrase by Knight (2006b, p.20), who contends that education has moved from being an "aid to trade". This transition is blamed for affecting the quality of education provision in that providers are more interested in income generation rather than addressing quality issues and the societal needs which are the drivers in the provision of this type of education from a government perspective (Clarke et al., 2016). In certain cases, the quality of educational services suffers at the expense of profit by operators conducting business without official approvals (Maringe & Woodfield, 2013; Marginson & der Wende, 2007). As such, Altbach et al. (2009) argue that the commercialisation of higher education on a global scale "conflicts with the traditional roles of the university" (p.14). For instance, HEIs in developed countries are seen to have an economic advantage by trading education and increasing revenue to combat financial constraints and public expenditure cuts. On the other hand, the HEIs in developing countries are on the receiving end and unable to compete effectively in the global market (Bashir, 2007). Arguably, ethical internationalisation should be committed to such fundamental values as quality in academic programmes and fair treatment of partners as well as respect for local cultures.

Socio-cultural issues: Research on TNE has revealed that there are concerns regarding socio-cultural conflicts between the host country and the sending country. For example, in South East Asian countries, TNE provision has raised local concerns over the homogenising effect of globalisation in education and matters that specifically pertain to loss of identity and culture (Rhein, 2016; Altbach et al., 2009; Knight & de Wit, 1995). These views are further buttressed by Teichler (2004) who indicates that internationalisation "might imply many questionable elements such as destroying cultural heritage, diminishing language diversity, reducing the variety of academic cultures and structures, quality decline or even supporting imperialist take-overs" (p.6).

Another issue pertaining to socio-cultural concerns and lightly touched upon above is that transnational education provided in partnership with western institutions is often deemed colonial. In other words, the imposition of entirely western-style education, which includes content and assessment, is considered to symbolise a spread of

western influence. This problem is compounded by frequent failures of institutions to discuss the socio-cultural and economic context in receiving countries (Knight, 2013a; Pyvis, 2011; Burnapp & Zhao, 2009; Woodfield, Middlehurst, Fielden & Forland, 2009). This problem also extends to academic staff in transnational teaching. A wide range of studies, including those of Stafford & Taylor (2016); Bovill, Jordan and Watters (2015); Smith (2009b); and Bodycott and Walker (2000), indicate that teaching staff face significant challenges when attempting to teach a course in one county designed for use in another.

In attempting to suggest measures to combat this challenge, Stella (2011) stresses the need to contextualise materials by adding local examples and explanations to the essentially western curriculum to ensure that the teaching and learning materials are relevant to the learners. Similarly, Smith (2012), Castle and Kelly (2004), and Dunn and Wallace (2004) consider that offshore providers should take into consideration the offerings of overseas higher education systems when it comes to the design and use of different learning materials including assignments and other related learning activities. Without this adaptation, cultural clashes may become a potential obstacle in knowledge transfer across borders (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). According to O'Mahony (2014), a study conducted by the Higher Education Academy in 2013, one of the few studies focusing on staff concerns of TNE programmes, gave voice to concerns over the suitability of curricula to students living and working in non-UK countries. In sum, cultural and educational imperialism may lead to the threatening of educational sovereignty regarding the lack of cultural adaptation of programmes, courses and curricula (Shams & Huisman, 2012; Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

Programme relevance: A criticism of TNE programmes is that they largely fail to adopt programme design to the contextual requirements of the host country (Dunn & Wallace, 2005). Similarly, Fang and Wang (2014) argue that curriculum should equip students with skill sets and competencies needed in the local labour market. In undertaking internationally recognised degrees, graduates need to prepare themselves for jobs on the international market; hence, the curriculum should offer opportunities for addressing both domestic and international labour market needs. It appears, however, that TNE providers are not doing so. In the Middle East, learning materials,

such as textbooks, do not seem to reflect the reality of local life. The studies in this context have expressed an inability to relate teaching materials to everyday experiences (Knight, 2014; Shams & Huisman, 2012; Heffernan, Morrison, Basu & Sweeney, 2010; Fanghanel & Trowler, 2007).

Additionally, evidence suggests that most the TNE providers shy away from programmes which require heavy investment in infrastructure, such as science-related fields, resulting in course offerings which do little to teach students the skills required on the local or international job market (Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012). On this note, it is important for the government to provide funding to ensure that relevant programmes that help to meet national needs are developed and implemented.

Curriculum alignment: Teachers and students on TNE programmes are unlikely to quickly adapt to the methods of teaching and learning required by the sending university (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Healey, 2015; Knight, 2013a; Heffernan et al., 2010). Thus, students from a learning culture which is alien to that used on TNE programmes may require significant levels of support to familiarise themselves with the content, teaching style and assessment requirements of their chosen courses. For example, academic staff and students in Oman must adapt to the UK education system to benefit from the TNE programmes offered by UK universities. However, Sharp (2017) and Forest (2007) both argue that standardising teaching, learning, and assessment internationally does not always produce the anticipated results. The reasons for this are two-fold; (1) the course content may not be suited to localised contexts (i.e. when religious/moral/political views conflict with the material) and; (2) The complication of cross-cultural measurement of performance through official assessment forms can be a barrier to effective implementation of education (Healey, 2015; Altbach et al., 2009). In short, this explains why it is difficult to promote a shared learning experience to achieve desirable results in multiple contexts (Sharp, 2017). Indeed, some authors, including Shams and Huisman (2012); Stella and Woodhouse (2011); Heffernan et al., (2010); and Coleman (2003), advocate for the adaptation of these elements to local contexts. However, striking a balance between how to respond to the local expectations and how to retain the distinctive features of

the sending country is not an easy task. Nevertheless, advocates for intercultural and globalised learning do exist, with Williams and Lee (2015) maintaining that pedagogy, technology, and assessment frameworks have and are being developed to assist international students in their education. In the case of Oman, for example, the MOHE has no mandate to interfere with academic pedagogy in private universities and colleges regarding curriculum development, teaching and learning methods and assessments. All these have to be negotiated with the partnered HE institutions. Understandably though, a balance must be struck between local and global needs in the curriculum design process for it to serve its intended purpose.

Recruiting and supporting qualified academic staff: There is much criticism in the literature with regards to the quality of delivery of education within TNE programmes. Much of this stems from concerns over the levels of support available to staff and their qualifications. One obvious consequence of the massification of higher education is the growth in demand for skilled faculty. It appears academic staff at the host institutions do not usually have the same level of qualification to that of the provider institutions (Findlay & Tierney, 2010; Altbach et al., 2009; Enders, 2007). This problem seems to stem from lower pay conditions in hosting countries (Knight, 2014; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). Altbach (2013a) in support of the above reports that Chinese institutions face a critical shortage of qualified staff with only a third of holding a bachelor's degree. In addition to this, the salaries of Chinese academics are considered meagre and unattractive, making it difficult for institutions to recruit high-quality staff. Apart from poor wages, other factors hindering the hiring of highly qualified academic staff include lack of infrastructure, poor working conditions, heavy workloads and lack of research capacity (Altbach, 2013a; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). In general, research has a relatively lower profile in the hosting countries because the primary function of their institution is teaching and not research. The problem of ill-qualified staff has been identified as a crucial issue for many hosting countries to address if they are to promote capacity building and staff retention (Findlay & Tierney, 2010).

Student profiles and standards: Those most at risk important factors influencing the low quality of TNE programmes is students who enrol with low grades. For

example, students who enrol on TNE programmes (i.e. in Oman and China) are less qualified than students their counterparts in public institutions (Altbach, 2013 b). In other words, TNE programmes tend to attract 'weak' students, as the best students either choose to go abroad or to study in public, state-funded institutions, which occupy the top spots in national rankings. In response to this issue, student enrolment standards and performance in China has led Chinese Government to decide to slow the pace of granting licenses for the delivery of TNE (Hou et al., 2014). In addition, a study in Malaysia shows that branch campuses tend to experience difficulty recruiting high quality lecturers and students (Wilkins et al., 2012). The researchers further explain that competition for students and the need to achieve recruitment targets has led some branch campuses to lower their admission standards compared to those of the main home campus. There is a quality/quantity dilemma here as institutions try to strike a balance between income generation to sustain their operations and at the same time maintain high-quality academic standards.

English language barrier: The English language, as the preeminent global language of business and academia, is the language of instruction on TNE programmes across the world. However, this presents a significant challenge for many students in the receiving countries (Daniels, 2013; Kritz, 2006; Luijten-Lub, der Wende & Huisman, 2005; OECD, 2004a). The problem with the use of English is that majority of learners in receiving institutions do seem to have the level of English proficiency required for entry into higher education in the sending countries. A low English proficiency level constitutes a barrier to interaction and communication in the classroom, and difficulty in understanding learning materials (Hughes, 2008). A study in Malaysia showed that the education system's failure to improve students' English language level sufficiently had affected the majority of graduates negatively, regardless of the university they attended (Cheong, Hill, Fernandez-Chung & Leong, 2016). Similarly, Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) have highlighted a problem in the UAE, where students who find the English language-based instruction challenging are likely to lose hope, leading to lower levels of achievement and increased dissatisfaction.

Having explored a range of challenges associated with TNE, the following section examines the issue of quality assurance, with a focus on the initiatives taken at the national, regional and international level to foster quality in educational institutions.

3. 11. Quality Challenge

There is an overwhelming consensus among education scholars that providing high-quality education remains one of the critical challenges facing TNE (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Healey, 2015a; Altbach & Knight, 2007; OECD, 2007; OECD, 2004a). Although there is a rapid expansion of TNE, there is no reliable data regarding the performance of institutions. The problem associated with high-quality education makes it difficult for some students to make informed choices regarding where to enrol. Literature shows that receiving countries such as China, Malaysia, UAE, and Singapore are experiencing significant problems in their quest to provide high-quality TNE (der Wende, 2007; OECD, 2007; Daniel, Kanwar & Uvalic-Trumbic, 2005). It is against this backdrop that some authors, including Stella and Woodhouse (2011), regard TNE as being largely unable to enhance quality in higher education. It appears most of the sending universities tend to be interested in making a profit rather than addressing critical issues related to the enhancement of quality in education. As highlighted earlier, the drive towards commercialisation of education and easy access to new contracts is believed to be affecting the provision of good quality education (Amaral, Tavares, Cardoso & Sin, 2016; Francois; 2016; Varghese, 2009).

Another problem is Quality Assurance. It appears some of the receiving countries do not have quality assurance systems in place, or that the existing quality assurance systems are not developed enough to monitor and evaluate TNE provision efficiently (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bashir 2007; Daniel, 2005). This might be exacerbated by the financial constraints and lack of administrative capacity in those countries. Knight (2006a) argues that that TNE can only help the receiving nations if it is of good quality and accessible to students from different backgrounds. Clearly it is vital to ensure that TNE addresses the needs of the country and that it is affordable.

65

Many shareholders share the view of establishing quality assurance mechanisms in both sending and receiving countries to eliminate poor TNE providers (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Altbach, 2010; Stella, 2011; Woodouse, 2006). However, there is debate over who should take the responsibility to ensure the provision of quality education: the sending or the receiving country. From the standpoint of the receiving nation, one of the primary purposes of importing TNE is to ensure proper quality of education (Hill et al., 2014; Bashir 2007). Therefore, there is an expectation that the universities in sending countries will guarantee high academic standards in the hosting countries. In this case, the sending university, which is the awarding body, is responsible for setting and carrying out assessments and is also responsible for the academic standards of the award which has to be identical or comparable to that of the sending university (Sharp, 2017; Lim, 2008).

While the sending institution should be responsible for ensuring quality, the government of the sending country should put in place regulations to monitor the TNE activities of their universities. Currently, the sending countries involved in TNE activities appear to not apply strict rules on the exporting of higher education services, in direct conflict with the regulations used by the receiving countries (Bischof, 2016). However, some authors argue that the sending institution is not the only body responsible for ensuring quality. In most cases, they only provide the programmes but are not involved in the day-to-day running of the courses as this is the role of the receiving institution. In this regard, the receiving institution is expected to play an essential role in ensuring quality education is provided (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). However, other scholars, including Stella and Woodhouse (2011); Dobos (2011); and Heffernan and Poole (2005) think that the provision of quality education should be a shared responsibility between both the governments and the institutions themselves. The reason they provide is that the provision of quality education is complex, involving different challenges related to language, geography, politics, culture, and the economy.

Consequently, the issue of the quality of education provision has become a critical item on the agenda of national, international and institutional development (Altbach et al., 2009; Hopper, 2007; Middlehurst & Campbell, 2003). At the national level, the

receiving countries are putting in place regulations to monitor the implementation of TNE programmes. For instance, in responding to concerns of education as a commodity, the Chinese Government has established regulations to protect its students from profit-making TNE providers (Hou et al., 2014). In the same vein, governments in Oman and Malaysia are also putting in place mechanisms in place to ensure quality education (Hou et al., 2014; Huang, 2007). This course of action is supported by Stella (2011) who argues that countries must ensure that there are regulations in place to protect stakeholders (especially students) to uphold a minimum standard of quality. However, some Africa countries, for example, are not yet equipped with such national policies or frameworks in this regard (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Knight, 2007b; Stella, 2006).

The sending countries and institutions ought to develop quality assurance mechanisms and good practices to enhance the quality of education in the receiving host countries. These should include institutional and programmes reviews, moderation of assessments, panel reviews, and the provision of quality assurance guidelines in the hosting institutions (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). There is a need for institutional initiatives to be regulated through guidelines provided by national quality assurance agencies. It is evident that some quality assurance agencies and accreditation bodies in the sending countries such as UK, Australia, and the USA have developed 'codes of good practice' and 'codes of conduct' to guide HEIs in the establishment of international cooperation in education (Jackson, 2016). For example, UK Universities follow guidelines provided by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as they enter into collaborative partnerships with foreign universities. The QAA provides guidelines related to the auditing of and standards required for TNE providers. As part of its work, QAA conducts reviews of overseas providers and full review reports for each country are made available on its website. Currently, country review reports include China, UAE, and Oman (Boteju & Burnapp, 2011).

At the international level, organisations such as UNESCO and OECD are responsible for developing quality assurance frameworks to be adhered to by the exporting and importing countries involved in TNE provision (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Daniel et al., 2005). Both UNESCO and OECD have been instrumental in achieving this by

jointly publishing "Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education" in 2003 (OECD, 2005). The guidelines provide tools that can be used by member states to assess the quality and relevance of higher education delivered across countries to protecting students and other stakeholders from low-quality TNE provision. In specific terms, the guidelines suggest measures which can be taken to appropriately share responsibility for quality assurance between national governments, students, official accreditation and quality assurance bodies, and the institutions and providers of TNE. These suggestions have resulted from the diversity of higher education systems. The development of a broad international convergence regarding the principles and issues is necessary to address quality assurance for cross-border programmes, and institutional mobility signals as a positive trend (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2011; Stella, 2006).

Other examples of international and regional quality assurance bodies include the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). These institutions have been instrumental in improving quality assurance in TNE. The INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice of 2005 are a specific example of attempts to standardise quality assurance agencies globally (INQAAHE, 2005). The APQN published a 'Toolkit on Regulating Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Education' in 2006 as a joint effort and response to TNE challenge for Asia, a significant importer region of TNE. The toolkit discusses among other things, the functions and types of regulatory frameworks, factors influencing the choice and design of frameworks, cooperation between host and provider countries, and resource implications and challenges (UNESCO, 2006).

Despite the establishment of international quality assurance bodies, one of the difficulties faced is the achievement of the standards which have been set. The higher level administrators and managers are often sourced from the home campus and are unable to ensure that local staff follows the procedures and regulatory measures (Bashir, 2007; Healey, 2015). The inability of local academic staff to do so appears to be the result of differences in cultures and the ability to adapt to different practices (Healey, 2015; Lane, 2011a). On the other hand, some authors, such as Pyvis (2011)

and, Ntshoe and Letseka (2010), criticise the attempts by international bodies (for example, UNESCO and OECD) to create guidelines for quality in TNE. These authors label these efforts as a form of educational imperialism. They argue, instead, for localised measures of quality which take into account the context-specific nature of the educational provision. This argument is especially important, due to the dangers faced when using the home institution as a point of reference for quality in a place which is wholly outside the originating institution's context, culture, and educational system. In short, the argument is that international and local standards should be integrated. In a study by Lim (2010), the difficulties in quality assurance in Singapore and Malaysia are outlined. Lin appears to suggest that quality assurance is complicated and time-consuming with mechanisms and conflicts between local and international beliefs regarding quality itself. Participants in the study stated that the existence of multiple systems for quality assurance, all with differing criteria, caused a level of investment in time and resources which significantly harmed efforts for continual improvement in other areas.

In summary, it appears that despite the numerous challenges presented by TNE at all levels, there is a general and global consensus that it is vital for national, regional and international agencies to collaborate and develop agreement on best practices to build trust (Stella & Woodhouse, 2011; Knight 2010). Literature reveals that scholars share the view that internationalisation of education is a positive development (Teichler, 2004). Some experts claim that internationalisation of higher education has had a beneficial impact on quality or at least has played a decisive role in the development of higher education in hosting countries (Stella & Woodhouse, 2011; Lane, 2011b; Van Damme, 2001). Oman, for example, has benefited from TNE as most high school graduates are now accessing higher qualifications awarded by credible foreign universities.

3. 12. Experiences of Academic Staff in TNE

The academic staff of higher education play a significant role as they hold the institution together. However, very little research has been carried out to assess the various roles, responsibilities, and challenges they face in delivering TNE (examples

of such research include Bedenlier & Richter, 2015; Green & Whitsed 2015; Keevers et al., 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). The current body of research does suggest that academic staff encounter difficulties when delivering TNE. Expatriate academic staff have problems in adapting to students who are unfamiliar with their teaching and learning styles as well the different social, political and the cultural context in which they have to teach (Dunn & Wallace, 2006; 2004; Bodycott & Walker, 2000). Literature suggests that some academic staff lack the pedagogical tools needed to engage meaningfully with culturally different student bodies (Keevers et al., 2014; Bodycott & Walker, 2000). Various authors have highlighted the importance of preparatory training for staff members aimed at successful curriculum implementation in an international context (Mak & Kennedy, 2012; Gopal, 2011; Dunn & Wallace, 2006; 2004). Although institutions do tend to provide training, studies indicate that this is still an area of concern. Gribble and Ziguras (2003) suggest that the cross-cultural teacher training given to academic staff is sometimes inadequate and too generalised. Their study examines the cross-cultural training provided by the Faculty of Business in three Australian Universities before traveling to the receiving country. From the findings, they conclude that the training programmes do little to prepare staff for the specific challenges of teaching abroad. In the same vein, non-Chinese academic staff working in China felt inadequately prepared to deal with the culture and structure of the country (Cai & Hall, 2016). It has been suggested that staff need to understand the local traditions, such as religious customs and family relationships, to avoid offending students (Wilkins et al., 2012).

The socio-cultural and political divisions between home institutions and the local providers is one of the major external influences on teaching and assessment of TNE. In a study conducted by Smith (2009a) in a UAE-based TNE provider, participants were of the opinion that localisation of the teaching and assessments were necessary to match the cultural and political milieu at the home institution. The study further established that there was lack of appreciation for the effect of the local context (regarding cultural and religious differences) and of the ability of academic staff and students to play an active role in mitigating the impact of these differences (Kadiwal & Rind, 2013). Bodycott and Walker (2000) conclude that classroom issues faced by a teacher in a TNE context invariably result from differences in language and culture

between the staff and the students. A study by Crabtree and Sapp (2004) on the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods across cultures, concluded that efforts made by two different cultural groups of students on negotiating a conducive learning environment improved the learning outcomes of the students and their perceptions of the learning environment.

English as the global lingua franca is also identified by academic staff as one of the barriers to the delivery of TNE programmes in hosting institutions. Bedenlier and Zawacki-Richter (2015), in a study on the opinions of experts working for 16 field-related journals, found that the use of English as lingua franca was amongst the top three challenges in TNE. Apart from this, other problems in TNE include the recruitment and retention of qualified academic staff in the receiving countries. Salt and Wood (2014, p.84), in a study on challenges faced by multi-national companies with cross-border activities, identified that "universities lack the infrastructure to manage overseas staff requirements; have different approaches to career development; view the role of secondments differently; and have a different attitude to dealing with contingency."

It appears then that universities struggle in an international context due to lack of knowledge and the nature of the business which requires a different set of rules. It has been noted that hosting institutions and branch campuses often recruit less qualified academic staff than the sending institutions because of financial constraints (Altbach et al., 2009). A study in Malaysia, for example, shows that branch campuses tend to experience difficulty in recruiting high quality lecturers (Wilkins et al., 2012). Academic staff have also indicated that poor working conditions such as unreasonable teaching loads, high numbers of students in classes, lack of research support and appropriate infrastructure constitute barriers to the provision of quality education (Healey, 2015).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that most academic staff teaching on TNE programmes feel the training given before the commencement of teaching is inadequate and they often receive little support from administrative staff for their work. According to Dewey and Duff (2009), without intense cooperation between

faculty and university administration, the internationalisation process may be fraught with unnecessary difficulty. As mentioned earlier, other challenges and obstacles faced in implementing international academic programmes include an unfamiliar educational environment, heavy workload, lack of support, issues with recruitment, training, and failure to ensure that the curriculum takes into account the cultural and political divisions between the home institution and the local provider. It is, therefore, necessary for the academic staff to work closely with administrators to address all the challenges they face in the implementation of TNE programmes.

Having discussed the experiences of academic staff in TNE, the next section explains the conceptual framework of the study.

3. 13. Conceptual Framework

Hammond and Wellington (2013) have observed that "a conceptual framework may provide a general orientation to a topic using a mix of published literature, personal knowledge and speculations on the kind of relationships that might emerge in the main study" (p.31). Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) clarify this by suggesting that a conceptual framework can be graphic or in narrative form and it explains the main things to be studied; that is, the key factors, variables, or constructs and the presumed interrelationships among them. Consequently, this section explains my conceptual framework arrived at from a review of the relevant literature and my own fieldwork experience. TNE can be defined as demand-absorbing programmes that offer places to students who could not attend national HEIs (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In addition, TNE requires a significant level of cooperation between nations and the relevant international organisations (sending and receiving/hosting). This cooperation can only be effective if their differing interests become convergent. International organisations, such the WTO, have provided a regulatory framework which is included in the GATS.

As discussed in the preceding sections, although TNE provides a number of benefits to various stakeholders, it also presents many challenges for both the receiving and sending country. Many authors in this review agree that the most substantial

contribution of TNE is the potential for it to build capacity in developing countries, and to support quality assurance processes, teaching methods, and programme management (McNamara & Knight, 2014; Varghese, 2011). However, there are concerns regarding the quality of teaching and learning, programme relevance and socio-cultural conflicts. This review of the literature shows that receiving institutions are sometimes not well equipped to run the programmes efficiently. Some of the problems related to this and cited in the literature include lack of infrastructure, shortage of qualified staff, admission of students with low academic performance and financial constraints (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011; Coleman, 2003). Despite these concerns though, Waterval et al. (2014) conducted a review of various studies that focused on the successful implementation of TNE programmes and identified many factors that are critical to the success of TNE. They classified all the elements into four main domains, which I have found useful to inform the conduct of my study. The four areas are as follows:

- **Domain of student:** This comprises three factors: (1) differences in learning behaviour; (2) differences in entry levels; (3) and differences in language.

- **Domain of teachers [this is referred to as the domain of academic staff in my study]:** This comprises two factors: (1) differences in content and didactical approaches; (2) and differences in feelings of ownership.

- **Domain of curriculum:** This comprises four factors: (1) differences in local contexts; (2) differences in attitude and approaches towards assessment; (3) disparities in access to learning resources; (4) and support systems and differences in time zone and working week.

- **Domain of soft and hard project management [referred to as the domain of management in my study]**: This comprises four factors: (1) relationship and communication between partners; (2) internal commitment at the home institution; (3) contract and business approach; (4) and quality assurance procedures.

73

According to Waterval et al. (2014), the first three domains relate to contextual differences between host and home institutions which potentially impact TNE programme implementation. The fourth includes soft and hard project management, with soft management relating to communication and personal relationships and teacher commitment, and hard management referring to rules, regulations, documentation, and record keeping. In my study, the domain of management does not refer to people in managerial positions but focuses on the factors highlighted by Waterval et al. (2014) and others related to management processes in the implementation of TNE programmes. It is worth noting that all the factors in the four domains are tightly interconnected. This categorisation is thus helpful for clarity and for structuring the theoretical framework adopted in my study.

Furthermore, Knight (2007 a) states that "it is impossible to look at the concept of internationalisation without considering the realities of the environment in which higher education is operating" (p.208). Hence, elements such as the socio-cultural context, policies, basic education, and national education bodies (for example, MOHE) and quality assurance agencies (for example, OAAA) are those that most affect the success of TNE provision. These elements will be examined in the implementation of TNE at the national level. Accordingly, as can be seen in Figure 4 below, the nature of this study involves a multi-level approach which reflects the complexity and dynamic nature of the phenomenon (Knight, 2007a). In this regard, my research takes into account three layers of context; namely, institutional, national and international. These three dimensions shape the way in which TNE is operationalised. As Rezende (2003, p.139) proposes, the "internationalisation processes should be conceptualised in terms of intra and inter-organisational relationships articulated in distinct spatial-temporal contexts".

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework
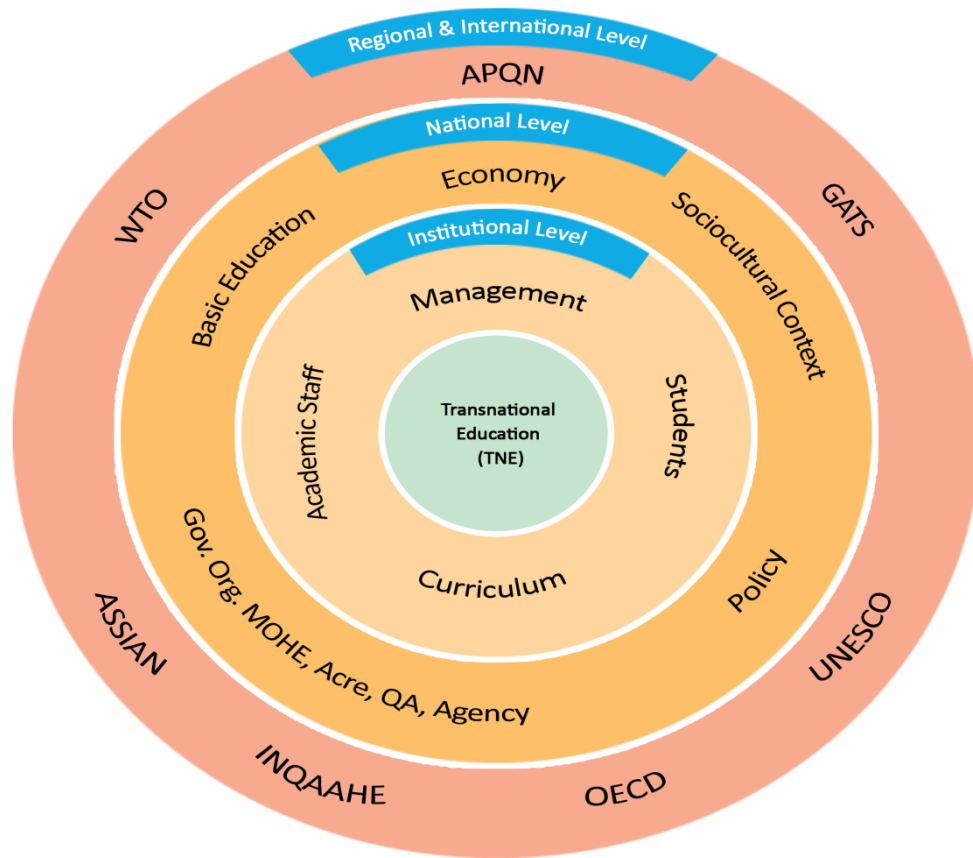
Using an interpretative approach, analysis of TNE in my study employs three interconnected lenses to analyse the TNE phenomenon. I explore academic staff, students, curriculum, and management from the perspectives of academic staff. I also examine the national level, economic, socio-cultural and political factors of TNE and review the degree to which international organisations, such as GATS and educational organisations such as UNESCO, have impacted the delivery of TNE. Decisions at the national level taken within the guiding context of international activities exist in a continuous feedback loop. As a result, decisions at this higher level will be influenced by both. This framework will be used to examine the delivery of TNE programmes within the formal agreement between Omani and UK partner Universities overseas.

3. 14. Chapter Conclusion

This literature review has revealed that internationalisation is considered to be one of the significant developments in higher education in the contemporary world. The GATS agreement has identified education as a commodity tradable between countries. In the last decade, an increasing number of higher education institutions globally and in Oman have signed international affiliation agreements related to research and teaching in higher education (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011). Certain factors, including political, economic and socio-cultural, as well as academic rationales influence the provision of TNE. Capacity building is a primary objective of the receiving countries while expanding revenue is said to be the main reason for foreign providers' involvement in TNE.

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, it is clear that foreign partnerships, public or private, can promote the quality of education and widen the participation of students in higher education. In this case, TNE helps to build capacity for national development. However, it can also create many problems and challenges for both sending and receiving countries, and these include cultural conflict and the language barrier. The literature suggests that a 'one-size-fits-all' model does not work with TNE programmes and thus, it is critically important to customise these international programmes to fit the different contexts in which they are delivered through collaboration between institutions (Smith, 2010). The review of the literature culminates with the presentation of my conceptual framework which shows in a graphic form the key factors to be studied while investigating the implementation of TNE in Oman. The theoretical or conceptual framework consists of three dimensions (international, national and institutional) needed for implementation of TNE in Oman. The next chapter addresses the methodology and study design.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methods, and procedures used to generate and analyse the data and a justification regarding their appropriateness within the framework of the chosen research design. The purpose of using the specified tools and procedures was to gain insight into the perceptions of academic staff regarding the implementation of transnational education (TNE) programmes in selected private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman. The chapter begins with a statement of the research questions followed by a discussion of the concept of methodology and the clarification of the research paradigm chosen for the research. The chapter includes a detailed explanation of choice for a qualitative constructivist model and data collection methods. It also describes the sampling technique used in the selection of my participants. There is a discussion on the procedures adopted in the conduct of the pilot study together with ethical issues encountered from the beginning to the end of the study. For example, how to be aware of my new role as a researcher (since I used to be the Director) when accessing the sites and the participants. I also discussed the challenges and obstacles I faced during data collection. The chapter ends with an exposition of the approaches to data analysis embraced in my study. The study involved generating answers to the following research questions:

Main research question

What are the academics' experiences and perceptions of transnational education in Omani private colleges?

Sub-research questions

Research Question 1: How has transnational education policy in Oman been implemented at the national and institutional levels?

Research Question 2: What are the academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private HEIs?

Research Question 3: From an academic staff perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in private colleges in Oman?

Research Question 4: From an academic staff perspective, what measures can be taken to improve TNE in private colleges in Oman?

As it can be seen from the four sub-research questions highlighted above, my study sought to develop a comprehensive picture of TNE by focusing on the rationale and the implementation of TNE programmes in the selected private colleges in Oman. The first sub-research question focuses on the exploration of the rationale for embracing TNE policy and the regulatory framework for its implementation. The aim was to understand the TNE policy and its implications at both national and institutional level. The second sub-research question provided a platform for the academic staff to share their lived experiences of TNE including their perceptions of the implementation of TNE programmes in their colleges. I was interested to know the academic staff's views regarding the establishment and development of TNE including issues around the design of TNE programmes and their subsequent implementation. This question enabled me to hear their stories about teaching and learning and assessment methods used in TNE programmes in Oman context. On the other hand, the third sub-research question was used to elicit the academic staff's views regarding the factors that were either supporting or militating against the effective implementation of TNE programmes in the colleges. I was interested to know from an insider perspective, for instance, how the working environment at institutional level and other factors such as outsider power at national level affected the implementation of TNE programmes. While in question two, the academic staff shared their general experiences, in question three, they were asked to articulate what

they considered to be the specific factors influencing the implementation of the TNE programmes. Lastly but not least, the fourth sub-research question sought to elicit academic staff's views regarding ways of enhancing the implementation of TNE in their colleges.

4.2. Methodology and Research Paradigm

A research methodology is the justification and "rationale for the application of particular research methods" (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p.109). It involves making explicit the context and thought of the research. In other words, a methodology is a framework within which the researcher decides what methods they will use and how the research will be carried out. Concerning their purpose, "methodologies are designed to decide the way in which the inquirer should discover knowledge" (Guba, 1990, p.18). In the same vein, Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) define methodology as "the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use" (p. 33). This view was highlighted earlier by Miller and Brewer (2003) when they stated that methodology "connotes a set of rules and procedures to guide research and against which its claims can be evaluated" (p.192). Taken together, these descriptions denote a methodology as a set of rules and procedures for reasoning, and a set of logical structures (Miller & Brewer, 2003). A researcher's background including their philosophical orientation guides their work, in other words, the researcher's ontological (nature of reality) and epistemological (nature of knowledge) assumptions underpin the conduct of any research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

There exist different research paradigms. According to Miller and Brewer (2003), the term paradigm is Greek in origin, which means "a theoretical structure or a framework of thought that acts as a template or an example to be followed" (p.220). A more specific definition of paradigm by Hammond and Wellington (2013), is "the dominant framework in which research takes place" (p.116). Guba and Lincoln (1994) support this by asserting that a research paradigm "represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p.107). Thus, for

social science researchers to attempt to understand the world around them, various research paradigms have been proposed and elaborated (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is clear, therefore, that all research actions occur under the context of those paradigms (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In the next section, I will discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpinned the conduct of this research.

4.2.1. Ontology

The root of the word ontology is the Greek word 'ont' meaning 'being' (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Therefore, ontology is related to the philosophical study of the essence of being: the science of explaining the basis of existence (Given, 2008). In other words, it defines social reality regarding the elements of what and how reality exists (Miller & Brewer, 2003). To be more specific, the questions which are related to the ontological inquiry are:

> 1) If our reality is independent of us as observers; 2) If social realities are multiple, depending on the perspective of the individual, or shared; 3) Whether social behaviour can be described by laws and theories that are both fixed and all-encompassing. (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.11)

Researchers can have different ontological perspectives. For instance, positivists believe in the existence of one reality whereas constructivists think there are multiple realities, depending on individual experiences. As a result of their objective philosophical grounding, positivists believe that the different researchers can come to the same conclusions on the same given phenomenon (David & Usher, 2011). In this regard, researchers using positivist designs must have extremely defined research maps to pre-empt any issues, challenges or problems which could materialize throughout the process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). However, constructivist researchers believe that knowledge is the result of social interaction between people with similar experiences of the same knowledge (Bryman, 2012). Social constructivists, therefore, see reality as being multiple and relative, shaped by intangible mental constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The following section discusses epistemology, which is another critical philosophical concept which clarifies the research paradigm embraced in a study.

4.2.2. Epistemology

The term epistemology also originates from Greek and is a combination of the word 'episteme,' meaning 'knowledge' and 'logos' meaning 'explanation' (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p.94). Epistemological questions concern the way in which knowledge is generated and passed on and the nature of the relationship between the inquirer and the knowledge being sought (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Snape & Spencer, 2003; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989. The beliefs about what is known and how to generate knowledge are different for positivists and constructivists. Positivist researchers believe that knowledge is outside the knower, and acquired by using different forms of scientifically designed methods. They believe themselves to be objective gatherers of data and that they are independent of their sources of data. In short, they believe that researchers must not influence the investigated phenomena (Hatch, 2002). In this way, an inquirer is said to be "objective and value-free" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.87). However, constructivists hold the view that individuals construct knowledge. Hence, it does not exist outside the knower. They acknowledge that there is an interdependent relationship between the researcher and participants or the study. Guba (1990) stresses that if researchers believe that realities exist only in participants' mind, then the subjective interaction is the only way to access these truths. The next section makes explicit my ontological and epistemological assumptions which justify why I adopted a qualitative theoretical framework in the conduct of my study.

4.3. Qualitative Research Paradigm

I adopted a qualitative research paradigm in carrying out my study. According to Stake (2010, p.36), qualitative research "is sometimes defined as interpretive research". The same point is highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (1998) who state that qualitative research relies on a naturalistic and interpretive approach. Qualitative researchers examine certain phenomena in their natural contexts in order to understand and interpret a particular phenomenon by the use of meanings gained

from participants. Miles et al. (2014, p.6) highlight the key characteristics of qualitative research which I considered as important when I was selecting the appropriate research paradigm for my study and these include:

- "Qualitative research is conducted through intense and prolonged contact with participants in a naturalistic setting to investigate every day and exceptional lives of individuals, groups, societies, and organisations.

- The researcher's role is to gain a holistic (systemic, encompassing, and integrated) overview of the context under study: its social arrangement, its ways of working, and its explicit and implicit rules.

- The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local participants from the inside through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending or bracketing preconceptions about the topics under discussion.

- The researcher reads through the data, to construct specific themes and patterns that can be reviewed by participants.

- The primary task is to describe the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations"

These features are more relevant to the nature of my research. As my research explored the implementation of TNE in Oman, a qualitative approach to data gathering in terms of both the ontological and epistemological perspectives of research design is clearly best suited to efforts to comprehend the various perspectives which were gathered from the numerous stakeholders interviewed here. In addition, an interpretivist approach must be used, as outlined in Lincoln and Guba (2003) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003), due to its adherence to the theory that complex social interactions are best understood, not by the gathering of large bodies of objective data in the hope of drawing out overarching theories of social interaction, as with the positivist approach, but through interviews and social observation. These enable the researcher to gather a picture of the issues drawing on the wealth of subjective experiences and values within the context being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). The removal of such values and contexts is not possible because the research aims to "study a real-world setting, discover how people cope and thrive in that

setting and capture the contextual richness of people's everyday lives" (Yin, 2011, p.4). For these reasons, the constructivist paradigm appears to be more appropriate for my study.

I felt that the positivist paradigm was inappropriate for use in my study. As observed by Hennink et al. (2011), the positivistic paradigm is the bedrock of research into the natural sciences where researchers are basically making use of numerical data and interested in testing hypotheses about natural phenomena. While quantitative studies tend to use data collection instruments such as questionnaires, I felt that this was not going to be appropriate for my study which sought to elicit participants' individual experiences that could not be quantified. According to Wellington (2015) instruments such as questionnaires will not give important information about participants' feelings and experiences. This view is echoed by Creswell (2007, p.37) who stated "this up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research". As a result, I opted for face to face interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' individual experiences.

I also felt that the use of a questionnaire would limit the chances of generating credible data as the participants are not used to completing questionnaires and sending them back on time to the researcher, therefore, response rate can be very low. Furthermore, sampling in quantitative research typically follows random sampling procedures (Creswell, 2003). I could not choose participants randomly because I wanted the sample to reflect the diversity of staff working in the private colleges and to work with academic staff who were willing to take part in the study. A random sample could have compromised the voice of some participants such as minority ethnic groups or female academic staff because the HE sector in Oman, and also in many countries in the gulf is dominated by males and staff from the Indian subcontinent.

My study made use of a purposive sample. In most cases, the quantitative paradigm is for the researcher who wants to develop a universal law about human behaviour in which it assumes that all people's experience is more or less the same and then in the

study the researcher is more interested in homogeneity and generalizability of findings (Patton, 2002). In my view, individual experience was important, hence, I interviewed each participant individually. In addition, quantitative research has the potential to avoid the relevant contextual details (for example: social, political & economic factors) of the people's experiences and this can compromise the credibility of findings.

The following section provides more details about interpretivism as a research paradigm.

4.4. Interpretivist Research Framework

The choice of a constructivist approach in this research was for many reasons. The first is that the collection of qualitative data allows for 'thick descriptions' of the phenomena being investigated in addition to providing the opportunity for collecting that data within the context in which the event occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). Secondly, it allows the collation of a wide variety of perspectives on the phenomenon under study provides credibility and trustworthiness to the research. As Cohen et al. (2007) argue:

> emphasis here is placed on explanation and understanding of the unique and the particular, individual case rather than the general and the universal; the interest is in a subjective, relativistic social world rather than an absolutist, external reality (p. 8).

As indicated earlier, my study adopted an interpretivist research perspective. Interpretivism is also known as constructivism, and these terms will be used interchangeably in my writing. This research paradigm views knowledge as constructed by the human mind and intellect. There are, therefore, multiple social realities and researchers who adopt a constructivist stance believe that meaning comes through one's interactions with the world (Gray, 2004). Thus, to study social phenomena, constructivists believe that the perspectives of those affected and affecting the events must be understood (Schwandt, 2007).

Bryman (2012) points out that interpretivists share the idea that any social research needs to reflect the uniqueness of human beings as against the natural order. Since an interpretive study is concerned with the individuals, its primary aim is to achieve an understanding of human experience. Subsequently, researchers who implement this paradigm, like myself, use individual perspectives to gain an understanding of their subjective interpretations of the context in which the study occurs (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002). Like most other qualitative research paradigms, researchers adopting an interpretivist stance place emphasis on subjective experience. They do not believe knowledge is discovered; instead, knowledge is created from the various viewpoints of the agents in the social practices. Researchers who adopt a constructivist approach, usually do not intend to predict or control the real world, which is assumed to exist in the minds of constructors (Guba, 1990). Therefore, constructivists always try to keep the communication channel open with their participants (ibid.). The above discussion indicates that the nature of knowledge generated from participants from Omani colleges is highly subjective as the collected data is from individuals' experiences and backgrounds within their cultural, social and political settings.

Finally, for the reasons provided above, this approach best suits the research questions posed by this study, as advocated by a variety of social researchers (Willig, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Stake, 2010; Hammersley, 1992). For instance, O'Leary (2004) states that "having a sense of how your question(s) links to various methodological approaches is an essential first step in exploring relevant methodological literature" (p.90). However, this methodology carries with it the issue of lengthy analysis of the data as opposed to quantitative data (Denscombe, 2010), and the probability of facing an overwhelming amount of data (Bryman, 2012). Nevertheless, I overcame these limitations by imposing strict personal deadlines during the entire research process.

Having discussed the central paradigm underpinning this research, and the rationale for conducting a qualitative study, the next section examines the research methods used for data collection.

4.5. Research Method

Crotty (1998) defines research method as the procedures, techniques or activities used to obtain and analyse data. These are the actual tools used to collect data, based on the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher taking into consideration the research questions (Willig, 2013; Gray, 2004; O'Leary, 2004). I have chosen the use of qualitative research methods in line with my philosophical views regarding reality and the nature of knowledge. My personal belief is that social phenomena are the result of interacting with people and investigating their experiences and individual accounts. I, therefore, found qualitative methods to be the most appropriate ones for my study. This view is supported by Neuman (2014) who asserts that an interpretive approach acknowledges the fact that knowledge and reality are constructed and reproduced via interactions, communication, and practice.

Given that my study sought to elicit the perceptions and experiences of academic staff regarding the implementation of transnational education programmes, I chose interviews as one of the most appropriate and convenient tools. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) state that interview is one of the most widely used formats of data collection when it comes to qualitative studies. Peräkylä (2005, p.869) asserts that interviews enable one to "reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes". Wellington (2015, p.137), supports this view by highlighting that "Interviews can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach". Interviews also enable researchers to probe the thoughts, perceptions, and values of participants. This view corresponds to the constructivist research model as described by Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003) who say that knowledge is not 'given' but 'created' and negotiated through the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee (p.139).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the development of TNE in Oman, I also adopted documentary analysis (Wellington, 2015) which helped me to generate additional data focusing on the context of the study. Literature supports the idea of using more than one data collection tool in research. According to Yin (2009), a good case study benefits from having multiple sources of evidence. In collecting case

study data, the main idea is "to 'triangulate' or establish converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible" (p.9). It was necessary to use more than one method to generate data to answer my research questions. Table 5 below highlights the research questions-methods matrix.

Table 5

Research Questions – Methods Matrix

Research Question	Research Method
1. How has transnational education policy in Oman been implemented at the national and institutional levels?	Analysis of policy documents, researcher work experience, and semi-structured interviews
2. What are the academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private HEIs?	Semi-structured interview. Analysis of institutional documents.
3. From an academic staff perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in private HEIs in Oman?	Semi-structured interview. Analysis of institutional documents.
4. From an academic staff perspective, what measures can be taken to improve TNE in private HEIs in Oman?	Semi-structured interview.

Regarding research question one, I was aware that policy issues relating to TNE cannot be answered solely by the academic staff. As a result, I drew on document analysis, observation, and my previous work experience in the MOHE to provide a comprehensive review of different policies. Ultimately, the data obtained through the other methods were more productive than those from academic staff. The first findings chapter addresses research question one. It provides more in-depth contextual information that helps the reader to have a good grasp of the discussion of

the other research questions. The following section explains each of the research methods employed in my study.

4.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

As discussed earlier, I used interviews as the primary method to answer my research questions. There are different types of interviews. They include structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Each one of these has its strengths and weaknesses that the researcher has to be aware of to make an informed decision regarding the appropriateness of the type of interview to adopt. For my study, I selected and made use of the semi-structured interview conducted on a one-to-one basis. Creswell (2012) argues for an individual interview as a useful approach in educational research although it is time-consuming and a costly method. This technique was more convenient in the Omani context as people feel more comfortable and confident to share their experiences. Culturally, Omanis tend to be reserved when sharing their individual views in public. Hence, I avoided using other approaches such as focus groups that require a sufficient level of trust among participants. I prepared a set of questions derived from the primary research questions which I used as a guide during the interviews. They enabled me to focus on the relevant themes and at the same time provide the flexibility to ask additional questions to explore issues raised by the interviewees in detail (Wellington, 2015). This view is supported by Opie (2004) for whom semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to focus on the main issues relevant to the study while at the same time give the flexibility to deviate from a pre-arranged list of questions and to change question wordings and the chronology of question delivery. Bryman (2012) also considers semi-structured interviews to be appropriate, arguing that they help the researchers to have a clear focus rather than a very general notion of issues which allows for more specific issues to be addressed. In the same vein, Legard et al. (2003) posit that "the first key feature of the in-depth interview is that it is intended to combine structure with flexibility" (p.141). This flexibility allows a sensitive probing of the participants' thoughts and the possibility of interviewee response expansion. Arthur and Nazroo (2003) state the importance of preparing for semi-structured interviews by selecting themes to address rather than specific questions

which do not allow for the flexibility required in individual interviews especially when the responses are unpredictable. Arthur and Nazroo (2003) also advocate for preparing a verbatim question list for the sake of preparedness to ensure that pauses to avoid lack of direction during the interviews. Thus, I have used Arthur and Nazroo's (2003, p.) framework of devising questions under the titles of "Introduction, Opening questions, Core in-depth questions, and Closure". I also used a digital voice recorder which was very helpful to minimize note taking during the interviews, thereby allowing me to concentrate on asking questions (Smith, 1995).

4.5.2. Using Documentary Sources

As indicated earlier, document review is one of the tools I employed to generate data about the private HEIs in Oman to supplement interview data. Documents broadly include "any papers, especially official ones, which provide more or less direct evidence of decisions, transactions, status, thoughts, debates or actions, which are directly or indirectly related to the purpose of a research inquiry" (Prosser, 2009, p.725). Using documentary sources enabled me to verify and expand the views and claims of the participants leading to a more comprehensive review of the research questions. Yin (2009, p.103) asserts that documentation "can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources". Documents such as state policies, institutional mission statements, and statistical information are rich data. My documentary sources comprised government policy documents, including regulations available publicly, and institutional documents from the two study case colleges (Appendix 2 list of documents analysis). I sought permission from the MOHE to access some of the documents that were not in the public domain (Appendix 3 permission letter form MOHE). The analysis of policy-related documents contributed to a better understanding of the reasons for the privatisation in HE and the Omani TNE policies. I obtained Institutional records from the two sites and the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman. I also made use of information available on the colleges' websites, prospectuses and brochures. The following section discusses how I came up with the sample for my study.

4.6. Sampling

Creswell (2012) asserts that one of the first steps in the process of qualitative data collection is the identification of a sample of participants that can help the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study. In light of this, I had to define a suitable sample for my research. There exist different sampling techniques, but literature shows that qualitative research involves the use of non-random sampling techniques. For example, Morrow (2005) asserts that researchers who adopt a qualitative approach select their sample based on the purpose of the study as well as the type of information they are looking. In the same vein, Tracy (2012) holds that:

> good qualitative researchers, at the very least, engage in purposeful sampling, which means that they purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes (p.134).

I adopted a purposive and convenience sampling techniques which I felt were compatible with the nature of my study. My study involved working with a specific group of academic staff in private higher education institutions in Oman. Therefore, I found the use of non-random sampling methods helpful in my research because I needed easy access and at the same time participants who would provide me with the data I needed. Wellington (2015) supports this by stating that researchers who use purposive sampling selected their participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research inquiry and based on ease of access. My research is not meant to generate a representative or random sample drawn from a broader population with the aim of generalising findings. Instead, it seeks to identify specific groups of people who have characteristics or live in situations that are relevant to the topic (Mays & Pope, 1995).

I worked with participants selected from two private higher education colleges in Oman. The use of the two sites allowed me to analyse data in each setting and across the two institutions. This type of design allowed me to examine the views of participants in both colleges to comprehend the similarities and differences between the two cases. The advantages of using multiple-case designs are highlighted by Yin (2009) who says:

Multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs. Even if you can do a 'two-case', your chances of doing' a good case study will be better than using a single-case design... the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial (p.61).

According to Wellington (2015), the social researcher is faced with two main challenges when sampling: the first relates to the degree to which the sample is the representative of the population under study, and the second relates to the adequacy of the data collected. In my case, I was not seeking to have a representative sample of all the colleges engaging in TNE. My focus was to gain an in-depth understanding of the TNE in the two selected sites (Yin, 2009) to show their differences by identifying the multiple realities of the lived experiences of those working there (Stake, 2010). Each college had agreed to provide me with enough participants to generate answers to my research questions. The following section discusses the reasons why the two specific sites in my study were selected.

4.6.1 Selecting Sample Sites

As indicated earlier, my study involved working in partnership with two private higher education colleges. Table 2 on page 26 shows a list of six private colleges in Oman that were working collaboratively with UK Universities that I could select. I had to work with a sub-set of the colleges and the two sites were selected carefully by looking at their potential to provide me with the data used to address my research questions as well as other factors like easy of access as explained in the subsequent paragraphs. Fortunately, having served in the MOHE for over fifteen years where I was involved in visiting several private colleges and universities. I had access to information about the private university and college system, and I was aware of the institutions which could serve as suitable sites for my research. It was vital that I work with institutions that have been implementing TNE programmes for an extended period to be able to make a comprehensive assessment of the benefits that derive from TNE, but also appreciate the deep-seated challenges that these institutions have been facing over the years. The two selected colleges have experience of more than a decade each in delivering TNE programmes in Business,

Engineering and Information Technology (IT). This experience provided them the necessary depth of knowledge to contribute to my study efficiently. Yin (2011) points out that "the goal or purpose for selecting the specific study units is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study" (p. 88). In line with Yin's (ibid.) view, I selected two colleges that I considered relevant and useful in terms of generating data to answer my research questions. My objective was to explore the issues around the implementation of TNE and I was not interested in generalising the findings, hence, the choice was based on two sites. I also considered the time at my disposal to be a key factor in the decision about the number of sites. The research was to be finished within the PhD study period and so with limited resources I could not work with many institutions. This is consistent with Creswell's (2007, p. 40) apt observation that: "To undertake qualitative research requires a strong commitment to study a problem and demands time and resources. Qualitative research keeps good company with the most rigorous quantitative research, and it should not be viewed as an easy substitute for a "statistical" or quantitative study".

The participants from each institution were carefully chosen to reflect a range of views and provide enough data with which to reach logical conclusions regarding my research questions. Keeping in mind that there is no stipulated sample size in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002) as sampling is not a matter of representative opinions, but a matter of information richness. In addition, Maxwell (2008) contends that the site selection strategy depends on the potential to generate rich data for the study. Hence, I selected two colleges affiliated with UK universities. In Oman, all private HEIs work in partnership with external Universities. This includes Universities from UK, USA, India and some Arab countries. I selected colleges working with UK partners for various reasons. Most of the private HEIs are affiliated with UK Universities because UK institutions have high reputation in Oman. Therefore, I sought to focus on colleges with highly reputable partnerships with UK Universities in the country. I felt that these two colleges would be good examples to reflect TNE implementation in Oman.

From my personal experience, I knew that the degree of partnership between UK universities and Oman colleges was relatively stronger than the partnerships established with Universities from other countries such as USA and India. Unlike USA, UK Universities establish partnerships which involve the awarding of degree certificates and providing substantial quality assurance support. In this case, I felt that focusing on the two colleges working with UK Universities would give me a comprehensive picture of TNE implementation. I avoided institutions whose external partners had a limited role in the awarding of degree qualifications including quality assurance engagements. To obtain more credible and rigorous data, the selection of two colleges with a similar setting that "yield the most information" was a critical matter. This view is supported by Patton (2002, p.229) who argues that "the key issue in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what it is you want to be able to say at the end of the study". The site selection criteria are explained below:

a) Private Colleges Affiliated with UK Universities

A considerable majority of private higher education institutions in Oman are affiliated to UK based universities (Appendix 1 list of private HEIs and their collaborative partners' universities). Engaging two colleges working in partnership with these universities would give me a good insight into the implementation of TNE programmes. Another key reason for this choice is the fact that the UK is recognized as a leading provider of TNE and has a well-defined system for the provision of quality TNE programmes (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Middlehurst & Campbell, 2003). UK based universities place emphasis on good practice and make use of reliable tools regarding monitoring and supporting of their programmes.

b) Omani College Profiles

A careful choice of the colleges was made by looking at the college profiles. As highlighted earlier, I needed to work with colleges that had massive experience of TNE. I wanted my participants to be able to discuss issues based on a broader range

of experience over time that goes beyond initial stages of implementation during which many teething problems must be 'ironed out'. I assumed that participants from these colleges would have experience of varying approaches to teaching and learning because of the date of establishment. In addition, they would have seen the whole cycle of provision from recruitment of students to graduation and employment. Furthermore, both colleges offer the most popular academic programmes in Oman namely Business, Engineering, and IT studies (Harthy, 2011; Ameen et al., 2010; Al-Shmeli, 2009; Al-Lamki, 2006). Many students in private HEIs are Business and IT students in response to the economic needs of the country. It is, therefore, of particular importance to understand the effectiveness of delivery of these popular study programmes as findings from my study would help to illuminate essential issues potentially faced by many similar institutions providing TNE in the country.

c) Access

Ease of access to the research participants is one of the critical issues to consider for a researcher (Wellington, 2015). In light of this, I approached the two institutions located in the same city I lived. It was essential to ensure that they fulfilled the other two criteria discussed above. The details of each site are provided below.

4.6.1.1. Characteristics of College 1

College 1 is one of the oldest HEIs in Oman. Initially, it was in partnership with a national professional organisation. However, in line with the current MOHE requirements, the college is now in a collaborative partnership with two UK universities. It offers undergraduate degree programmes with a post-92 UK university located in the southern part of England. On the other hand, the college offers a postgraduate course in the teaching of English as a foreign language in partnership with a red-brick university located in the northern part of England. There are three faculties namely: Business Management, Information Technology, and English Language Studies. In the academic year 2015/ 2016, the college had a total enrolment of 3162 students in which 95.1% were Omani and the remaining were

international students. The total number of academic staff were 72 in which 18% were doctorate holders (MOHE, 2016).

4.6.1. 2. Characteristics of College 2

College 2 presents itself as one of the most popular HEIs in Oman (according to information on the College website) established more than a decade ago. This college works in partnership with two post-92 universities in the UK, and it offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various subjects including Engineering, Technology, and Business. In the academic year 2015/2016, the college had over 5208 students in which 95.5% were Omani and the remaining were international students. The school employs a total of 189 academic staff members in which 27 % were doctorate holders (MOHE, 2016). The following section focuses on how participants were selected from each site.

4.6.2. Selecting Participants

As reflected in my research aims and the main research questions, my study sought to elicit views of academic staff in private HEIs providing TNE programmes in Oman. Potential participants had to have at least two years of working directly on the implementation of the TNE programmes. This criterion was to ensure participants had sufficient contextual knowledge to contribute to the questions included in my study efficiently. To answer all my research questions, I made sure that participants were from across the following categories.

a) Head of departments: I conducted interviews with heads of academic departments to elicit their views on TNE. I wanted to ascertain their perceptions about TNE and on the nature of partnership with UK universities. I wanted to know their opinions and experience with the partnership institutions. Moreover, it was vital that I ascertain their perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of both parties in the programme implementation, this being one of the critical areas of my research. I also explored areas such as higher education policies, financial constraints, socio-cultural factors, and autonomy with them.

b) Programme coordinators: It was essential to approach programme coordinators as they are the frontline staff responsible for interacting with overseas partner Universities on a regular basis. I sought to establish their views regarding the quality of academic partnership and their perceptions of the role of partner Universities in the designing of programmes and assessment processes as well as quality assurance.

c) Quality assurance staff: I also interviewed academic staff involved in the quality assurance processes in both colleges to elicit their views regarding the quality mechanisms put in place by both parties. The interview included discussions around the role of each side in the provision of quality education in Oman.

d) Teachers: I interviewed teachers who played a key role in the day to day implementation of the TN in and outside the classroom. I was interested in eliciting the views of this category of academic staff regarding TNE educational pedagogy. Their perceptions of teaching and assessment of their subjects and the extent to which this reflects the sociocultural context (including, but not limited to, societal and student needs). I also sought their views of working conditions and academic support facilities on programme implementation.

I deliberately excluded the Deans of Colleges from my study. This was for two reasons: firstly, from a pragmatic perspective, I realized that these senior administrative staff are usually very busy and, hence, it is difficult to find time to talk to them. Secondly and more importantly, due to my work in the MOHE I have developed very close relationships with Deans of Colleges and Vice-Chancellors from all private HEIs in Oman. I therefore felt that involving Deans in my study would raise some ethical concerns as they would view me as an "insider" and therefore, may not be comfortable to share information about TNE implementation in their own institutions. Given the nature of my relationship with them, it could have been difficult to work on an academic project such as this one without compromising or by-passing some ethical lines. This issue has been discussed in literature, for instance, Morse (1998, p. 61) argued that in the context of qualitative research "[i]t is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she

is already employed and has a work role" for this "may place the researcher in an untenable position". Therefore, I took the decision to exclude the deans in my interview groups in order to avoid any incompatible attitude.

As a study focusing on TNE, one might argue for the involvement of relevant staff in the UK partner universities in the study. However, I would like to clarify that in line with my research aims and objectives, it was not necessary to include staff from UK partner institutions. It was not my aim to compare the views of the different partners in the implementation of TNE but to understand the reality of TNE in the Oman context. In addition, research on western perspectives of TNE is widely discussed in literature while the TNE experiences of the receiving countries, such Oman, are relatively few (Waterval et al., 2014; Kosmützky & Putty, 2015). Arguably, this provides opportunities for further more comprehensive research on TNE to be conducted in Oman to include both sending and hosting institutions.

Having described the positions of the participants that make up the academic staff in the Omani HE context, the next section discusses the pilot study which was carried out before conducting the field work for the main study.

4.7. Pilot Interview

Piloting in research is highly desirable. Before conducting my fieldwork, I pilot tested my data collection instruments in light of Yin's (2009) observation that pilot testing of data collection instruments allows for the identification of unforeseen issues. In this regard, the pilot study helps the researcher to refine data collection plans as well as assisting with the development of relevant lines of questions. In the same vein, Bryman (2012) contends that piloting research instruments ensures the smooth operation of the data collection methodology prior to the process commencing. I conducted a smaller version of this study to test the suitability and clarity of the interview questions. I carried out two different pilot interviews to identify and rectify issues which may cause ambiguity, confusion or irrelevant responses. After each pilot interview, I sought feedback on my questions by asking

participants to comment on clarity, comprehensibility as well as their level of comfort with me and my questioning style.

The first pilot interview was with a British academic teacher with more than five years of both academic and administrative experience in the Gulf States. I met her at an International Conference of Education in the UK in January 2015. The interview ran smoothly and lasted 45 minutes. The participant appeared to have difficulty in understanding the meaning of specific terminologies such as 'transnational education' and 'college adequacy.' Moreover, one of my questions regarding mentoring and training (type and duration) that prepared them to deal with the new environment and culture in Oman was not clear. I had to reword the question for clarity. Another pilot interview was conducted in Oman immediately before carrying out the actual study. I interviewed academic staff who worked in a private college not included in my research. This interview also ran smoothly for a similar duration of time.

Generally speaking, the pilot study allowed me the opportunity to modify some of the interview questions. Following the feedback that I received, I made a significant change by beginning the interviews with open questions to build-in flexibility and comfort to the process. I also eliminated leading questions for the same reason. Finally, I became aware of specific themes which were raised and could potentially become central to the study, preparing me well for future interviews. The next section discusses the ethical considerations made throughout the conduct of my research.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

The conduct of this study was guided by the research ethics principles contained in the University of Sheffield's Code of Practice. These guidelines are per the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. BERA (2011) dictates that researchers must conduct their studies within a moral framework, showing respect to all people, knowledge, and values. As pointed out by Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011), researchers have to adhere to ethical issues throughout the research

process. Admittedly, this is a complicated matter that involves much more than merely following a set of static guidelines (Creswell, 2012).

Every researcher is now expected to carefully consider potential ethical issues arising from data collection methods and the context in which the research is conducted. Ignoring these possible matters would result in a compromise of the integrity of the study (Bryman, 2012). Willig (2013) provides some measures which should be put in place to ensure the ethicality of research: the provision of informed consent, avoidance of deception, offering the participants the right to withdraw, debriefing participants, and confidentiality of data. Webster, Lewis, and Brown (2014, p.78) outline the five principles of ethical research as follows:

1. "The research should be worthwhile and should not make unreasonable demands on participants.
2. Participation in research should be based on informed consent.
3. Participation should be voluntary and free from coercion or pressure.
4. Adverse consequences of participation should be avoided, and risks of harm known.
5. Confidentiality and anonymity should be respected".

All above were taken into consideration for the entire research period. Examples of how these principles were employed in my study are provided in the following subsections.

4.8.1. Seeking Permission

Gaining official permission is the first step for researchers before collection of data begins (Cohen et al. 2007). Therefore, I formally asked the relevant institutions permission to conduct my research. I got the permission without any problem. When I approached the private higher education institutions in Oman, I was clear that my position of power should not be used to recruit individuals in the research (O'Leary, 2004). I achieved this by clarifying my status as a researcher to the college authorities making it clear that they were under no obligation to accept my request and that refusal to participate in the study was, in no way, going to affect their college.

99

4.8.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent can be defined as "the voluntary consent of individuals to participate in research" (Burgess, 1989, p.5). The participants have the right to know they are being informed fully about the nature and purpose of the research. In this respect, Yin (2011) states that the investigator should obtain the individual's consent before gathering data. Participants of this study were given the option to engage in this research and asked to sign the consent form after they had full information about the research study.

4.8.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity

According to Borg and Gall (1983, p.112), researchers must protect data to ensure that identifying "information is not accessible to anyone outside" the research team. In line with this, all the participants and institutions in my study were promised anonymity and confidentiality. I made use of pseudonyms in particular when referring to participants and the names of the participating higher education institutions. I kept all data on a personal laptop which was password protected to ensure that no other third party could access the data. I informed all participants their data would not be used for any other purpose without their written consent.

4.9. Fieldwork and Data Collection

After gaining permission to conduct my study and having piloted my research instruments, I proceeded to do the fieldwork. This section provides details of the fieldwork which includes how I gained access to the sites, recruitment of participants and the interviews schedules. I also discuss the problems and challenges I faced during my fieldwork.

4.9.1. Gaining Access and Recruiting Participants

Upon approval of my ethics application, I made initially informal contact with the potential sites. I visited the places in the selected province and took advantage of the

visit to talk about my study. I was clear about my new position as a researcher and not as an employee of the MOHE and stressed this fact to the management at the colleges, pointing out that they had the option to reject my request for access to their institution. I made my position clear to militate against their decision being affected by my previous role as Director of Educational Services Department in Oman. I received a warm welcome from the senior management members of the two colleges, and this was a good sign for a healthy working relationship with them. At this stage, there were no formal agreements. However, both schools expressed interest in supporting my research project.

After the approval of my ethics application by the University of Sheffield on 14th April 2015 (Appendix 4 Ethics Approval Letter), I was able to contact the colleges officially and arranged briefing sessions with potential participants. (Appendices 5.1 & 5.2, Letters of Permission from Colleges 1 and 2) During the briefing sessions, I explained what my study involved and clarified my new role as a researcher and not an official from the MOHE in Oman. Interested participants had an opportunity to ask questions and explain what involvement in the study would entail. I also provided full information regarding the ethics criteria for the research (Creswell, 2012). It was also made clear that participation would be entirely voluntary. I also informed them about flexibility concerning the time of the interviews and their preferences of the meeting venue.

Towards the end of each briefing session, I gave the potential participants my contact details. I also asked them to put me in contact with their colleagues who could potentially be interested in participating. I received some responses and made arrangements to interview them. After conducting a few interviews, I noticed that I did not have the right number and diversity of participants that I needed. I then went on to contact other academic staff referred to me by some of the interviewees; an approach called snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2012). I made sure that I contacted staff who would cater for the diversity of views that my study sought. My final sample was diverse, including participants of different gender, culture, work experience, nationality and level of education, among other things.

I was able to establish excellent rapport with the participants and this facilitated the data collection. A total of 27 staff members including teachers, quality assurance officers, programme coordinators and heads of departments took part in the study. The number of participants, their nationality and gender are shown in table 6 below.

Table 6

Sample sites and number of participants

Higher Education Institution	Number of participants	Nationalities					Gender	
		Omani	Indian	Filipino	Pakistani	Other *	Male	Female
College 1	12	1	6	-	1	4	4	8
College 2	15	2	3	5	1	4	5	10
Total	27	3	9	5	2	8	9	18

* This group of participants were from different countries including; Lebanon, Iran, Romania, Canada, and Nigeria

As shown from the table 6 above, the participating academic staff comprised of Omanis and expatriates. It is hard to find Omani academic staff in private higher education sector since most of them prefer working in government or public institutions for these offer them better working conditions compared to private organisations. As a result, the Omani academic staff were in the minority in my sample as compared to other nationalities. I had only three female Omani academic staff who specialised in IT and English Language studies. In Oman, most of the international academic staff are recruited from Asian countries mainly; India, Pakistan, and the Philippines so the two colleges in my study had mostly expatriate staff from Asia. In this regard, those from India constituted a significant majority of participants in my study since this nationality tends to dominate the workforce in Oman in almost all sectors, including Higher Education. This is because India and Oman are neighbours and the two countries enjoy very good bilateral relations which have seen many Indians coming to live and work in Oman. However, I attempted to obtain a right mix of different nationalities to better understand the private HE sector

and its idiosyncrasies. The following table 7 and 8 show participants' profiles in college 1 and 2 respectively. For more details about participants' profiles, please see Appendix 6.

Table 7

Participant Profiles – Interviewees - College 1

No	Name Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Subject area	Years of work expert. in the college
1	Namir	Male	HoD, professor	IT	13
2	Malika	Female	HoD, associate professor, and quality assurance coordinator	Business Management	10
3	Mohammed	Male	Senior lecturer	Business Management	8
4	Tahir	Male	Senior lecturer	Business Management	13
5	Venice	Female	lecturer	Business Management	4
6	Julia	Female	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Senior lecturer IT, programme coordinator	8
7	Amina	Female	Senior lecturer and director of quality assurance	IT	4
8	Muller	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	4
9	Alia	Female	Senior lecturer and member of quality assurance	English language studies	6
10	Suad	Female	Lecturer	Englishs language studies	3
11	Tuba	Female	Senior lecturer	English language studies	11
12	Maha	Female	Lecturer	Englis language studies	3

Table 8

Participant Profiles – Interviewees - College 2

No	Name Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Subject area	Years of work exprt. in the college
1	Kerry	Female	Senior Lecturer	IT	7
2	Naila	Female	Lecturer	IT	3
3	Masood	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	3
4	Zana	Female	HoD	Mathematic	3
5	Iva	Female	HoD	Engineering	3
6	Jones	Male	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Mathematic	4
7	Maria	Female	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Engineering	3
8	Rolla	Female	Senior lecturer and quality assurance coordinator	Mathematic	4
9	Sonia	Female	Lecturer	IT	4
10	Leon	Male	lecturer	English language	3
11	Ruby	Female	Lecturer	Mathematic	3
12	Morgan	Female	Senior lecturer	IT	4
13	Roman	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	3
14	Rose	Female	Senior lecturer and quality assurance coordinator	English language	5

| 15 | Mohan | Male | HE of Dep, associate professor | Management | 5 |

The following section focuses on how interviews were conducted during the field work.

4. 9.2. Conducting interviews

The interviews were conducted from the 28th April 2015 and lasted until 8th June 2015. Participants were given the Participant Information Sheet, highlighting all information relevant for making an informed decision regarding whether to take part in my research or not (Appendix 7, Participant Information Sheet). The interviews ranged in duration from between 40 to 60 minutes. Most of the participants interviewed from the private colleges had experience in other government and private HEIs inside and outside the country, which allowed a greater depth to their perspectives, helping the data collection process.

I ensured that all the interviews were conducted at suitable and comfortable places based on the participants' preferences (Yin, 2011). With the exception of one, all the others were conducted during working hours and at the college premises. All interviews were conducted in noise-free environments without any disruptions from third parties. I made arrangements in each college to ensure that all interviews were conducted in an office or classroom with a closed door to ensure that the interviewee would be comfortable and happy to share information freely.

As mentioned earlier, I adhered to the ethical guidelines for the conduct of interviews providing participants with all the necessary information about the nature of my study and their involvement. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point and given full information regarding data protection and guaranteed confidentiality of their responses and personal data. In addition to the information in relation to the use of recording the interviews in the Participants' Information Sheet, I also asked the participants' permission to utilise a recording device. Participants signed two copies of the consent form and retained one copy for

their record (Appendix 8, Participant consent form). In the interview process, I played the role of facilitator. In other words, I was there to elicit responses which gave as detailed information as possible. All interviews were conducted in English.

I made use of an interview guide following Arthur and Nazroo's (2003) framework to ensure that I adhered to the main areas of interest in my conversations with the participants and that there was the flexibility to accommodate new themes during the interviews. All interviews began with initial questions related to participants' backgrounds to allow them to discuss any personal experiences. There was a question regarding the initial preparation and training received at the time of employment. 15 questions followed this initial one, containing probes anticipated at the design stage (Appendix 9, Interview Guideline). Within the core phase of interviewing, I developed the strategy suggested by Legard et al. (2003) to ask both broadly and narrowly focused questions and to avoid leading one. Each question was asked clearly and succinctly with follow-ups when deemed necessary. By the nature of semi-structured interviews, I did not always ask questions in the pre-ordained and logical manner planned earlier. The order changed when answers were detailed needing no further probing. In addition, having prepared the interview guide, I was able to collect the relevant data from participants regardless of the direction each interview happened to take. The interview guide helped me to focus on the areas of research interest and assisted me to remember the issues of my inquiry. (Appendix 10, Summary of the Data Collection Process). The interviews were designed to probe the following areas:

Interview (Areas of Interests)

Areas of Interests
1- Participants' perceptions on TNE phenomenon and international academic partnership.
2- Participants' perceptions on government policy and the role of MOHE in private HEIs and TNE and their implications.

3- Participants' views on support and training provided prior to the teaching of TNE programme.

4- Participants' perspectives on the colleges' working conditions/environment (policy, rules, and regulations…. etc.).

5- Participants' perceptions on the appropriate facilities and support services that have been provided by the Omani colleges.

6- Participants' views on adequate academic and administrative resources to delivery TNE programmes.

7- Participants' perspectives on the professional development opportunities in the colleges.

8- Participants' views on the students' academic support services provided by Omani college.

9- Participants' views on the students recruiting policy and academic standard.

10- Participants' perspectives on the designed TNE programmes and their sensitivity to the sociocultural context.

11- Participants' experiences of the pedagogical aspects of TNE programmes (teaching and learning, and assessment) and the sociocultural relevance.

12- Participants' perceptions on the quality of education provided in the colleges.

13- Participants' perspectives on the role of the UK partner Universities in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their affiliated colleges.

14- Participants' perceptions on the key factor affecting the implementation of TNE programmes in Oman.

15- Participants' views on the ways of improving the quality of TNE programmes in the colleges.

4.10. Challenges and Obstacles Faced During Data Collection

I managed to conduct my fieldwork successfully; however, I faced a number of challenges and obstacles. One of the main challenges I faced was the interference of my previous work position in the MOHE and the new position as a researcher. Some of the participants considered me as an official from the MOHE and hence, were hesitant to participate and share information freely in the study. Accordingly, I had to establish excellent rapport with the participants in order to prompt them to share their experiences. Prior to each interview, I had to spend some time to explain my new role as a researcher and to assure the participants about their protection and safety throughout the study. I emphasised that the data were for the purpose of the research only and would not be used for any other purposes that could put them in trouble. I had to transform my image to ensure that the participants would feel comfortable when I visited them. To create a friendly environment for the interviewees, I had to wear casual clothes (Omani cap and coloured casual Omani dress instead of turban and white formal dress). This helped to send a clear message to the participants that I was approaching them as a researcher and not an official from the MOHE.

The country's socio-political system is another challenge faced by researchers conducting empirical studies not only in Oman but in all states in the Arab world (Brandenburg, 2012). From my experience, people in the Arab countries usually do not express their opinions freely. According to Brandenburg (ibid.) this is linked to the socio-political system in these countries which are considered as non-democratic societies as compared to the countries in the west. In some cases, I struggled to get honest information from participants as the socio-political context was not encouraging this level of dialogue. During the interview process, I noticed that some of the participants were uncomfortable to share their experience, in particular, negative experiences, as they feared they could put their colleagues or themselves in trouble with the MOHE or from the senior management of the college. I had to prompt them to give details during the interview sessions. In some cases, some participants chose not to answer some of the questions they felt could expose the weaknesses of the college. During interviews, some of the participants refused to be recorded, and as a result, I had to take notes. For instance, one participant refused the

recording of the interview at the point when it was almost at the end and sent me responses by email instead, with no reasons provided for this choice. Moreover, one participant was close to refusing participation, and another missed the appointed time of the interview. However, this it is the right of participants to refuse to participate in a study and to withdraw at any time, so I could not force them to continue (Creswell, 2012).

I was able to conduct face to face interviews with all participants including the Omani female participants. However, it was important for me to ensure that all interviews with Omani female participants were conducted during working hours and within the college premises. From a cultural perspective, it is not acceptable to make alternative arrangements including interviewing female participants out of working hours and away from their work place. It was also important to maintain a safe distance during interviews with female Omani participants and ensuring that I avoided direct eye contact and hand shaking. I also had to use offices designated for the interviews by the college and had to keep the door open to make the female participants comfortable.

Another issue I encountered was with time management. Due to the different location of the two sites of the interviews, I was unable to attend one of them on time. I ended up rearranging the interview time with the participant. In retrospect, I should have allowed more time between scheduled interviews in anticipation of this kind of scenario. A final challenge was the time for obtaining participation from the different departments across the colleges to ensure diversity of views. However, I succeeded in recruiting academic staff with at least two years of experience of delivering TNE in the same institution and different nationalities despite the majority of them being non-Omani and consisting of Asian ethnicities. Creswell (2012) considers that these challenges are part of the nature of qualitative approach where studying individuals in their environment produce problems for the researcher which might not be the case in quantitative research. The following section discusses how I analysed the data generated during the field work.

4.11. Data Analysis

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), there is no consensus about what the concept of analysis means because the meaning can vary from one person to another. In this way, there is no specific and precise formulation of strategies and techniques to be followed in analysing the data. However, Creswell (2012) provided six interrelated steps for analysing and interpreting qualitative data. This process involves the following; (1) Storing and transcribing the data. (2) Exploring the data and coding. (3) Utilising the codes to generate a general picture of the data descriptions and themes. (4) Representation of the findings via narratives and visuals. (5) Interpreting the results via reflecting personally on the effect of the findings and the literature which may inform the findings. (6) Data analysis involving conducting ways to validate the accuracy of the results. In the following sub-sections, I will discuss some of the steps outlined above in analysing the data.

4.11.1. Data Recording, Storage and Management

In preparation for the interviews, I purchased a good quality digital audio recorder to obtain an accurate record of the conversation. Use of this device was particularly important given the cultural expectation in Oman about maintaining eye contact with interviewees when talking with them. I was able to concentrate on speaking and keeping an eye on the non-verbal communication features such as body language of the interviewees instead of writing notes all the time. The recorder allowed an accurate capture of the data and also helped to keep a precise record of the date, time and duration of my interviews.

I transferred all interviews unto my laptop immediately after each meeting. I had a secure password to protect participants' data, and I also backed up the information on two memory sticks which I stored in a locked cupboard in my study room at home. All files were labelled numerically according to the order in which the interviews took place. I did this to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of data and to protect and back-up the original copies (Denscombe, 2010).

4.11.2. Transcription

I transcribed each interview immediately after conducting each script, to increase my familiarity with the data. The transcription helped to determine the gaps which needed filling in subsequent meetings. The interview scripts did not have names of the participants to keep them anonymous. In this case, every single participant has to be identified with a unique serial number for reference purposes (Denscombe, 2010). Each transcription took around ten hours to complete, after which it was sent to the participant to verify its accuracy (Appendix 11, example of Interview transcript). The advantage of recording the interview, helped me to play it several times, which subsequently help me to be 'close to the data' to identify key themes emerging from the data.

4.11.3. Data Analysis Approach

Researchers, such as Wellington (2015) and Creswell (2012), highlight that there is no single accepted method for analysing qualitative data. However, researchers must ensure that they apply a method most suitable for drawing concluding from their data (Patton, 2002). According to Denscombe (2010), qualitative research sees the formulation of the research question, the collection of data and the analysis of data as an emerging and iterative process. In this respect, the chosen analytical approach for my research data is the thematic approach because of its popularity in qualitative methods (Boyatzis, 1998). With this in mind, I chose thematic data analysis for this research. The thematic analysis offered a more convenient procedure to other methods such as discourse analysis or grounded theory especially for an inexperienced researcher (like myself) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In a thematic analysis, researchers explore the data to code them according to their patterns, allowing classification of data into relevant themes (Schwandt, 2007). Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2006) define it as "… a method for identifying, analysing and reporting (themes) within data" (p.79). In other words, thematic analysis is "a robust and highly sensitive tool for the systematization and presentation of qualitative analyses" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.385). Chapter 6 shows detailed results of this analysis.

After completing the transcription of the interviews, I started the process of analysing data by following the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) (see table 9 below). There is followed a thorough explanation of the process for each phase.

Table 9

The phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data; reading and re-reading the data; noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set; collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes; gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set to generate a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling extracts examples; final analysis of selected extracts; relating the analysis back to the research question and literature.

Adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p87)

Phase 1: I started to familiarise myself with the data by replaying the recorded interviews several times and transcribing the data. In this stage, the transcription process of the script can be an excellent way to start familiarising yourself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), in the thematic analysis, the data must be read carefully 'at least twice' (p.185). I, therefore, read through the scripts many times to highlight the extracts of interest where initial thoughts have been written and revisited.

Phase 2: After transcribing and reading through all the twenty-seven scripts, I imported them to Microsoft Excel. Although there is considerable debate about the strengths and limitation of using computer software programme for qualitative research (Opie, 2004), I found using Excel useful because it assisted me to manage the massive amount of data efficiently. In the beginning, I tried to use NVivo programme but after working through two transcripts I found the software quite complex and time-consuming. Therefore, I decided to conduct the data analysis manually using excel. Regarding the use of software such as NVivo, Basit (2003, p. 143) asserts that "the choice will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher". This view has been echoed by Bazeley and Jackson (2013) who point out that the choices about what tools to use and how to use them are entirely up to the researcher. Consequently, analysing the data manually on an excel sheet was useful as it enabled me to have more control and ownership of the data management process. In order to identify key themes from the data, I read each transcript in detail to determine the features that are of interest in connection with the research questions. All the interview transcripts have been coded in chunks and line by line so that the importance or meaning of a comment became clear about further responses.

The emergence of codes was data-driven in which codes are attached to the 'raw' data (Denscombe (2010). According to Boyatzis (1998, p.45), there are five steps involved in inductively developing codes. These are: (1) reducing the raw information, (2) identifying themes within subsamples, (3) com-paring ideas across subsamples, (4) creating a code, and (5) determining the reliability of the code. The identified were compared to the research questions to make sure that just they contributed considerably towards the research aim. Through this process, I began to perceive overarching themes and sub-themes, and I able to reorganize these regarding their relative significance. In other words, the developing mind maps assisted me to take into consideration the relation between overarching themes, sub-themes and codes.

Phase 3: Braun and Clarke (2006, p.82) define themes as "... something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of

patterned response or meaning within the data set". On the other hand, subthemes are considered to be "... themes-within-a-theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). As the name suggests, this stage involved categorising the different codes into potential themes. All the identified codes were collated into possible themes. I refocused on the analytical procedures at the broader level of analysis (once the interview transcripts were coded) to determine the emerging ideas that can be utilised to group codes together. In this phase, I also considered the definitions of themes and subthemes, as well as the possible thematic maps. Some initial codes were formed as the central or key themes, whereas others formed sub-themes.

Phase 4: This stage involves reviewing and refining the themes. The emerging issues were read with the coded text extracts to ensure that they were grounded in the codes. I studied the coded excerpts by reading each theme to consider whether they formed a coherent pattern as it is essential to ensure that the potential topics reflect the meanings in the data set as a whole. To achieve this, I reread the entire data to check whether the themes fit with the data set and coding. I also made sure I did not miss any additional data during the earlier coding stages. It is argued that the process of reviewing and refining coding data and generating themes could go on until you have devised a thematic map that you are satisfied with (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) insist this process can be endless so it is vital for the researchers to know when they need to stop to avoid any interminable coding. In line with that, they maintain that "when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop!" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.21). Based on that, I stopped coding when I realised there were no more significant emerging themes.

Phase 5: This phase involves defining and naming the themes. I followed Boyatzis (1998, p.31) who maintains that the name has to be "concise and clear, communicating the crux of the theme in as a few words as possible, meaningful and conceptually to the phenomenon being investigated, close to data". Following the reviewing of themes and production of a thematic map of the data, I was capable of determining theme descriptions to figure out what they entailed and ensure a systematic approach. During this stage, I was able to consider how each idea would fit into the overall data.

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework in connection with my study's theoretical framework discussed in chapter 3. All the themes and subthemes identified from the data were connected to the relevant layers (institutional, national and international) and the themes and subthemes were classified in the appropriate domains (student, academic staff, management, and curriculum). A complete list of themes and subthemes and their corresponding layers and domains in the theoretical framework are shown in table 10 below. As can be seen from the table 10, some of the themes and subthemes overlap between different layers and domains. Waterval et al. (2014) explain that the factors influencing TNE implementation are interconnected, and categorisation facilitates structuring the analytical framework.

Table 10

Main themes and subthemes from the thematic analysis process with the relevant circle of conceptual framework

Themes	Sub theme	Sub-sub theme	Link to the Conceptual framework layers and domains
TNE partnerships between policy and academic demand	The basis of the existing partnerships		National/ Institutional/ management
	The role of the Omani and UK HEI partner		National/ Institutional/ management
	Views of the roles and commitments of the Omani and UK institutions in the provision of TNE		Institutional/ management
Perspectives on the implementation of TNE programmes	Curriculum development	Programme design	Institutional/ curriculum
		Teaching and learning methods	Institutional/ curriculum
		Assessment	Institutional/ curriculum
		Recruitment	Institutional/ Academic staff
		Induction	Institutional/

	Staff-centred issues		Academic staff
		Staff development	Institutional/ Academic staff
		Promotion and incentives	Institutional/ Academic staff
		Working conditions	Institutional/ Academic staff
	academic support services	Student admissions	National/ Institutional/ Student
		Foundation programme	Institutional/ management
		Teaching resources	Institutional/ management
		Library	Institutional/ management
		Information and Technology Services	Institutional/ management
	Quality culture		Institutional/ management
Factors affecting the implementation of TNE in Oman	Leadership in the local colleges		Institutional/ management
	The role of the MOHE in Oman		National
	The nature of partnership between local and external HEIs		National/ Institutional/ management
	Basic education and type of student enrolled		National/ management
	Curriculum relevance		Institutional/ Curriculum
	Student performance		Institutional/ student
	Economic factors		National
	Dealing with multiple		National/

	stakeholders		Institutional/ management
Ways of improving the implementation of TNE in Omani private colleges	The role of the external partners		National/ Institutional/ management
	The role of the local colleges		Institutional
	The role of the MoHE		National
	Programme design		Institutional/ Curriculum

Phase 6: The last stage of thematic analysis comprised the final review and the writing-up of the findings. I presented the themes, sub-themes, subordinate themes and coded transcript segments in tables in the next chapter. My study is qualitative, and the following section clarifies the criteria that can be used to judge its quality. I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-staged framework for thematic analysis to help me generate and analyse the data thematically.

4.12. Quality of the Research Design

Morgan (1983) cited in Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.236) notes that "goodness criteria are themselves rooted in the assumptions of the paradigm for which they are designed; one cannot expect positivist criteria to apply in any sense to [interpretivist] studies". My study is a qualitative study and cannot, therefore, be judged using the same criteria as quantitative research. Positivists use the following four conventional criteria to judge the quality of their research; internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My study uses the parallel criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) for a constructivist approach. My study is a qualitative study and cannot, therefore, be judged using the same criteria as quantitative research. Positivists use the following four conventional criteria to judge the quality of their research; internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (ibid.). My study uses the parallel criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) for a constructivist approach. These criteria reflect those of the positivist

approach and trustworthiness is the overarching measure of quality measured by four principles; (1) confirmability as parallel to objectivity, (2) credibility as parallel to internal validity (3) dependability as parallel to reliability and (4) transferability as parallel to external validity (ibid). These are all fully explained in the following sub-sections.

4.12.1. Credibility

It is critical to ensure that a study that produces new knowledge is seen as credible (O'Leary, 2004). Credibility is gained when researchers are engaged with their participants and obtain extensive data (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). For me to meet this criterion, I had several meetings with my supervisor to ensure that my research design was suitable for generating credible knowledge. In addition, I engaged with participants in a manner that helped in creating data that addressed all the research questions. The participants had the opportunity to verify their interview transcripts to make sure that the data were correctly recorded and it was an accurate reflection of the interview. Furthermore, having two sites of study provided the opportunity to compare the results from two private colleges to boost my confidence that the data is "on the right lines" (Denscombe, 2010). I also used both secondary data (documents) and observation during my site visits to support the participants' view regarding the colleges' infrastructure and equipment.

4.12.2. Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the results of a study allow transferable conclusions to different settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and this ensured with describing the research methods and context. In this case, the determinations in connection with applicability could be by anyone who reads the research account (as much data from as wide a variety of sources as possible) (O'Leary, 2004). I have attempted to provide thick descriptions in my study to ensure that any interested researchers can follow and analyse the possibility of applying the findings to similar contexts

4.12.3. Dependability

Dependability is similar to credibility. Having one ensures the other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In brief, it relates to the degree to which an independent auditor may check the research process in order to verify that the credibility and transferability have indeed been ensured. Dependability is further ensured by recording the activities relevant to the research process (ibid.). In the context of my study, I presented the research to a number of independent researchers, for example, during the confirmation review and at conferences.

4.12.4. Conformability

The fourth and last criterion is conformability. Conformability is obtained through evidencing the fact that the bias of the researcher (values and ideologies) does not unduly influence the research (Patton, 2002). Hammond and Wellington (2013) support this by explaining that conformability entails that researchers ensure their data support their findings. They also point out that providing participants with the data obtained is a method of securing this (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Consequently, I emailed my participants and asked them to look at the interviews to provide them the opportunity to feedback and reflect on the transcripts (Appendix 12, Submission Letter of the Transcript for Participant Validation).

4.13. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the research design and method of data collection were discussed, with an elaboration of the research questions. I considered the potential ethical issues and measures along with the obstacles faced during the research process. The techniques for data collection, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews were further discussed. I collected data from the academic staff of two colleges which included heads of departments, quality assurance coordinators, programme coordinators, and teachers. I used the data analysis process based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Finally, there was a discussion on the trustworthiness of this research regarding its credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. The next chapter starts with the presentation of my findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION IN OMAN:

FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the discussion of research question one which sought to explore the implementation of TNE policy at the national and international level in Oman. The research question has two parts that needed addressing and this includes firstly, making explicit the rationale for embracing TNE policy including the regulatory framework for its implementation and secondly, exploring the extent to which the policy has been implemented and the subsequent results of its application in the private HEIs. The findings discussed here provide rich contextual information that is essential for understanding the other issues emerging from the two case studies in my study. The discussion of the research question is a synthesis of data generated from a variety of sources including higher education policy documents, institutional reports, academic staff interviews (from the participating colleges), and observations made during both my work and my research-related visits to the two selected colleges. The key issues identified from the data are discussed in light of the reviewed literature and personal reflections as a former Director of private HEIs within the MOHE in Oman.

As highlighted in my study's conceptual framework in chapter 3, TNE is analysed at three different levels. However, this chapter aims to analyse the TNE policy and its implications at two of the levels namely national (macro level) and institutional (micro level) as an essential component in understanding internationalization and

TNE as argued by Willis and Taylor (2014). Many themes relating to the implementation of the national policy of TNE at both macro and micro levels were identified. The themes are addressed under the following subtitles; (1) the national perspective on TNE and Implications. (2) Government policy and regulations on private HEIs and TNE (3) Academic staff's views on government's involvement in private HEIs and TNE (4) the choice of partner Universities.

5.2. National Perspective on Transnational Education and its Implications

In line with the country's economic development agenda, the MOHE in Oman sought to widen opportunities for access to higher education. As a result of this, it went on to encourage the opening of private HEIs that would operate in collaborative partnerships with foreign Universities. In this regard, the government joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and ratified the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) in 2000 which enabled foreign providers to provide their educational services, programmes, and courses, through an Omani private HE partner (Harthi, 2011). This open HE sector policy which gave birth to private HEIs and TNE has brought some tangible benefits to many stakeholders including the government, private HEIs, and students. For instance, students can access and study credible TNE programmes without the need to travel abroad. Indeed, going to another country is expensive and has many challenges such as going through the visa application process (Issan, 2016). In addition, Omani private HEI opens up studying opportunities for those with no prospects of ever getting a 'western degree'. Furthermore, female students and employees can study in part-time up to the Master's degree level without having to leave their jobs. TNE has reduced the government expenditure on higher education and at the same time, the country benefitted from 'capacity building' by producing more graduates (Harthi, 2011; Al-Lamki, 2006). By working in partnership with credible foreign universities, private colleges received well developed and reputable academic programmes, books, and modern educational equipment. The establishment of these private HEIs is likely to contribute to the development of local society, especially remote regions in the country by providing training and job opportunities for local people. Economically, the country benefits from reducing the net currency outflow, and more graduates are

produced every year to take up jobs (Ameen et al., 2009; Goodliffe & Razvi, 2008). The necessities of private HEIs to established academic affiliation with universities in other countries is echoed in the literature. For example, Varghese (2009), argues that partnership with foreign Universities provides credibility to the newly established private institutions (as in Oman) and the courses they offer. Such collaboration assists new private HEI in delivering academic study programmes required by the market, affordable tuition fees, as well as to improve the employability of graduates who are encouraged to study domestically.

The development of TNE and the rapid expansion of private HEIs in the last three decades is the result of the demand for the higher education system in many middle-income countries faced with increasing demands of HE (Murray, 2011; Knight, 2009; Robertson, 2010; Altpach, 2006). The emergence and expansion of private HE appear to be associated closely with an increase of TNE (Varghese, 2009). For instance, when the Malaysian government prevented private education institutions from offering their own degrees, the private education sector looked for partnerships with cross-border universities (Lane 2011a; Hill et al., 2014). Now Malaysia is one of the host countries for TNE where private higher education has seen enormous growth over the past ten years with 73 private universities and 403 private colleges (Lee, 2017). In the Arab region, there has been a rapid increase in the number of private universities with international branch campuses. Lawton and Katsomitros (2012), for example, report the existence of 200 international branch campuses worldwide, of which 37 are in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Thus, privatization and TNE have become global features in higher education as asserted by Currie and Vidovich (2009).

However, government policy on transnational education is influenced by its national development agenda and global economic developments (Zajda & Rust, 2016). Literature reveals that different countries have their different plans for hosting TNE. Some countries see TNE as a factor promoting 'national competitiveness' characterized by a heightened competition among countries for political and economic superiority. For example, the emergence of international branch campuses (IBCs) appears to be a competition for attracting international students from other

countries rather than countries strengthening their local higher education sector (Lane & Kinser, 2011a). In this case, the aim of several importing countries is associated with their ambition to be an education magnet which is designed to attract international investment, provide access to both quality training and education for domestic and international students, and establish a knowledge-based economy. According to Lane and Kinser (2011a), the development of policy related to IBCs was directly influenced by nations that aspire to become an 'educational hub'. This is the case also in many of the Gulf States that seek to become regional education hubs by using foreign-linked programmes as a means to attract international students to study in their universities and colleges (Healey, 2015b; Ahmad & Hussain, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2012). In line with that, the UAE, Qatar and Malaysia have created a strategic education plan in order to place themselves as an educational hub to attract potential students from the region by fostering the image of themselves as centres for quality education (Knight 2013).

Other countries consider TNE as a 'capacity absorbing' in which programmes and HE providers from different countries use an effective strategy to provide HE for the high number of local students seeking higher education (British Council, 2016). In this regard, Lane (2011b) argues that the majority of all private HEIs in the era of TNE can be classified as 'demand absorbing'; that is they arose in order to absorb excess demand in the system which is the case in Oman and China for example (Healey, 2015b; Al-lamki, 2006; Huang, 2006). In Oman, the government considers Private HE as a viable option available to potential students. Private HE is, therefore, classified as a demand absorbing where building national capacity and increasing the national pool of labour talent are the main functions. In contrast, in Malaysia, Qatar, and UAE, IBCs are part of HE strategy for attracting international students. In Oman, however, branch campuses cannot operate independently because TNE programmes are developed through affiliation with an Omani higher education institution. The adaption of TNE programmes in Oman is not as a result of competition between higher education institutions in attracting national and international students but rather a 'capacity absorbing' in which government policy aims to provide affordable and, at the same time, internationally recognized qualifications locally.

In this regards, however, some argue that as the colleges and universities are an instrument of social and culture change (Taylor, 2010; Cochrane & Williams, 2010) they should do more than just provide opportunities for students to enter higher education. They are supposed "to play an active role in sustainable development in the [Arabic] region, and increase awareness with respect to issues such as human rights, ethics and values, democratization, peace and globalization" (Ismail & Al Shanfari, 2014, p.39) as the private HEIs follow Western curricula, textbooks, and share the same academic perspective. I believe achieving such objectives in the Middle East region solely through HEIs and TNE are unrealistic. The reason is that policy, and social factors require a national initiative where all key players including basic and higher education work together.

On the other hand, some authors argue that hosting various HEIs from different educational systems (e.g., UK, USA, and Australian) as such in Oman, could affect the maintenance of a homogenous national educational system, which domestic policies have sought to create (Rhein, 2016; Zajda & Rust, 2016; Shams & Huisman, 2012; Dunn & Wallace, 2006). However, diversity is a critical component of TNE, because different faculties, students, academic programmes, academic mobility and collaboration within HE systems is thought to benefit the quality, quantity, efficiency, and the relevance of HE (Field, 2009; Teichler, 2008). In Oman, although the danger of diversification is within the MOHE and OAAA, an agreement was reached about the benefit of such diversification (programmes, qualifications, HE system) as long as adhesion to the national qualification framework is observed.

5.3. Government Policy and Regulations on Private HEIs and TNE

As indicated in the preceding section, the Omani government encourages the establishment of private HEIs and promotes transnational higher education in the country. Private HEIs receive substantial funding and incentives from the government. For example, Royal Decrees (67/2000) specify the support provided by the government in order to assist and promote the private HE sector. The support includes the allocation of land to build their premises and a grant of up to 3 million Omani Riyal (approximately / £5 million). The first six private Universities that were

established in the country's main regions were given an additional grant of OMR 17 million (approximately £30 million) by the government to encourage the setting up of universities across the country (MOHE, 2005). In addition, all private HEIs are exempted from paying tax for the first five years after being established (ibid.). Apart from the direct financial support, private institutions also receive indirect support such as internal scholarships. The MOHE runs an internal scholarship programme which provides more than ten thousand 'internal scholarships' each year for secondary school leavers to study in any of the private HEIs in the country (MOHE, 2016). There are various reasons behind the government funding and support for private HE. This helps to widen access to HE and helps institutions to provide quality education. As Daniel et al. (2009) assert, the financial support helps to mitigate the negative consequences of the cost of tuition fees in the interests of equal socio-economic participation in higher education. It is worth pointing out that supporting the private HE sector is applied in many countries in which private HEIs receive substantial funding and grants from the state. Countries such as UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are notable examples of Gulf region nations that support the establishment of private HE and encourage hosting international branch campuses (Kirk, 2015; Jamjoom, 2012; Kritz, 2006; Wilkinson & Yussof, 2005).

As the primary aim of private HE in Oman is to respond to national policy and economic agenda, the government has set up regulations and processes in order to make sure these institutions are working in line with the national development agenda. In this context, a number of laws and regulations have been enacted to supervise private HEIs in Oman. Below is a highlight of the main guidelines provided by the MOHE which should be adhered to by the private HEIs (MOHE, 2005):

- Institutions must register and operate according to government policies and under MOHE supervision.
- Institutions must not be established with profit-making as their primary objective.
- Omani nationals must be the majority of shareholders of private HEIs.
- Private institutions must be affiliated with accredited, internationally recognised, foreign universities.

- The academic programmes have to be approved by the MOHE before they can be implemented.
- Tuition fees have to be approved by the MOHE.
- Any change in the initial partnership agreements should be communicated and get approval from the MOHE.
- The recruitment of academic staff and senior management staff should be approved by the MOHE.

In order to develop HE sector and to supervise the implementation of government policies in the fields of higher education, the MOHE was established in 1994 as a government body that deals with both public and private HEIs. As part of its function, the MOHE oversees private HEIs and this includes the deployment of quality culture and facilitation of any developments that requires mediation. As stipulated in the guidelines above, all private HEIs in Oman have to be licensed before they can operate. According to the government's legal framework, licensing is provided by the Council of Education, however, all applications for the establishment of private HEIs are to be submitted through the MOHE. In this case, investors should present their agreement with a foreign university in order to identify: (1) type of affiliation, (2) the partner's role in establishing a new institution, (3) the details of the accreditation, (4) degree programmes to be offered, and (5) the proposed tuition fees (MOHE, 2005). Most importantly, the foreign academic partner has to be recognized officially in Oman. In line with that the MOHE states that all private higher education institutions in the Sultanate are required to maintain academic affiliation with a reputable international institution to be licensed (MOHE, 2005). This type of affiliation is approved by the MOHE which is an essential aspect of the Omani private HE policy in order to enable TNE educational services. Unlike some countries where foreign universities can operate solely without the need of local partners as the case of IBCs, in Oman, the requirements for the establishment of private HEIs is that at least 51% of the organisation should be owned by an Oman citizen (Issan 2016; Martin, 2007). In terms of academic cooperation with foreign HEIs, an affiliation agreement is drafted to outline the services and modes of cooperation which should exist between local and foreign HEIs. In this case, the provision of TNE services can only be done through an Omani partner higher education institution, that is, unlike other countries, no branch campuses exist in Oman.

Furthermore, the provision of academic programmes in private HEIs is regulated by the government and having to be licensed by the MOHE before they can be taught: "All programmes offered within Oman, including those offered through external institutions, must meet the requirements specified in [….] the Oman Quality Framework" (OAAA, 2004, p.16). One of the main responsibilities of the MOHE is assuring relevance and variation of academic programmes offered in HEIs in line with the country's economic development. This is well articulated in the Royal Decree No. 36/2000 article 11 (MOHE, 2005, p.16): [The Ministry of Higher Education shall] follow up coordination and integrating between higher education institutions with respect to fields of specialisation and degree awarded by each of them." This article proposes that the Ministry reviews and approves any new programmes proposed by the private colleges and universities. In addition, the MOHE is responsible for approving the partner Universities and human resources, that is, the academic staff who work in the local higher education institutions.

As mentioned earlier, the government views private HE as a strategic way of developing national capacity and, therefore, is committed to ensure that the private HEIs are not being established as essentially profit-making institutions. Article 1 of Royal Decree No. 41/99 asserts that "their [private universities] main objective is not profit-making" (MOHE, 2005, p.19). In this regard, Article 17 of the Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 (MOHE, 2005, p.35) prohibits the increase of tuition fees without obtaining permission from the government: "The private HEIs shall not increase approved tuition fees for any programme of study except after obtaining the approval of the Minister [of Higher Education] three months prior to the beginning of the academic year". Within this regulatory framework, the government tries to control the cost of private higher education for students and their families and provides financial subsidies on the understanding that these private institutions are national organisations which should not operate as profit making institutions. In practice, due to the lack of clarity and the absence of a legal framework that prevents this from happening, many of the private HEIs have shareholders, meaning that they are, *de facto*, profit making. In fact, some of the private HEIs are registered as companies in Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry and engage in the Muscat

Securities Market and can be interpreted as a contradiction to the MOHE's position of existing as non-profit making organisations. However, this might suggest that profit is acceptable as long as it stays in the hands of nationals and commitment to quality education.

By and large, however, the old distinction between private non-profit (e.g. foundations) and private for-profit (e.g. quoted companies) is fuzzy in several countries including Oman due to the legislative frameworks for charities being inadequate (Daniel et al., 2009). In addition, there are many non-profit institutions that are able to make profit when they provide higher education abroad such as IBCs. As a point of comparison, in far-eastern nations, such as Malaysia, the international branch campuses "are generally registered as private education companies and operate with foreign, for-profit joint venture partners" (Healey, 2015, p.13). Therefore, some argue that the traditional concept of public/private HEIs has been changed in many higher education systems such as Vietnam, the Philippines, China and Malaysia leading to a new definition of the public/private boundaries (Mok, 2000).

The discussion in the preceding paragraphs indicates some examples of the government control of the private higher education sector. The Omani government is more concerned that transnational education programmes meet national requirements and should be aligned with the Omani national qualification framework. In addition to this, the current desire is to focus on the development of the Omani higher education system in order to preserve the Omani values and culture (Issan, 2016). This mode of operation is similar to that which existed in most European countries until recently, whereby universities were wholly managed, owned and run by national governments, for the benefit of their citizens who would progress from university to a nationally owned enterprise (Healey & Bordogna, 2014). Hence, regulating external providers via measures such as qualifications, authorities, customs, regulations and limitations on foreign ownership is necessary to protect the students as well as making sure these colleges are producing a quality of education that matches the Omani context and expectations. This view has been supported by many authors including McBurniei and Ziguras (2001, p.85) who argued that

"transnational education must address the myriad concerns of governments, including consumer protection, advancing national goals and protecting the local system". The way the government is involved in the implementation of TNE in Oman is similar to what is happening in some receiving countries in the world (Bashir, 2007; Luijten-Lub et al., 2005). For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the government is responsible for approving collaborative partnerships between local and external institutions, and supports the sector financially through the provision of grants and other operating incentives such as exemption from taxes (Jamjoom, 2012). Another example is China, where regulations ensure that TNE is delivered via joint programmes between foreign providers and Chinese universities, in which "global-local" conceptualizations could be achieved (He, 2016; Huang, 2003). Lane and Kinser, (2011b) have argued that a strong national regulatory model of TNE activity is being currently observed in several parts of the world.

This section discussed the national policy of TNE and privatization of HEIs. It revealed that from the government perspective, private HEIs are considered as a national organization that are established to address the socio-economic needs of the country. As shown above, the private institutions are state-oriented, that is, the state appears to drive the institutions' work more than the market. The following section discusses the academic staff view on the government involvement on private HEIs and TNE activities.

5.4. Academic Staff's views on Government's Involvement in Private HE and TNE Activities

As mentioned above, the government plays a significant role on the development and organization of private higher education and TNE activities. A Royal Decree No. 70/2000 was issued in 2000 to establish the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges in the MOHE to be responsible for supervising private higher education (MOHE, 2005). The Directorate monitors the implementation of educational policy regarding private HE and Supervises the implementation of the standards of TNE programmes within these private institutions. As part of its supervisory role, the directorate conducts an annual visit to private universities and

colleges to review the adherence of these institutions to the relevant legislation and regulations as well as to make sure that sufficient teaching and learning equipment and infrastructure are provided for the implementation of TNE programmes. In addition, during the site visit, the directorate team listens to any challenge or obstacles that are faced by the institutions in their work. They provide a report with advice, guidance and recommendations for improvement.

A number of authors highlight the importance of such government involvement in private HE and TNE (Ziguras & McBurnie 2015; Ziguras & Pham, 2014; McNamara & Knight, 2014). However, supervising universities and colleges has its own challenges. For instance, Taylor (2009) argues that government policy on HEIs can be seen from the academic's perspective as an infringement of academic freedom or of institutional autonomy. According to Helms and Rumbley (2017) how policies are implemented, and by whom they are implemented, are crucial elements in HE because implementing policies can have a major effect on issues such as efficiency, capacity of policy implementers to advance their agendas and managing their work. Therefore, it is essential to explore the impact of the government policy on HE, hence the inclusion of the two private colleges in my study.

This study revealed that academic staffs were generally positive about the involvement of the MOHE and the government policy on academic partnerships was seen as an important catalyst for the provision of quality education. However, the academic staff indicated that the MOHE is not doing enough in terms of monitoring and evaluating the TNE programmes. For example, they mentioned that they are encountering some challenges that could affect the implementation of TNE programmes. These challenges include: poor working conditions and lack of professional development opportunities. The academic staff also felt that they are neglected by the MOHE when they visit their colleges. This is because the visits are usually meant to involve meetings with top management staff and a review of college documentation without engaging the academic staff in the discussions. They argue that this leaves the MOHE with an imbalanced view of how the implementation of TNE programmes is going on. It was also highlighted that the MOHE should ensure that there is a wide diversity of academic staff teaching on the TNE programmes.

This would create a conducive environment for implementing such TNE programmes.

The academic staff hoped that the MOHE's involvement in the issues cited above would usher in a new dimension and provide a fresh pair of eyes to understand what is going on with a view to complementing the work being done by the college and their partners. The ineffectiveness of the government in monitoring HE is echoed in literature. For instance, Issan (2016) contends that the lack of adequate government control in Oman's private HEIs is affecting the achievement of the national goals such as the development of adequately prepared human resources. From my experience, there are not enough local experts in the MOHE to get involved in detailed scrutiny and monitoring of private HEIs, and the implementation of TNE programmes. The MOHE trusts private HEIs and their external partners to provide good quality education. Additionally, while academic staff are asking for more involvement on the part of the MOHE, the senior management in the colleges always ask the Ministry to allow them to work in a more autonomous environment. In other words, whenever the Ministry holds meetings with colleges' senior management, there are strong calls for the Ministry to step back in order to avoid bureaucracy and give them more autonomy to respond effectively to the market and social demands.

Top management in these private colleges felt that the process could become too bureaucratic if they have to wait for the MOHE on every change they want to make. Some participants contended that allowing the MOHE to take more control of HEIs is tantamount to promoting consumerization of higher education, that is, the shift from higher education as a supply-driven function to higher education as a demand-driven activity (Taylor, 2009). Therefore, countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, which aim to establish themselves as 'education hubs' have had to adopt greater flexibility with regard to their governance and regulatory structures (Ziguras, 2003). They have had to reduce direct state intervention and instead develop a system of 'network governance' in partnership with foreign universities to maintain a competitive edge and local efficiency (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). In contrast, countries such as Oman and China exercise more control on TNE whose role is to respond mainly to the local sociocultural and economic demand for HE. In this case,

the government control is crucial given the proliferation of unscrupulous institutions purporting to offer quality education but instead providing bogus qualifications (Varghese, 2009; Hallak & Poisson, 2007).

Furthermore, the findings of my study suggest that the synergies between government policy objectives and institutional priorities are not strong enough and this in turn has negative impact on national-level initiatives. According to Helms and Rumbley (2016), this is not an easy task because some of these challenges have nothing to do with the academic partnerships, nor can they be solved within HEIs. These challenges tend to be associated with local policy and socioeconomic factors which need to involve multiple stakeholders. For instance, although the government's goal of expanding the number of Omani students (who study international programmes) in higher education has is somehow achieved, (see Chapter Two), the study revealed that the objective of quality education provision in these private institutions is still beyond reach. Therefore, reforming private higher education sector may need a shift of the national regulatory policy from direct – in a daily base, where private HEIs are not driven by competition for reputation, towards an evaluation-informed priority setting (Teichler, 2008) in which both competition and the market could steer the sector. However, the government is aware of the difficulty to continue monitoring private HEIs sufficiently with the growth and diversity of HEIs in Oman and the shortage of qualified staff who can deal with academic issues. As a result, the government rely on OAAA for the development of a quality assurance system which is responsible for the assessment, evaluation and accreditation of these educational institutions.

As previously discussed, TNE in Oman requires private HEIs to establish a partnership with foreign universities. Thus, it is essential to consider the two colleges' rationale for choosing UK partner Universities and to identify the factors behind such selection.

5.5. The Choice of Partner Universities

It has been additionally and extensively noted that partnership in higher education is influenced by the historical, social, political, cultural and geographical relationship between hosting and sending governments (Montgomery, 2016; Lane, & Kinser, 2011a). Some argued, partnership in higher education is rooted in a context of colonialism (Yang & Xie, 2015). As Montgomery (2016) notes, "higher education is an integral part of the colonial structure and is a site where colonial attitudes are perpetuated" (p.73). In Oman, although the MOHE expects every private HEI to establish a partnership with a reputable foreign university, the decision of which foreign partner Universities to affiliate with is left to Omani private HEIs. In my study, the two local colleges chose to work in partnership with UK universities. According to Smith (2011), partnerships with UK universities are in demand in countries with low existing HE capacity and ex-commonwealth and colony states. The choice of UK universities was motivated by a number of factors, including the perceived global reputation of UK HEIs, and the long standing bilateral relationship between Oman and the UK. This resonates with the literature regarding the credibility of UK HEIs, and the way in which they have taken a leading role in providing TNE programmes and upholding effective quality assurance systems (Montgomery, 2016; Oleksiyenko & Yang, 2015; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). An additional reason for the choice of Omani higher education institutions to partner with UK universities is the use of English language as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, one of the criteria used by local colleges to choose a suitable partner institution is the availability of programmes in partner university that the college wants to provide. This is one of the requirements of the MOHE for private HEIs to establish partnership with the programme provider. The study also revealed that other factors such as marketisation led these new private institutions to look for opportunities to partner with foreign UK universities to obtain credibility in the educational market. It also emerged that the Omani people, who include students and the employers, prefer studying in and employing graduates from UK universities, respectively.

At the institutional level, the rationale for internationalization and involvement in TNE activities can be different among HE institutions and across different levels of staff within the institution (Willis & Taylor, 2014). In general, however, competitive pressures encourage institutions and countries to look for competitive advantage via academic partnerships. The coveted goods of 'world-class status' and 'global reputation' lead towards branding, rankings, reputation management and positioning (Middlehurst, 2017, p.159). However, according to Taylor (2010) the "institutional motivation is often more complex" (p.88), and research on the motivation of internationalisation and adopting TNE programmes at the institutional level of both sending and hosting HEIs is limited (Willis & Taylor, 2014). In my case, the study revealed that the rationale for establishing partnerships with UK universities is a pragmatic one. The cooperation with the post-1992 universities, which are not members of the elite groups such as Russell Group or prestigious UK universities for example, is predominantly for programme design and student exchange rather than for research cooperation. This partnership fits well with the teaching-oriented Omani private colleges. Indeed, the priority of teaching over research or combination of teaching and research of these private colleges is reflecting the government priority of TNE as a 'capacity absorbing' in which teaching and learning is the main function of private colleges. Furthermore, it is difficult for new colleges in Oman to establish partnerships with prestigious Russell group universities in the UK because these universities are cautious about putting their names on programmes that are delivered by new colleges with an unknown profile. The notion of academic partnership with same status counterpart universities has been supported in the literature, for example, Taylor (2010a, p.100) contends that: "universities look to partner a smaller number of institutions believed to be of the same or better peer status; conversely, links with institutions believed to be of lower status may be discouraged". In addition, the establishment of academic partnership with high prestigious universities is usually costly and unaffordable for the private HE to host such high profile TNE programmes. A similar situation can be observed in countries, such as China, where the high-quality foreign universities usually seek Chinese partners that are at a comparable level to themselves, and most of the universities in the economically developing regions in China simply are not among the top-tier universities (He,

135

2016). Hence, as argued by Locke (2014), the university rankings have as much influence as political and economic factors in terms of choice of partnership.

In my study I was able to ask academic staff about their perception of the rationale of having affiliated with UK universities. The study revealed that establishing academic partnership is more associated with policy at a macro level rather than institutional motivation to compete favourably on the education market. In other words, participants do not see the academic partnership as an instrument to attract students and funding but rather a response to the government requirement. For some staff, academic partnership means extra administrative work and a financial burden to the college. Unlike other countries, in Oman, the private HEIs do not compete for students or funding as the government provides scholarships and support equally to all colleges. Nevertheless, competition can be considered as an important factor for fostering quality teaching and learning of the universities and colleges (Fabrice, 2010). Therefore, I argue that the lack of national competition for funding and students among Omani HEIs, might be causing some institutions to partner with less credible foreign institutions resulting in poor quality teaching and learning. However, some argue that competition for limited resources might not always be a suitable means for improving performance and quality (Ismail & Al Shanfari, 2014; Wilkinson & Yussof, 2005). It can be argued that cooperation among private HEIs can help to deal with many challenges facing Omani private HEIs and in other countries. However, this is not to say that HEIs cannot work in both cooperative and competitive environments which indeed are often the case in the globalisation era (Taylor, 2010). Alternatively, establishing awards and prizes culture can be an effective tool to generate a competition among private HE for development and enhancing quality education. Although this may sound plausible, I think there is need to conduct more research before imposing the notion of competition in the Omani private HEIs which are working in a different context.

In comparison with branch campuses mode as an opposite to validation arrangements of TNE, it could be argued that the former mode is more suitable to the Omani socio-political context as TNE in Oman is mainly seen as a method of building local human resources to meet economic and social development demands. This argument

has been supported by Lane (2011a) and Altbach (2013a) who state that validation arrangements are more appropriate than branch campuses in regions prone to political and social instability due to the flexibility such arrangements give for local colleges to respond promptly and effectively to changes in the local circumstances. In addition, branch campuses also have their own operational challenges and some of them suffer from financial and administration challenges and in some cases this contributes to their closure in many countries such as UAE and Singapore (Healey, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2012; Lane, 2011a; Altbach, 2010).

5.6. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the national policy on private HEIs and TNE activities. This has been steered by two main objectives; building national capacity by increasing access to higher education for secondary school leavers, and promoting quality of education through TNE programmes. In order to reach these goals, the government through the MOHE regulates all operations and activities of TNE and private HEIs which host TNE programmes. The findings from this study, together with the literature, indicate that a degree of government involvement in the implementation of TNE programmes is vital. When the sector is left to international markets, there would be a decline in national influence on designing and deciding the curriculum and its contents.

However, according to academic staff, the government policy was not very effective in assuring quality of education. The findings of this study show that there are some challenges caused by government control of the private HE sector and these include; bureaucracy, finance constraints, and increasing workload on academic staff as they assume more administrative tasks. A number of factors that influence the selection of partner Universities have been highlighted. These include reputation, use of English language and the historical relationship between Oman and the UK. The choice of partner Universities is driven by the quest to satisfy the government requirement and is not motivated by competition for students or funding. Arguments for competition and the need for private HEIs to cooperate in order to provide solutions to common challenges have been addressed.

The chapter provides useful information and interpretation about the government policy on TNE and its implications for private HEIs which is fundamental to understand the challenges and obstacles facing private HEIs in the implementation of TNE. The next chapter provides the other section of the primary data focusing on the analysis of academic staff views on TNE programme implementation.

CHAPTER SIX

TNE INSIDE PRIVATE HE COLLEGES

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data which were generated mainly using semi-structured interviews conducted with academic staff from two different private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) implementing Transnational Education (TNE) programmes in Oman. Within this thesis, secondary data were collected to add a detailed background and richness to the primary empirical data. This data took the form of a perusal of college websites, and documents which were invaluable resources regarding fundamental information on the institution, publications, and events and workshops. I also obtained paper and electronic documents on the two colleges from the MOHE, the deans and the heads of departments.

In brief, the contents of this chapter represent an attempt to construct meaning from the data generated from different individual academic staff members: teachers, quality assurance coordinators, programme coordinators and heads of the departments. In attempting to develop a detailed understanding of TNE and programme implementation from the perspective of academic staff, the research questions pursued in this study are as follows:

Main research question

What are the academics' experiences and perceptions of transnational education in Omani private colleges?

Sub-Research Questions

-     **Research Question 1**: How has transnational education policy in Oman been implemented at the national and institutional levels?

-     **Research Question 2**: What are the academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges?

-     **Research Question 3**: From an academic staff perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in private colleges in Oman?

-     **Research Question 4:** From an academic staff perspective, what measures can be taken to improve TNE in private colleges in Oman?

6.2. Organization and Presentation of Data

Narrative discussion is a primary form for representing and reporting findings in qualitative research. However, there is no set form for doing this, it can vary widely from one study to another (Creswell, 2012). The findings will be presented using emergent themes identified in the data which shed more light on the above research questions.

As indicated in the methodology chapter, the study adopted a thematic data analysis approach with the aid of Microsoft Excel. As a result of this analysis, several themes and sub-themes were identified and selected. Responses from all the 27 participants are presented under common themes (derived from the main research questions) and sub-themes (determined from the interview data). The key themes below which relate to the main research questions will be used in the presentation and analysis of data:

- Academic Partnerships between policy and practice.
- Perspectives on the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges.
- Key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in the Omani private colleges.

- Suggestions for improving the implementation of TNE in Omani private colleges.

The interview guide contained several questions that helped to generate responses to the main research question. Although my study generated qualitative data, I made an effort to analyse the data involving a method that integrates elements of qualitative and quantitative analyses so that the interpretation of the results could be less subjective. According to wellington (2015) qualitative interviews can produce quantitative data. Green (2001, p. 16) supported the usefulness of quantifying data stating that this helps to:

> (1) make the distinction between life experience and cultural data; (2) make informant selection in qualitative research more explicit … (3) attempt some quantitative analysis of qualitative data ... (4) attempt to verify numerical estimates derived by comparing these estimates with findings from sample surveys, if available and (5) characterize the domain of investigation along with the probable variables influencing knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

Therefore, it is important to quantify the data obtained from qualitative research. Quantitative analysis of qualitative data involves turning the data from words or images into numbers. To do this, I used simple spreadsheet to tabulate, count and draw relations between the occurrences of different kinds of responses for each of the interview questions. In other words, after the data were obtained, simple metric frequencies were calculated manually. I presented the responses of my participants in a tabular format and determined the frequency of particular themes or responses in order to express the responses in numeric form. According to Opie (2004, p. 140) "Tables provide one of the commonest ways of organising large amount of data and correctly produced tables offer a very convenient and straightforward method of displaying it". (See appendix 13 which shows a summary of responses on each of the interview questions and the frequencies of responses). Based on the tabulated frequencies, it was possible to quantify the responses made by the participants in my analysis of findings. For instance, instead of using words like "most" or the "majority" of participants, an effort was made to report the findings using some

percentages and numerical quantities to reduce the subjectivity of qualitative coding (Chi, 1997).

The following section presents the data relating to the first theme. As a reminder, I have used pseudonyms for all participants. The characteristics of the participants were described in Chapter Four and tables 7 and 8.

6.3. Academic Partnerships between Policy and Practice

This study sought to understand, among other things, academic staff perceptions regarding the partnerships between the Omani HEIs and their foreign affiliations. For this purpose, interview questions were designed to explore the basis of the existing relationship and the role of each party in the implementation of the TNE programmes. In addition to the description of functions, the study also investigated the extent to which each side was meeting their expected responsibilities; by seeking participants' views about the practice of the partnerships.

6.3.1. The Basis of the Existing Academic Partnerships

The two Omani HEIs that participated in my study were both affiliated with UK universities. The participants were aware that the MOHE was driving this policy of mandatory affiliation with an external partner. As explained in Chapter Two, the MOHE expects every private HEI to establish a partnership with a reputable foreign university to ensure high-quality degree programmes. Outside these specifications, the choice of institution to be affiliated with is left to the colleges, with the final approval by the MOHE. It was interesting to note that each of the two colleges in this study had chosen British universities. When I asked for the reasons why the colleges had chosen to affiliate with UK universities, I learnt that 85% of the academic staff (23 out of 27 academic staff)[1] felt that the choice of UK universities was based on the credibility of the UK higher education system. This was well articulated by Mohan, (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2)

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[1] The quantification of the qualitative data for all interview questions is shown in appendix 13.

who referred to both the quality assurance of programmes and the benefit to students in terms of their better employment prospects on the international job market after receiving a degree accredited by a western university. In this respect, Mohan said that "we have this kind of affiliation with the foreign universities to make sure that there are high-quality programmes […] a western degree or western certificate has more weight on the market than the local ones". Naila (IT Lecturer, female, College 2), also said: "…a western degree or a western certificate weights more on the market so if a student graduates with a degree from UK, Australia or any other western institution they have a competitive advantage on the job market." This answer appears to be about the value of the foreign degree.

A senior teacher from College 1, added that in addition to credibility, the tendency to work with UK based universities was due to the long existing bilateral relations between the two countries. He stated that: "I think the long and close political relationship between the two countries have had a strong influence in these partnerships" (Tahir, senior lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1). Another member of staff who believes that Omanis value British and American degrees more than those awarded by institutions from other countries was Tuba, (Senior Lecturer, English language studies, female, College 1) who said: "both of our academic partners are from UK universities. I think Omanis are happy having a British or an American degree. so that is another fascination, it is a flowery picture. I want a [UK University Certificate]". It was also evident that western higher education is perceived as a global brand.

In sum, the academic staff participants understood that partnerships were driven by the government, and were aimed at both addressing quality issues in higher education and contributing to capacity building. The data appear to suggest that the choice of partnership for TNE programmes in Oman, is not only driven by government but is also guided by market pressures and perceptions of academic quality and brand, with UK, US, and Australian degrees.

6.3.2. The Roles of the Omani and UK HEIs Partners

One of the issues that my study sought to establish is the role of the local college and affiliated university in the implementation of TNE programmes. It emerged from the data that, in line with the government policy, the functions of each partner were well defined. In both cases, the local colleges were responsible for providing facilities for teaching and learning and for designing courses while the UK higher education partners oversaw the running of the programmes by validating them and providing quality assurance. According to Zana, (Head of Department, Mathematics, College 2):

> The partner University approves the programmes and moderates all assessments and assuring quality of education providing. It also organises workshops and consultations […] [they] visit the college at least twice a year for that purpose, and assessment packs must be sent to them for moderation. They control everything; they give their certificate and their logo.

It was evident from the study that both local colleges had managed to establish several rigorous and well-embedded quality assurance systems supported by their relationships with UK partner Universities. considerable number of the academic staff agreed that moderation processes existed for both coursework and examinations and this was a responsibility of the foreign institution. This view was further buttressed by Malika (Head of Department, Business Management, quality assurance coordinator, College 1) when she stated that:

> the partner university has got a significant role […] [they check] student performance, they do this by comparing the current result with the previous semester performance, they also compare the percentage to check student improvement […] they spend up to 5 days to this review.

The expectations of an external partner university were also reiterated by Iva (Head of the Department for Civil Engineering, female, College 2) who said:

> The partner Universities are involved in approving our programmes and making sure the programmes comply with the quality processes. The external partner helps us; they visit us and provide us with external examiners. They offer us guidance, support, assistance, and mentorship.

The MOHE also provides guidelines to be followed by every private college in the establishment of a collaborative partnership with a partner HEI. For example, they expect private colleges to have the necessary infrastructure and facilities to offer degree studies. This includes administrative offices, classrooms, qualified academic staff, libraries and IT facilities. The following quotation, from Rolla highlights the government's expectations:

> The Omani College provides buildings, facilities, and the entire infrastructure. Our college is providing laboratories, library, classrooms, and all sort of teaching and learning equipment. The college is also responsible for hiring qualified staff to run the programmes and for setting rules and regulations in consultation with the affiliated university (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics- quality assurance coordinator, female, College 2).

This analysis showed that most staff at college 1 and 2 were aware of the role of the foreign partners in designing validating programmes, moderation and student assessment. In this case, the programmes are designed and developed by the local institution, and the external partner approves them. Both parties work towards enabling course designers to meet institutional, professional or national requirements, through the production of learning outcomes, alignment to national frameworks, and calculations of credit weightings. However, giving staff from Omani HEIs the opportunity to visit the universities (local or external) to observe and participate in teaching, assessment, programme management, student feedback sessions, and university administration practices was not happening. Moreover, some participants stated that many of the responsibilities regarding quality assurance of teaching and learning were not implemented correctly and the academic agreement was drafted merely to satisfy the Ministry's requirements.

6.3.3. Views of the Roles and Commitments of the Omani and UK Institutions in the Provision of TNE

I also interrogated the participants regarding their perceptions of the role played by each institution in the provision of TNE programmes. I wanted to know the manifestation of the cooperation in practice, that is, whether the institutions were adhering to the defined roles or whether there was a mismatch between the commitments in principle and reality.

The two colleges in my study followed guidelines provided by the MOHE on the management of the partnerships. Evidently, there were mixed feelings among the academic staff regarding the existing partnerships. On one hand, 37% of the participants were positive about the partnerships stating that the partner institutions were doing a good job. For example, Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) said:

> I think they do their best […]. They give us input, and as an external source they help us to ensure that the quality of our programmes is at par with the international standards [...] link tutors are assigned for everybody […] they come over here and talk to the students, they have meetings with us […]. They keep on guiding us and monitoring us in the process.

Contrary to this notion, 63% of the staff members were not happy with the nature of partnerships stating that the partner Universities were not supporting them effectively in the implementation of TNE programmes despite paying significant sums for the privilege of the partnership. This view was articulated by Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, College 2) when she stated:

> I expected the partner university would be much more involved. It should get involved more in consultancy, training for staff and student exchanges…this kind of affiliation is just on paper and was drafted simply to satisfy official MOHE requirements.

Further detail was provided on the passive role of the partner university in teaching and quality assurance matters by Mohammed (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1):

I have been here for 7 years and I watched and observed the working of our internal systems in the college, and I noticed that the partner university has a minimal role to play […] It's the internal management who control things, so I don't know what the partner university does.

In the same vein, another participant expressed some frustration about the college's partners:

They just impose things on us. They provide us with the procedures that we need to follow, but they do not train us [...] since we are partners they should give us some training to prepare us […], but they do not. They just give us procedures, and we need to follow them (Mohan, Head Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2).

Some participants felt there was a need for the role of the partner university to be expanded; to include not only the validation of courses and monitoring of quality assurance but also a close collaboration with staff. They believed, there was a need for better cooperation with the Omani team to develop a full picture of the dynamics involved in the implementation of the programme. The external university could ensure academic staff are qualified to teach the modules they are assigned. (Masood Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2), argued that:

Partner Universities […] do not check who is going to teach the module and what the specialisation of that teacher is. Is he/she capable of doing this? They are not even aware of who is going to handle the modules, and who has moderated them…

Masood appears to suggest that the UK partner Universities are not ensuring the quality of their modules. If this is the case, then it raises serious concerns over the effectiveness of TNE regarding the quality of teaching and learning. One other observation made by the academic staff focused on the lack of regular communication between academic staff and their counterparts in the UK partner Universities. It was reported that teachers in Oman were unable to discuss any concerns regarding teaching with their colleagues in the partner Universities. Besides, when representatives from the UK partner university visit the local colleges, they spent more time with senior management rather than meeting with the teachers

to discuss issues around teaching and learning in detail. Muller (Senior Lecturer, IT, College 1) stated that:

> If there are any concerns regarding teaching and learning, we ought to understand that these are taken care of from an administrative point of view, that is, the senior management rather than teachers […]. What we suggest is that teachers should be more involved in all the processes including our concerns with the partner university.

Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) reiterated the same view when he said:

> whenever colleagues from the partner university visit us they talk to the dean and the assistant dean only. I feel that there is a need to talk to the teachers to gain a better picture of how things are going.

Inevitably, teachers should be involved more in the process to ensure that any issues affecting the TNE have a chance of being addressed. While it is essential for senior management to participate in meetings with the partner university, without the teachers' involvement, the partner university cannot fully appreciate the issues and successes of their partnership unless there is more involvement from the academic staff.

There were different opinions on the issue of moderation. Some lecturers including Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, programme coordinator, female, College 2) said the process was, "wow", "excellent" and "magnificent" but others believed the process was not correctly carried out. They seem to suggest that in some cases, examination papers were pre-selected; hence, external markers would be given work from the best students to present a misleading picture of student attainment. This view was shared by different participants as shown in the following quotation:

> We give partner University the excellent exam papers […] you know, before the final exams we tell the students what to expect. We provide the partner University the exam papers that are marked and checked in the best way, so we do not select the exam papers for partner University randomly (Sonia, Lecturer, IT, female, College 2).

Apart from the worrying issue of selecting papers for moderation, there is an even more worrisome problem which suggests malpractice regarding examination procedures. If students are indeed fed examination content before the actual exams, this exposes a significant oversight role on the part of the affiliate university about quality assurance, assessment moderation, and supervision. Academic staff expressed the concern that quality assurance was compromised by the failure of the partner Universities to examine the operations of the host college closely. Alia, (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, quality assurance coordinator, female, College 1), stated: "to be honest with you, the management of the college is very proactive in this area but […] they [the partner university] leave us, and they forget about us". Interestingly, Jones (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, programme coordinator, male, College 2) stated a similar view but with an emphasis on the partner's inability to play a significant role: "I don't think that they should play a very crucial role because they don't understand what is happening here." Another participant viewed the role of the partner university as associated with marketing rather than academic aspects. In this respect, Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, programme coordinator, female, College 1) stated that: "you see, we do most of the work; we only need them for the degree, recognition and the status. You know the students value the international degree more". Even among the academic staff who were positive about the partnerships, there was also a feeling that the partnerships could be improved. Participants highlighted the need to broaden the scope of services and implementation for more people in the local college to participate fully in the different programmes within the partnership framework. The academic staff expressed the view that students and teachers in the local colleges lacked adequate opportunities to benefit from the partner university through staff and student exchange programmes. Tuba well illustrated this view (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, College 1) when she stated that:

> The partner university is meant to share their good practices […] have exchange programmes, exchange academic instructors and exchange students. But what we can see is that they [foreign partner] give their certificate and their logo because they receive money so why not take students and expose then to different cultures.

The quote above suggests that some of the academics were not happy with the role of the partner Universities and claimed that their partners hampered quality assurance. Some lecturers believed the scope of services could be expanded to include other educational services, such as academic and student exchange, while others felt the lack of involvement by partner Universities disqualified them from full participation in TNE. These indicate mixed feelings on the part of academic staff regarding the implementation of institutional responsibilities. On a positive note, some of the academic staff cited that the external partners were trying to ensure that they fulfilled their end of the responsibilities.

On the other hand, the academic staff were unconvinced about the role of the partner Universities. They saw the partner Universities as playing only a minimal role. They mentioned the lack of communication between the colleagues from partner institutions with academic staff as an example. Some academics felt that the partner visits were superficial and that no real attempts were made to address relevant issues faced by the teaching staff. Other lecturers felt the partner institutions should offer more than their current provision. They were still others who were not aware of the scope of the partnership between the local college and the external partner. It appears from the data that quality of education is a fundamental issue of TNE in Oman.

Having presented the practice of partnership between the Omani private colleges and UK universities, the next section offers a summary of the analysis on academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes by private colleges in Oman

6.4. Perspectives on the Implementation of TNE Programmes

During the interviews with academic staff, many questions were asked to elicit their views regarding the implementation of TNE programmes. The next section explores the following identified overarching sub-themes.
1.   Curriculum development.
2.   Staff-centred issues.
3.   Student academic support services.

150

4. Quality culture.

6.4.1. Curriculum Development

In terms of curriculum development, the following elements emerged from the study: programme design, procedures for programme approval and review, teaching and learning methods, and the nature of student assessment. These are presented below.

a) Programme Design

The study established that programmes offered in the two Omani HEIs were designed locally, with each college being responsible but in consultation with the partner university. The partner university had the mandate to validate and accredit the programme before it was submitted to the MOHE in Oman for final approval. The MOHE provides the template used in programme design and specifies the procedures to be followed for the programme to be approved. The programme design passes through a designated consultation process which is informed by industry requirements to ensure that each programme aligns with the needs of the society. Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) provides a clear picture of the process as follows:

> The crucial role in designing a programme is played by the actors who are here in Oman. For example, this is done by the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Higher Education together with the academic staff and alumni from the college and [...] [the team]. They take input from the stakeholders […], and once the programme is designed, it is sent to the industry panel […] to ensure the needs of the country are adequately addressed. Once this is done it is then sent to the partner university for approval […] based on that if they say we require some amendments then the MOHE will also have to approve that.

Regarding the portfolio of existing programme in comparison with the quality of the partner institutions, 63% of the staff expressed their satisfaction while 37% had some reservations. Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2), had this to say:

151

Most of the academic programmes here are monitored [by the partner institution] […] there are specific measures, specific standards, and specific procedures to ensure the outcome of the programme is comparable at least to some extent to the international standards.

Some academic staff felt that the programmes were outstanding, and students could get the benefit of having western certificate: "these programmes are well respected everywhere. So, if you can get our students to grasp the whole curriculum then we are ok, we are fine" (Roman, Senior lecturer, IT, male, College 2). In the same vein, Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of quality assurance, female, College 1) expressed her satisfaction and reflected on the challenge associated with working with a UK partner as follows:

The programme […] is excellent. Taking a British curriculum is an innovative idea […], but I think that we need to look at other components of implementation […] teachers need to familiarise themselves with the British curriculum […] [as most] did not study through the British system.

However, in some cases, the market research was not efficient; hence, some programmes were not considered to be addressing the needs of society. One participant who commented on this was Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 2). She stated that: "although we have formulated a relationship with industry to know their requirements in the current job market […] our graduates are not equipped with the core and soft skills required". This idea was supported by Tahir (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) who stated that:

[Graduates] go to the right place but […] their skills or abilities are not meeting the requirements of the employers. Given that they do not learn the concepts correctly, when a problem arises in the workplace they cannot solve it […] [we] need to ensure the graduates coming out with a good foundation.

In addition, staff indicated that the colleges were neglecting the potential value of alumni by failing to elicit their feedback regarding the relevance of the curriculum

during programme reviews. In this respect, Iva, (Head of Department, Civil Engineering, female, College 2) said:

> What I find here is in our college is, the authorities are not putting in much effort in tracking students to get feedback about their careers […]. We need to adapt to the employers' requirements. I feel that the mechanism for doing this should be there.

It also emerged that there are intercultural clashes that affect the implementation of the programmes. For example, Tuba, (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) highlighted that:

> The foundation teachers had to conceal the cover page of all the 200 books because of the cultural issue and the requirements that it should not go to the students, which is fair enough. However, […] to some extent students should also be exposed to other cultures.

Building on this point, Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) also pointed out the ramifications of this cultural closed-mindedness on restricting teaching methods and the effect of this on student development as follows:

> [With] our teaching methods we are trying to keep the students away from real life. We do not expose them enough to topics that have to do with daily life experiences […] We should try to make assessments and learning more connected to real life to prepare the students for the industry.

The other issue that emerged during the discussions was about the designing of programme. Some academic staff thought the process of incorporating changes was too bureaucratic because it takes a long time to effect any changes to the programme. According to Sonia (Lecturer, IT, College 2):

> Some materials and module assessments need to be revised. But they do not have the intention to review or update any material […] [due to] the heavy workload of teaching and administrative hours. The process for the review or making amendments to the curriculum is also too long […]. Teachers will be willing to revise and assess teaching materials if they have the time.

In some cases, there was no adequate mechanism in place to support new courses. There were instances where academic programmes were introduced without any relevant reference textbooks in the library. Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) saw this as making teaching and learning very difficult. He said:

> There is lack of relevant textbooks, and references suggested in the module information guides, and there is a gap between the stated learning outcomes and the available learning resources in the library […], so we browse the internet to find other references.

From the study, there was evidence of satisfaction on the part of academic staff regarding their involvement in the programme design process. Some academic staff felt that the programmes were designed to meet both local and international standards as the partner institutions also played an essential role in validating the planned programmes. Their input was vital because it helped the local colleges to ensure that what they offered were both current and aligned to international standards. The MOHE plays a significant role in designing programmes by providing templates to be used by the local institutions. However, although an effort was being made by local colleges to engage all relevant stakeholders in the curriculum design processes, this did not always happen and, as a result, problems, such as lack of curriculum relevance, became apparent. Moreover, a considerable proportion of academic staff either implicitly or explicitly noted the disconnection between the designed programmes and the realities of the workplace in which the students find themselves after graduation. The data, therefore, suggests a pressing need for educational institutions to build strong relationships with key players in the industry, and their alumni, to ensure that they incorporate the necessary changes to the curricula so that they are relevant to the society and the world.

b) Teaching and Learning Methods

Concerning teaching and learning methods in the two colleges, the design of the classrooms was meant to give teachers the freedom to employ the most up-to-date and blended/technological approaches. Also, an emphasis was being placed on the use of instructional technologies and active learning. College 2 lectures noted a

promotion of "flipped learning", a method used heavily at their partner university in the UK. Similarly, at College 1, there was also a mention of a teaching philosophy aligned with the teaching philosophy employed at their partner university in the UK. Rose, (Senior Lecturer, English Language, female, College 2) stated that "in our college, we are using active learning approaches which are also used in our partner university".

Although the emphasis on active learning and student-centred methods in teaching and learning was prioritised, 63% of the teachers felt that their students were unprepared for this style of learning. For example, Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) said: "the students […] should be trained towards this in basic education rather than higher education. It is late to be giving them full training on study skills in higher education". Similarly, Maha (Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) reported that students seemed to be ill-prepared for the demands placed on them to be independent learners. She said:

> How can you blame the student who went through a teacher-centered approach for 12 years, suddenly he/she is now expected to become an independent learner [...] schools are not doing their part […] I feel students are being spoon-fed.

Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, College 2) further reinforced this view and suggested that the Omani schooling system employs approaches which are not conducive to the Western style adopted by the HEIs. He stated that:

> We must be very careful in trying to apply those strategies and methodologies here because of cultural barriers, for example, the concept of "flipped learning" which is well known in the west […]. The problem is that the students here do not read very much so this means the approach itself, the flipped learning approach if we must apply it here, ought to be taken very lightly.

It seems that Mohan was referring, not so much to the clash of culture regarding sensitive materials, but rather to the lack of willingness on the part of the students to

prepare adequately for classes. The focus on techniques which require a certain level of independent learning appear to be a matter of significant issue for some lecturers. Teachers expressed their surprise that both sexes, after initial hesitation, seemed to mix well because, gender issues (which one might expect to arise in classes where the mixing of gender, although relatively common) are restricted somewhat in social contexts outside of the learning environment. For instance, Venice, (Lecturer, Business Management, College 1) referred to this when she said:

> I was a bit surprised when I first started teaching in Oman because boys and girls refused to work with each other and I never had that issue back in my country […], but with time, things get better, and the students become more relaxed.

These responses indicate that the implementation of TNE programmes was fraught with various cultural challenges. For instance, it emerged that a certain proportion of learning resources published in western countries were either absent or redacted. Besides, the academic staff found the use of examples from western nations to be challenging for their students due to the difficulty felt by students in understanding different contexts. Furthermore, students were characterised as being teacher-centred learners which presented challenges to teachers delivering programmes designed from a western perspective that imposed a learner-centred approach.

c) Assessment

Interview conversations also centred on assessment design and procedures. The two colleges followed the same systems regarding assessment design. The study established that the two colleges made use of four principles that underpin their assessment regulations at both the module and programme level; accessibility, consistency, comprehensiveness and external standards. Assessment design was scrutinised through a system of 'internal peer review' before sending them to the partner university's external examiners for approval and further discussions. In both colleges, there were regular annual reviews.

A concise summary of the interrelation between the module content and teaching, and the assessments were provided by Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) who stated that:

> Regarding assessment, we are governed by the partner university [...] Every module has learning outcomes, every learning outcome has assessment strategies, and every assessment strategy has what we expect from that assessment regarding skills, knowledge, and competency. These three things are mixed in every single delivery of the lecture.

There were procedures in place for marking and moderation of students' work, and college mentors supported inexperienced staff through the process. However, almost 25% of the participants raised concerns about the extent to which the partner university guaranteed the quality of assessments. For example, Jones (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Programme Coordinator, College 2) mentioned this when he said:

> The box files we send to them [partner university] include all the materials for class and all the mid-semester exams; all examination questions are there, assessment and sample answers. We send it to them, and they are supposed to comment on that, but I have never received any feedback. Also, the material that you are talking about, even our partner university may be a bit confused with their regulations as they do not seem to adhere to them.

It was noted in College 2, that the management introduced a traffic light system as used in one of its partner Universities in the UK. This involved monitoring the pass and progression rates in each programme, a mechanism that appeared to put pressure on the academic staff to ensure that all students pass the module. If a low pass rate was recorded on the module, the lecturer received queries but not the students. This practice evidently caused teachers to make allowances for poor student performance so that students do not fail assessments. Naila (Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) reported that:

> At the end the semester, somebody will look at the result and the […] traffic light system. If there is a red colour, then you will be in trouble, but the thing is that you will be forcing people to compromise the quality just to make sure

that they are not on the red […]. The college […] needs to get the students to be responsible for their studies, not the staff…

This view was also highlighted by Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, quality assurance coordinator, female College 1) who stated that:

It seems staff is responsible for student's studies and not the student […] Students are now customers, and our management must satisfy them. The authorities question you [the teacher] at the end of the semester so as a teacher you want to make sure you are not on the red and not being on the red means making sure or allowing students to pass the exams easily.

Arguably, this practice does not help students to develop knowledge and skills that they can use in future as stipulated in the programme aims and objectives. In this respect, Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, female, College 2) stated that "with the traffic light system it is difficult to support students, to become independent learners. How to help students to become independent learners is one of our biggest challenges".

Although not directly related to assessment, a more global issue was raised regarding the atmosphere at the private providers of higher education "teachers tend to safeguard their jobs by ensuring that students get whatever they want. For instance, if the priority is to save their jobs then even if something is wrong, students may be left to get away with it" (Tuba, senior lecturer, English language studies, female, college 1).

Thus, it appears that assessment was a significant challenge for the participants regarding the apparent lack of oversight from the external partner institution and the internal demands placed on teachers to ensure that students achieve the necessary standards. It seems that the latter could be rectified more efficiently than the former, but this would require a level of honesty and communication between teaching staff and senior management.

Having discussed the various sub-themes which emerged from responses relating to curriculum development, the next section organises participant responses under the theme of staff-centred Issues. In other words, those problems are directly related to staff working conditions and job experiences at the two colleges.

6.4.2. Staff-Centred Issues

A significant theme covered in this study was an exploration of staff-centred issues at the local colleges. I was interested in understanding both the experiences and perceptions of staff about the recruitment process, induction, opportunities for staff development, promotion and incentives, and the general working conditions. Each of these aspects will be presented in the sections below.

a) Recruitment of Academic Staff

In principle, local colleges have the responsibility of recruiting teaching and supporting staff for the TNE programmes. They do this by following defined guidelines provided by the MOHE and the partner University. Both colleges had recruitment and selection criteria in place. Following staff recruitment, the institutions engage in consultation with the partner University on the suitability of lecturers, and the MOHE gives the final approval.

More than three-quarters of those interviewed revealed that the first difficulty of this process was the recruitment of highly qualified staff. In this context, Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of Quality Assurance, female, College 1) indicated that: "it is challenging to get highly qualified people; people who are ethically sound, with good qualifications and everything that is appropriate for this system...". The reason for such a struggle was articulated by Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2) who explained that:

> The institution is not able to hire highly qualified academic staff because lack of competitive salaries and the desire to make profit, they require higher salaries, want to work for fewer hours, which is beyond the capabilities of the

159

private institutions. As a result, colleges tend to go in for people with lower qualifications who can work for more extended hours.

While there was a system in place, it appeared that the allocation of teaching load and responsibilities was problematic. For instance, it was highlighted by some lecturers during the interviews that some people were asked to teach modules which were not in their areas of expertise. Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) stated that: "you are employed based on a profile but […] the department does not know about the profile, so the department forced [staff] to teach modules [that] […] do not even fit in your profile […] it's the student who suffers in the end".

Although the problem was said to be prevalent in both institutions, it appeared College 2 was the most affected. Furthermore, the question of mismatching staff was even more pronounced as it was not merely about assigning lecturers to modules for which they were not qualified. Some indicated that when they joined the college, they thought their schedule would focus on teaching; yet, they were asked to do administrative tasks without any further remuneration or incentives. According to Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, Programme Coordinator, College 2), "as a programme manager I have a full teaching load, and yet I am expected to do administrative tasks too". Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1), also said: "we do more administrative work than teaching".

The data indicated that the participating academic staff was not content with the recruitment process. There was a feeling that the colleges were failing to attract highly qualified staff; namely, those with PhDs, due to the low salaries. Lecturers' pay did not reflect the amount of work that they were expected to undertake. It also emerged that the colleges were facing staff shortages, resulting in ever-increasing workloads for the available staff. In some cases, lecturers were asked to teach subjects where they had no expert knowledge. Participants saw this as a move by the colleges to cover the shortfall, but this could have severe ramifications for student attainment and the smooth-running of the institution in general.

b) Induction

With the understanding that teaching on TNE programmes would require a set of skills and competencies tailored to suit the expectations of both institutions, I asked academic staff from each of the two colleges questions related to staff induction. The analysis of data revealed that both colleges set aside one week before the beginning of each semester for intensive induction programme for newly recruited led by a Central Professional Development Unit. In College 2, this central induction was coordinated by the Centre for Academic Practice and in College 1, by the Quality Assurance Department. In addition to the centralised induction programme, the induction process continued at the departmental level where the academic Heads of Departments assigned a senior lecturer to support new employees who have joined their department for at least one semester. The mentor system was described by two participants as follows:

> There will be a mentor who will be with the faculty member, with the new employee throughout the semester. So, this mentor is there to assist this new employee just to make sure that everything is aligned with the policies and the new teacher understands the system here (Mohammed, Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1).

> When we join the college, there is a system where you get to know the processes; we call it the mentorship system. It helps to understand the processes, what we do inside the college and that is where I saw the differences between my old workplace and this college (Leon, Lecturer, English Language studies, male, College 2).

While both colleges were able to put in place induction programmes as described above, my study indicated that these programmes were not comprehensive. The induction focused mainly on technical issues, such as the teaching and learning methods, quality assurance mechanisms, student assessment, and feedback mechanisms. There was an emphasis on ensuring that the new teachers developed an understanding of the college's learning and teaching system and how the college works with the MOHE and the partner University, rather than explicit instruction

regarding the specifics of teaching itself. Venice (Lecturer, Business Management, female, College 1) stated that:

> When I came to the college, I received oral instructions about teaching and assessment standards and the forms which I had to complete. The college organises workshops. There is a Teaching and Learning Committee which approves all the teaching programmes, delivery plans, assessments and other teaching activities.

In the same vein, Ruby (Lecturer, Mathematics, female, College 2) stated that "the mentor is more focused on dealing with administrative processes and not the teaching itself".

Approximately three-quarters of the participants (74%) believed that there were gaps in the induction programme. There was a feeling that not much attention was given to address lecturers' understanding of the socio-cultural context of the country. For instance, some participants stated that they did not receive training on how to deal with Omani students in the classroom because of cultural differences. Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, Programme Coordinator, female, College 2) described this as follows:

> When I came to Oman, I used to talk to students; because I wanted to know what was going on. I was not familiar with the culture, and everything was strange to me. I had some Islamic background, but it was different. I feel there should be more support for teachers during those three months.

The same sentiments were echoed by Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) who stated that:

The first group I taught was a part-time cohort so […] their study skills were quite poor. I felt they didn't know how to behave as students. There are certain norms or etiquette that they were not familiar with, so I faced challenges which I was not prepared for […] there was no sort of intercultural training.

Seventy-four percent of the academic staff indicated that they were not familiar with the culture of students in Oman which made it difficult for them to know what

methods and approaches to use. Some lecturers stated that they needed further training on socio-cultural issues to help them manage their students effectively. For example, Suad (Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) stated that:

> When I came here […] they taught me how to change my teaching pedagogy and many other things, but I feel there should have been more support on understanding the Omani culture [...] so I don't think the training was sufficient.

This view was further buttressed by Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, female, College 2) who added that:

> Teachers should be given some cultural awareness lessons before they go to the classroom; especially expatriate teachers […] if you don't have the experience then you do not know how to work with Omani students, and they can perceive you as rude.

The TNE programmes are taught by staff recruited from diverse backgrounds, that is, teachers from Asia, Africa, and Europe. These lecturers are competent in their disciplinary knowledge. However, some of them would be teaching on TNE programmes and working with students from a different culture for the first time. This situation requires focused induction and on-going professional development opportunities. My study showed that in both colleges induction programmes were conducted systematically. However, there was a feeling among a considerable number of academic staff that the induction programmes were not as comprehensive as they should be. For instance, teachers felt positively about how they are inducted into the academic practices, but the non-Omani lecturers felt less confident about working in a new social-cultural milieu.

C) Staff Development

My study also sought to establish whether there were continuous professional development opportunities for academic staff in the two colleges and how the partner institutions supported these provisions. The study found that each of the two colleges had an institution-wide programme of professional development for academic staff

which covered some critical areas of educational practice including teaching, learning, assessment, and research. However, opportunities varied between the two colleges.

In College 1, the Head of Quality Assurance unit was responsible for academic, professional development and, they used a bottom-up approach to develop its staff development schedule. This was informed by individuals' staff development needs highlighted in the annual staff appraisal. Participants said they had workshops at the college level or departmental level to address a variety of identified topics. Most participants appreciated the training received on this matter. For example, Suad (Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) said:

> They always encourage us to attend conferences, to publish our work, and they support us in many ways, for example, paying for conference registration. Every semester we have different staff development sessions, and they cover different areas of need. We have peer review forms and staff appraisal, so some staff go through that and they plan the best courses for teachers' development.

In College 1, there were no opportunities for staff to engage in further studies, such as pursuing a Master's degree or PhD, or professional accreditation courses like as a Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. However, some lecturers expressed dissatisfaction with the training. According to Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1):

> There are programmes and training in there. However, there is no chance or any support from the college for further education such as pursuing a master's or PhD or any other post-graduate studies. I think there is a lack of provision of these professional development programmes.

College 2, also had staff development opportunities at either college level or the departmental level. A variety of initiatives were in place; for example, in-house professional development activities were organised by the Centre for Academic Practice for both academic and administrative staff.

> We have a staff development programme; the college is extending support for conferences such as the Oman Education Technology. So, it gives us

financial support, research-leave, and other financial help for our individual professional development. We also get opportunities to work collaboratively with industry (Iva, Head of Department, Civil Engineering, female, College 2).

The significant difference was that, in College 2, they provided a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, which is awarded by one of its partner Universities in the UK. I also learned that the college offered opportunities for PhD studies to some of its senior staff in collaboration with its partner Universities. With College 1, there was a provision of workshops on topics relating to teaching, learning, assessment, and research using a bottom-up approach. The Centre for Academic Practices identified the areas of need in consultation with lecturers from each academic department and developed a schedule of workshops for each semester. Some staff members also had the opportunity to deliver specialised topics. The situation in College 2 was described by Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, female) as follows:

> There are training programmes in each semester [...] The college already has a budget for these training and teachers are interested in them. They apply through the system for attending and accessing funding for these workshops. Teachers can also participate in other training programmes outside Oman.

In sum, both colleges supported their staff research development activities including provision of financial support to attend conferences and publish their research outputs in peer-reviewed journals. However, when I talked to the academic staff, some expressed dissatisfaction with increasingly limited financial resources because not everyone was able to attend conferences of their choice or to publish their research work. Tuba (Senior Lecturer, English language studies, female, College 1) stated that:

> The college is not a research institute but a teaching one […] we used to get opportunities including going to international conferences to do presentations, and we were reimbursed on the full cost or the actual bills. But now […] the college only pays up to OMR 600 which is not enough to travel to places like America and Australia.

165

Some lecturers also showed discontent at the apparent lack of equality of opportunity when it comes to the support for attending workshops/conferences outside Oman. Morgan, (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) had this to say: "our management is partial when it comes to supporting the staff. Some academic staff are supported to attend conferences abroad while others get rejected". This problem appeared to be more pronounced in College 2, as there was no mention of this from participants in College 1.

In summary, the data indicates that, in both colleges, there were defined systems and structures to promote and support continuous professional development for people at various levels (new and experienced staff). There were many professional development courses in both colleges. In College 2, they could join the MA and PhD programmes of the partner institution. However, College 1 did not have such a reciprocal arrangement which would have been welcomed by its staff. In general, the academic staff did appreciate the efforts made by the colleges to provide support and on-going professional development. However, there were complaints from some of the staff that the provision of staff development opportunities was not for everyone.

d) Promotion and Incentives

Staff from both colleges were asked to comment on their experience regarding promotion and other incentives within their colleges. It appears that in both places most of the academic staff were not very clear about career progression structures. For example, Tuba (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) stated that:

> I don't know what the second line of escalation is, so […] more transparencies are required as to how to go about it […] promotion is one of the most motivating factors for academics […] there should be a policy about it.

Similarly, Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 2) indicated that:

There are no clear criteria for promotion. The head of the department decides who deserves to be promoted. There is nothing written in this regard at all. I think the approach is not transparent at all.

However, some academic staff acknowledged that the MOHE had provided some guidelines for academic promotions in HE in Oman. Apparently, the colleges were not implementing the MOHE guidelines on promotions as this was not a priority for some institutions. This view was expressed by Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) who stated that:

As far as I know, we do not have a written policy on promotions. I think there is some guidance from the MOHE, but there is no implementation of that regulation. I used to work at a government university, and everything was transparent.

The same situation emerged in College 2, where Jones (senior lecturer, Mathematics, programme coordinator, male) indicated that:

When you read these policies, they are different when it comes to the reality. In other words, the written document is not the same as the actual application of the rule. Honestly, there is no reward […] However, we get a query if we are late two or five minutes.

From the above quotations, the two colleges appear to be neglecting promotions and incentives. Staff in College 1 indicated that there was nothing written down regarding the promotion of staff while in College 2 staff said what was written down was not being implemented. There were concerns also about the level of monitoring as evident from Jones's response. Apparently, reward and incentive remain an area that needs developing. This requires having a transparent system for promotion and incentives for staff so that they are motivated and have satisfaction in their work.

In sum, despite the provision of clear guidelines on promotion by the MOHE, the colleges appeared not to be particularly proactive in adhering to them. Since academic staff expects clarity and transparency on their promotions, these issues need addressing. Staff indicated further dissatisfaction over the lack of recognition

by management for the extra work they do. This suggests a need for the colleges to recognise additional work by their staff so that they can be reward accordingly.

6.4.3 Academic Support Services

As previously mentioned, participants were asked questions about the academic support services in the colleges as it is a crucial element of the teaching and learning processes. These support services include the registry (student admission), foundation programme, teaching resources, library and IT services. An effort was made to understand how each of these critical elements was managed in the colleges under study. The next section discusses a summary of the data from participants.

a) Student Admissions

The study looked at student admissions based on the entry requirements for students (as publicised on the websites of each college), and the extent to which they were followed. This was done to understand whether the students met a standard entry level for the degree programmes awarded by the partner Universities, which is a vital compliance issue for academic standard.

During the interviews, participants were asked to comment on whether students met the expected entry criteria for their degree programmes. The requirements included English language competencies and general academic attainment. There was a feeling that most of the private colleges in Oman tend to recruit students with low academic standards; this is because most of the top achievers usually opt to enrol in the public colleges or the public university in Oman. Some of the best students are also travel overseas or attend public HEIs. This observation was made by staff from both colleges. For example, Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) stated that:

> Omani students and their parents usually look at private HEIs as the last choice. We expect that the top students will study abroad or join the public-

sector universities and colleges and some average students will enter our college.

In the same vein, Masood, (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) said:

> In Oman, the government provides funding to all students for enrolment into either a public or a private HEI […] In general, public institutions enrol most of the secondary school high achievers […] This puts pressure on private institutions to accept students with low results and to provide the needed academic support.

The study established that most of the students were accepted on the programmes despite not having achieved the requisite English Language level. In other words, the colleges were non-compliant with their entry requirements, although all students undertook a foundation programme to improve their English Language proficiency level. Leon (Lecturer, English Language studies, male, College 2) said:

> Students leave secondary school with a less than satisfactory level of English, which I think is a barrier to their success in higher education. We have many smart students here, but I think the use of English is a fundamental problem.

This was also a concern in College 1:

> Language is still a barrier. We recruit students from state schools where there are not enough opportunities for students to learn the English language. They have difficulty in understanding, and following what teachers are saying […] this area needs addressing if you want an efficient implementation of those programmes (Tahir, senior lecturer, Business Management, male, college1).

While in basic education, students use the Arabic language as the medium of instruction, English is the medium of instruction in all the TNE programmes; hence, it is of immense importance for students to be able to communicate in this language efficiently. The problem of inadequate mastery of English was common in the two colleges under study.

The admission process seems to be a challenging aspect in private colleges because they rely on tuition fees to fund their operations and evidently must lower their entry

requirements so that they can admit students who can pay the required fees. Naila (Lecturer, IT female, College 2) said:

> I think from the management point of view, yes, the desire to enrol many students is there. There is a tendency to accept all students who wish to study in the college. The partner university approves it and gives them university registration number [...] I think this somehow compromises the quality of education.

Jones (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Programme Coordinator, male, College 2) talked about other problems in addition to English language proficiency:

> I also find that students do not have good maths background [...] I find myself having to explain elementary concepts during my lecture and when I'm marking papers I come across many mistakes.

Another crucial point on admissions was student choice of academic courses. There is a problem with what to study and what to opt for; this is often the case with young adults preparing for entry into HEI. It appears parental interest influences some, and as a result, they end up studying subjects that do not suit them. A participant from College 1 stated:

> The most crucial problem for every student is to find their best specialisation which corresponds to their interests and capabilities. It happens very often that the student starts some specialty aiming only to take a diploma or under the influence of the family, without real expectations and imagination of their future work. (Alia, Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female).

The data indicated that the colleges recruit students whose results were lower than those in public institutions. Lecturers in the study explained that, because of this problem, students in their colleges required a significant amount of academic support. Most of them were not self-directed as they relied mostly on the teachers and did not appear to have the expected level of motivation. One of the significant challenges that the colleges in this study faced was the lack of English proficiency in all four skills - writing, reading, listening and speaking - for many students.

b) Foundation Programme

The foundation programme, in the context of Oman, is a non-credit bearing program developed to provide support to new students to enhance English language, IT, Mathematics and general study skills. Majority of students entering higher education in the country are required to undergo a broad foundation programme to bridge the gap between secondary schools and HE requirements particularly regarding English language proficiency, academic and study skills. Masood, (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) said:

> When you talk about the foundation programme, it's supposed to be a bridging programme […] But what you are essentially saying is that they are not ready to go to college […] I don't know how good or bad their secondary school education was.

As presented earlier, most of the students had issues with the English language and lacked study skills. Suad (lecturer, English language studies, female, College 1) stated that "it's not so much the problem of English alone […] sometimes it's just their lack of general study skills. So usually performance depends on the skills and habits they bring with them from the school level".

Some participants in the study expressed reservations regarding the effectiveness of the foundation programmes when asked about whether they thought that the students were prepared to undergo degree studies. Most of the participants felt that students with a low level of English Language and study skills required more than two semesters (allocated for the foundation programme) to reach the expected standard for embarking on a degree programme. Leon, (Lecturer, English Language studies, male College 2) captured the view held by most academic staff and stated as follows, "I don't know if the foundation programme bridges the gap". There were similar views by teachers from college 1. For instance, Tuba (senior lecturer, English language studies, female) stated that:

> In 12 years of their schooling, the students do not have enough academic skills, so they have the foundation programme. How does one foundation programme help develop all their skills in 6 months (two semesters)? […] to

those students who come with an IELTS [The International English Language Testing System] score of 2 or 3, I mean... I must be honest and say, how I can help them achieve a higher score of IELTS 4.5 […] It's impossible.

The views of most of the academic staff were captured in an observation made by Mohammed (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) who stated that:

I think that the foundation programme is not a reliable solution to the problems faced by most of the students when they embark on the undergraduate studies. The English language proficiency must be addressed much earlier at the grassroots level.

The data appear to show that the foundation programme has not sufficiently bridged the gap between secondary and higher education. The academic staff in this study indicated that the time allocated to conduct a full foundation programme was not enough. Since the educational level of students enrolling in college is weak, the government needs to review the basic education programme to ensure that students have the necessary skills and English language proficiency required for higher education.

c). Teaching Resources

All participants were asked to comment on their experience and perceptions of the availability of teaching resources in each college. These include well-designed learning environments, for example, classrooms which support active learning approaches, whiteboards, laboratories, and audio-visual systems, among others. It appears that there were no concerns regarding teaching resources in both colleges because all the academic staff spoke highly about the provisions in their schools. For example, Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) stated that "the college is very supportive. All the materials […] [and] we are provided with all the facilities we need for our work."

Similarly, Kerry (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) stated that: "the facilities and resources of the college are excellent. We have enough. We have a Wi-Fi connection, internet connection; the library has useful resources. We sometimes suggest book and other materials. They are very accommodating". The same feelings were expressed by Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, College 2) when she said: "the college provides laptops to all academic staff, projectors in all teaching rooms, well-equipped labs, and library. The equipment is up to date and meets the teaching requirements".

Thus, both colleges had adequate teaching resources; sufficient numbers of classrooms, well-equipped laboratories, and in-class audio-visual systems to support teaching and learning activities. The available resources met the requirements of the TNE programmes on offer. There was also evidence that the learning environments were designed to facilitate active learning approaches in technology, resources, and open, collaborative spaces.

d). Library

Both colleges had 'well-resourced' libraries with reference books, e-resources, relevant journals, and a subscription to relevant databases in addition to quiet rooms and private group study areas. The lecturers commented that they were able to place orders for new books through the librarian and these were made available in appropriate time. academic staff from both colleges made other positive comments. For example, Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1) indicated said, "we have an outstanding library building and books for a standard learning resource centre".

e). Information and Technology Services

The colleges use contemporary teaching and learning equipment characterised by an intensive use of modern technologies. All participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of the IT facilities and all expressed satisfaction in this

regard. The two colleges have a well-developed Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) that was used by teachers and students. Both staff and students had email accounts, and Wi-Fi was also available to facilitate students' learning in the college environment. Commenting on the IT facilities in College 2, Masood, (Senior Lecturer, IT, male) had this to say:

> We do have all the required software […], and every year there is a departmental budget and we are asked to indicate our new software needs for teaching […] all the things we use in teaching are of high standard compared with the tools and technologies used internationally.

Muller (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 1) also said; "you will find all the latest infrastructure […]. Computers […] high-end servers […] a lab […] for hardware installations […] forensic labs […] the best infrastructure and resources".

A summary of the participants' comments shows how both colleges appear to have invested heavily in IT facilities; to facilitate the provision of TNE programmes. For example, in College 2, staff enrolled on the Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning benefited from video-conferences with their tutors at the partner university in the UK. They were also able to communicate and clarify any questions with their partners.

This section has presented the data on the main and sub-themes relating to academic support services. The next part will deal with the data associated with quality culture in the implementation of TNE in the Omani context.

6.4.4. Quality Culture

I asked participants to comment on the college's commitment to the development of a quality culture. This question was not intended to generate any response focused on quality assurance procedures in the colleges but to get some evidence from the participants regarding how the college valued the provision of high-quality education and student experience. Forty-one percent of the academic staff in both institutions felt that the colleges were committed to fostering a quality culture. For instance, they

stated that the colleges provided adequate teaching and learning resources, clear policies and guidelines on teaching and related learning activities, and IT services. The staff views were captured by Julia, (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1) when she said:

> The college has always supported the quality aspect. They provide whatever we need for the teaching and learning process, and they take staff recommendations and suggestions into consideration, so they keep these quality standards.

Similarly, Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, Programme Coordinator, female, College 2) stated that "although I do agree that the private institution responds to the business side which is need for growth, they are also looking at the other side – quality".

Despite having quality assurance units within the two colleges, 59% of the lecturers were critical about the role of these units and believed it was not efficient, "the existing quality control is not functioning properly. It perhaps exists only on paper […] there are some academic staff who are not adhering to the expected standards" (Mohan, Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2). Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, female) also from College 2, stated that:

> More emphasis is laid on the formal […]. For example, the college organises many extra curriculum activities for the staff and the students […] but students complain that they are unable to attend classes and therefore cannot prepare for the exams because of the activities.

Those who had doubts about quality culture addressed some weaknesses in the colleges. According to them, the criterion of recruiting students was considered the main reason for lowering of academic standards. Some saw the heavy workloads as compromising teaching quality. Others felt the lack of strong links with industry to check the relevance of curricula as another weakness. Others also mentioned the weak relationship between partner Universities concerning oversight responsibilities as a negative impact on the quality of education.

I am sure if some people from the partner university come here and join us in the classes and they see the assessments - not the ones that we give them - they will withdraw this partnership with our college. (Sonia, Lecturer, IT, female, College 2)

There was a feeling that a more comprehensive consultation with alumni and employers would help inform the curriculum design. Here are examples of what the participants who expressed the negative views said:

Now we have many students going to business stream […]. I think the college should have […] [a] tracer study or interview the leaders of workplace where our students they work to make sure we produce good graduates (Alia, Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1).

Suppose [the graduates] go to the right workplace, how can we make sure we did an excellent job for them? Are their skills or abilities meeting the requirements of the employers? If you do not follow your students, then your reputation is likely to be affected on the labour market (Roman, Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2).

There was a feeling that pressure was put on academic staff by the college to work beyond contractually designated work hours which affected the quality of teaching as they were unable to find time for continued learning to ensure an up-to-date knowledge base. Here are examples of responses from participants who held those critical views:

As a teacher, we are handling the generation of knowledge. We are not like factory workers. We need more freedom and time to prepare for our teaching sessions or engage in any meaningful research activities. It does not help to make us work extra hours. (Amina, Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of quality assurance, female, College 1).

Regarding our workload, there is a lot of pressure. We need to work beyond our stipulated time per day. Working from morning to evening is very cumbersome. We need time to prepare ourselves, to update our knowledge. Effective teaching requires continuous engagement with learning. I should be

able to demonstrate knowledge and to answer all my students' questions. Failure to do so will be humiliating for me as students might say 'our teacher is incompetent'. (Masood, Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2).

The data show that 59% of the academic staff were unhappy with the colleges' laissez-faire approach to the development of a quality culture, citing that quality statements were only on paper and not in practice: "I strongly believe that as a college we still don't have a quality culture. Things are said in theory, yet, in practice there appears to be a gap" (Alia, Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1).

In general, I was able to establish that the academic staff who were not satisfied with the colleges' commitment to developing a quality culture thought the top management was more interested in making a profit rather than ensuring sound academic standards. For instance, Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 2) stated that, "honestly, there is no progress in the academic field. In theory, the college's main goal is the students, but in practice, money is more important".

In the same vein, Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) posited that:

> Sometimes there is some interference from the top management forcing us to be lenient with students. I think there is a difference between being student-centric and being lenient; we cannot compromise the quality of the academic programme and the integrity of the academic process because we want to retain the students.

On the other hand, the academic staff who were satisfied with the quality culture felt that management was striving to strike a right balance between profit-making and achievement of reasonable academic standards. Kerry (Senior lecturer, IT, female, College 2) expressed this as follows: "the top management is trying their best not to compromise the quality of learning [...] they are taking care about the staff and students to maintain the quality". The same view was further buttressed by Malika

(Head of Department, Business Management, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) who stated that:

> I can tell that the governing bodies coming from abroad and our department, the people who are concerned, they are on their toes to keep it to that level; up to the international standards. […] a lot of audits are carried out […] external examiners come from partner Universities […] they check everything including question papers and students' work.

The determination shown by the management to strike a balance between business objectives and the achievement of academic standards as expected by the partner university is visible, as commented by the lectures.

Regarding the colleges' commitment to the provision of high-quality education and student experience, my study generated mixed views from the lecturers. There was a different picture regarding the number of positive and negative perceptions in the two colleges. Academic staff In College 1 were generally positive about the development of a quality culture while in College 2, they were negative when discussing the quality culture related questions. Those with positive views talked about efforts their college towards ensuring the development of a quality culture. Some cited efforts like the provision of policies and procedures by top management. It emerged that, although primarily private institutions are profit-making organisations, a right balance was being achieved in the colleges to ensure that teaching resources, the necessary facilities, such as IT services and library, classrooms and other facilities for student extracurricular activities, are available.

On the other hand, those who expressed negative sentiments talked about the massive workloads for staff, lack of strong links between the college and industry to inform curriculum design. They also mentioned limited interaction with alumni, recruitment of students with poor academic results, and a lack of involvement of external partners in the delivery of the curriculum. The participants saw these as indicators of a lack of the colleges' commitment to the development of a quality culture. There was a feeling among academic staff in both institutions was that there was more concerned with profit than the delivery of excellent quality education. There was a

178

confirmation that the colleges had developed clear guidelines or policies and procedure. However, the quality statements were said to exist on paper only and not in practice. Although my study did not investigate these issues in detail, they, however, provide valuable insights into the situation in the colleges which are worthy of further exploration.

Having presented the analysis related to the themes identified in relation to the actual implementation of TNE in the colleges studied, the main purpose of the next section is to offer the perspectives of academic staff in relation to the factors affecting the implementation of TNE in Oman.

6.5. Factors Influencing the Implementation of TNE in Oman

The study sought to establish the factors affecting the implementation of the TNE programmes in the selected HEIs. In this regard, participants were asked to articulate the elements they feel influence their work on the programmes. The factors are highlighted in the following themes:

- Leadership in the Local Colleges.
- The Role of the MOHE in Oman.
- The Nature of Partnership between Local and Foreign HEIs.
- Basic Education and Type of Student Enrolled.
- Curriculum Relevance.
- Student Performance.
- Economic Factors.
- Dealing with Multiple Stakeholders.

6.5.1. Leadership in the Local Colleges

The two private colleges had defined strategic plans with mission statements concerning commitment to developing well-rounded graduates who would contribute to the development of the society in which they live and work. Top management was said to be committed to the provision of high-quality education which meets the needs of the local communities. However, during the interviews, it emerged that the

leaders in the colleges were perceived as not ensuring the achievement of the specified goals in their strategic plans. There was a feeling that the colleges were using a business model focused on profit-making rather than creating a quality culture helpful in meeting the needs of learners and the society. Some participants also expressed some form of ill-treatment at the hands of the senior management. Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) stated that:

> There are so many complaints going on. I have been to my boss about two or three times to express my dissatisfaction and sadness about the treatment of some staff in the department. Many teachers have made allegations, but we do not see any change at all […] I am not convinced about our leadership's commitment to the quality culture.

Other staff felt that the top management was not sensitive to the welfare of academic staff, citing that they had massive workloads and were compelled to spend all their working hours at the college even when they had teaching responsibilities. Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female College 2) had this to say:

> There is a semester break and we are expected to work from 7:45 am to 4.00 pm, like administration staff […]. We do not need to come from 7.45am to 4.00pm. We can arrive at 8.30am and leave around 4.30pm and still cover the required hours, and this is the kind of work environment we want. As professionals, we need to see that our effort is being recognised and appreciated and if you do that, then people will keep giving more and more.

Similarly, Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) commented that:

> In this college, I work more than the administrators. When the academic semester is over, we start marking the papers and continue working up to nine hours per day. So, you feel you are working as a labourer, not as an academic person.

There was a feeling among some lecturers that a business model was in place rather than a higher education working environment which affected the morale of academic staff. This understanding had a bearing on the quality of teaching and learning on the

programmes, as highlighted by Malika (Head of Department, Business Management, Quality Assurance Coordinator, College 1) when she said:

> When a person is overloaded […] this is a significant risk for quality [...] you need to learn; you need to attend conferences, you need to publish […] how is it possible when we are having 19 hours of teaching? […] if the quality of teaching goes down then definitely the quality of learning will also go down, there is a close relationship between them.

One other issue that emerged from my study was the lack of opportunities for staff to discuss their concerns with management. For instance, when new policies were introduced in one college, there were no opportunities for staff to discuss them with management in a friendly environment. A teacher from College 2 said, "If I am not happy with certain new rules, it is difficult to give my views as no open forum exists where I can discuss issues with management. There is no room for discussion or questioning" (Morgan, Senior Lecturer, IT, female). As stated by Morgan, it can be frustrating for staff if they cannot find opportunities to give their views on issues that relate to their work. Academic staff pointed out to a discrepancy between communication policies and their application. The staff log in and log out policy is an example of the implementation of a new policy without the consent of staff in one of the colleges. The teachers felt it was not appropriate for them, but they said no one listened to them.

> Management sometimes comes up with policies without an understanding of the implication on the academic […] the login policy is too strict and does not suit the nature of our work as academics. We work at home […], but if you come a few minutes late, you are penalised. I think admin people should understand our work as academics. (Masood, Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2).

The example by Masood clarifies the conflicts that exist between management and staff when there is no right communication practice. The management of the private HEIs appears to be more interested in satisfying students, and paying little or no attention to the teachers' voice, as stated by Muller (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 1): "the management always listens to the students because they are like

their customers. However, if students fail, the blame is laid on the teachers' shoulders".

However, the study also established that the management in the two colleges was also viewed positively in some instances by the academic staff. For example, the provision of resources to facilitate teaching, learning and assessment activities was appreciated by staff from both colleges. Suad (Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) said:

> At least we have materials to support all teaching, learning and assessment activities provided by the college. Our leader is managing to equip the colleges with up to date technology. The quality of students who enrolled here is the challenge. We need to deal with them compassionately and at the same time keep a balance between education standards and type of students we get.

Similarly, Rose, (Senior Lecturer, English Language, female, College 2) stated that:

> Our management try to ensure that the core business, that is, teaching and learning activities go on smoothly. I think any fault on providing quality of education has nothing to do with our dean because of his limited authority. He must adhere to the policies of the college's board of trustees, MOHE, and the affiliated university.

Teachers in my study identified leadership or what they referred to as the 'top management' in their colleges as a crucial factor in the effective implementation of TNE programmes. They had a clear understanding of what top management needs to do to facilitate the implementation of the TNE programmes. However, there was a feeling that some of the problems associated with the implementation of TNE resulted from ineffective leadership. For instance, they reiterated the issue of massive workloads, lack of sensitivity to the welfare of teachers, recruitment of students with poor results, compromising quality standards in a bid to accommodate more students, and a lack of time for teaching staff to engage in personal, and professional development activities. The teachers felt that top management should address all the above issues to promote effective implementation of the TNE programmes.

6.5.2. The Role of the MOHE in Oman

The Higher Education sector in Oman is relatively young compared to other countries. The development started in the mid-1980s with the establishment of a limited number of public colleges. The first public university opened in 1986 and private colleges in the mid-1990s. The government asked the private sector to invest in HE to help meet the demand for HE from the increasing number of high school graduates. Each college was then asked to work in collaboration with a reputable foreign university to ensure that a high-quality HE was provided in the country. The MOHE provided the guidelines (policies and regulations) for these partnerships and has the responsibility to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness.

During the interviews, participants mentioned that the MOHE was not doing enough monitoring of the partnerships between local HEIs and their foreign partners. The MOHE is expected to monitor the scope of the collaboration between each local institution and their external partners. However, it appeared this was not the case as the agreement between partnerships was not always fully implemented. For example, Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1) stated that:

> I feel the MOHE could be more involved in regulating these partnerships regarding specific criteria. For example, if you are a partner university you must provide more support to your partner […] there must be a give and take and it should be there.

There were concerns that the MOHE was not concerned about the working conditions of staff. During visits to the colleges, the MOHE was more focused on the analysis of documents and prioritised meetings with management, excluding the academic staff from this process. Some lecturers felt that issues associated with their working conditions were not appropriately addressed. These included the number of working hours and promotion, as indicated by Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2):

> The MOHE has a role […] regarding [regulating] the teaching load […] quality of the faculty […] and […] programmes, the quality of the academic staff, the balance of numbers of staff from different nationalities. […] If these

are done correctly, with the system in place, then there is bound to be a gradual improvement in the entire process.

The same view was echoed by Mohammed (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) who stated that:

> I think the MOHE can do more by supervising these TNE programmes. They can monitor who is teaching and what kind of support is being given by the partner university including the appointments of senior positions such as HODs, etc.

The academic staff I interviewed showed an understanding of the MOHE guidelines of the partnerships between local private colleges and foreign universities. One of the observations made was that the MOHE expects the colleges to employ staff from diverse backgrounds, that is, to have a balance of different nationalities. Some of the academic staff interviewed expressed the view that having people with diverse academic qualifications and ethnic backgrounds would enhance the educational environment. They also said the differences could help with decision making on academic issues and staff welfare. For example, Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) argued that:

> Having a variety of nationalities among the academic staff is very important. [...] When you bring people from outside the country, a kind of integration will come, a sort of fertilisation of ideas which will create a lovely environment for research and innovation. So, having only one ethnic background […] dominating the academic climate […] is not going to be good. The Ministry of HE needs to keep an eye on that.

The overall feeling among academic staff was that the MOHE should focus on monitoring the academic activities of teaching and learning and working conditions. One other primary concern was the issue of promotions. Most of the staff stated that there were no precise promotion structures in the colleges and the MOHE should help them to receive recognition and support from management. This view was shared by many including Zana (Head of Department, Mathematics, female, College 2) who said: "I think the MOHE can help the colleges by providing clear guidelines

on the appointment of staff to various positions and how staff can move from one level to the other".

The data shows that the MOHE constitutes one of the key players in the implementation of TNE. Apart from being responsible for planning and approving the establishment of higher educational institutions, academic staff felt the MOHE should do more regarding supervising the implementation of the TNE programmes to ensure that the local and external institutions adhere to the partnership agreement details. However, the study revealed that the MOHE was not doing enough regarding monitoring and evaluation of TNE programmes. Participants also mentioned poor working conditions as another key problem.

6.5.3. The Nature of Partnership between the Local and Foreign HEIs

Although the two colleges had affiliations with credible institutions in the UK, there was a feeling that the support given to the local college by the external universities was minimal. In other words, the scope of the partnerships appeared to be limited. Participants said they expected the external partner to provide more services to the local institution. As it stands, the foreign partners are officially responsible for validating courses, moderating examinations and awarding degrees.

Some of the academic staff mentioned an excellent partnership and substantial contact with their counterparts in the partner university. However, they expected a closer relationship with the partner university on a broader range of academic issues including staff working conditions as Iva (Head of Department, Civil Engineering, female, College 2) said:

> Every semester, the team from the partner university come here, and they tell us what they expect us to do and how we can do it. We get in touch through online context or email and they come here for 2 or 3 days. But if they want to play a crucial role as a reputable university, they must provide more support for supporting quality culture and dealing with academic staff issues and working environment.

It seemed that the relationship between College 1 and its partner university was less robust, so the staff talked about their expectations for a stronger partnership and recommended the nomination of dedicated officers at the partner university.

> Sometimes we face the challenges of not having enough resources. So, if a partner university has more, then we can share them. We need to be in contact − contact me, email me, they should have dedicated officers for partner Universities so that this liaison is faster, and more support should be given and if that happens it would be better. They should have staff members who can visit for six months and see how we implement their programmes, the facilities we have, and so that they learn about unfamiliar cultures, so I would like to see an exchange programme between us This is what is missing here, it happens usually in international partnerships (Tahir, Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College1).

In College 1, no exchange programmes were in place for either academic staff or students. Staff in the college, however, felt it was necessary to visit the external universities to learn and to benchmark their practices. They also felt experienced academics from the partner university could visit and share first hand experiences with the domestic team. Tuba (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, College 1) said: "We don't have exchange programmes. What does a partner university mean? I think the partner university is also meant to share their good practices. We should have exchange programmes for academic instructors and students". Masood (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) reinforced this view by stating that:

> the partner university should help us understand their system through staff exchange programmes or by sending their staff to teach or conduct staff development workshops in our college. The MOHE should encourage this kind of cross-border activities.

In addition, the external university was expected to validate monitor and evaluate how the programmes and lecturers felt this process could add value to the implementation of the TNE programmes. Feedback and regular interactions between staff from both institutions would enable collaborations between the two. This partnership was likely to impact positively on the designing and implementation of the programmes. Naila (Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) thought "interactions

186

between staff from local and the external institutions would facilitate benchmarking of practice in the courses we offer which will improve the quality of education". Similarly, Malika (Head of Department, Business Management, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) added that:

> Partner Universities should work closely with us […] the quality of partnership can only improve if we have frequent visits […]. This will help our partners understand what students need so that they can reflect on how to enhance student learning when they go back to their country.

There was a strong feeling that students' needs in Oman were different from those in the partner institutions; hence, closer ongoing collaboration was required. Academic staff were calling for clarity of expectations from both sides which can be made possible by having meetings and discussions more frequently than is currently the case. There were occasions where the external partners promoted changes in policies and procedures which were not realistically possible in the Omani context. Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2) added that:

> Unless you see what is happening in the schools and the classrooms, you cannot develop a full understanding of the real situation to make better judgments of how to support Omani students. Therefore, the partner university need to listen to our academic staff to have a better understanding of the sociocultural context of the country.

The data showed that the agreements between the local colleges and external universities were limited in their scope, focusing mainly on course validation, moderation of examinations and awarding of degrees. academic staff, however, wanted more; for instance, they wanted regular exchange programmes for staff and students to ensure the sharing of good practice to improve the quality of programme implementation. There was a feeling that the external partners should have a crucial role in providing the development of a quality culture in the implementation of the academic programmes through staff development opportunities, staff and student exchange and monitoring and evaluation of courses.

6.5.4. Basic Education and Type of Students Enrolled

One of the issues that emerged from the study was how the quality of students enrolled in the TNE programmes was affecting the implementation of the programmes. Most of the student's complete primary education without a reasonable level of English language skills and knowledge on the independent study skills needed to undertake undergraduate degree studies. The study shows that despite graduating from the Foundation Programme, most students were weak in English language proficiency.

Participants in my study traced the problem of appropriate study skills among students back to basic education. For example, Masood (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) stated that:

> We cannot isolate higher education from the general system of education in the Sultanate. I think that the enrolments in higher education institutions need to be looked at carefully. The level of the students coming to private colleges and universities is very poor, and therefore colleges are offering the foundation programmes to solve the issue.

In the same vein, Suad (Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) stated: "I think our students are not well prepared at the basic education level. The problem is that students study in Arabic so changing to English is likely to make learning very difficult".

As indicated earlier, many students had difficulty adapting to the new teaching and learning approach because of their primary education, which most academic staff described as being ineffective. Academic staff who were trying to employ a teaching and learning philosophy which is learner-centred, find it challenging to satisfy students' expectations. Furthermore, many students struggle with their education which affects the quality of results produced in each programme. Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1) describes this as follows:

> You need to make things easier for the students and explain the concept in simple terms so that they can understand […] writing on the board […] gives

a connection with the students rather than showing the slides and explaining. When I'm writing on the board, the students connect with it better, and I believe they are learning something.

Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2) also said:

From my personal experience in this country, language is a barrier. So, unless they are competent in English, we cannot expect much from the educational process, because learning will be minimal.

Malika shared similar views (Head of Department, Business Management, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1):

When you come from a foreign university, and you see the standard of the students in the education system over here, we see a huge gap, so we need to come down to the level of the students to ensure they understand the lectures. It is one of the difficulties we face - how to come down to the level of students.

It emerged from my study that private higher education colleges tend to register students with lower results compared to those who enter public higher institutions. However, this is a common trend in Oman. One of the reasons is that, after basic education, students with higher grades choose to either enrol in public institutions or study abroad. Private colleges also have a relaxed approach in entry requirements making it possible for students with low grades to register on degree programmes. This has implications for the quality of programme implementation as students struggled to cope with the demands of international requirements. The result is that students face challenges with the use of English which is the medium of instruction and some find it hard not cope with their studies.

6.5.5. Curriculum Relevance to Local Contexts

Participants in the study mentioned the relevance of the curricula to local employment and sociocultural contexts as an essential factor for the implementation of the TNE programmes. There was unanimous agreement on the need for both the

local and foreign university to design the courses. There were a few concerns on the issue. For instance, Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) stated that:

> The curricula have examples that are detached from the students' daily lives making it difficult for them to understand even simple basic concepts: I don't believe internationalisation is necessarily a good thing when especially when it is taken blindly or on the face value. I feel it needs to be customised. 'Glocal' not Global, that is, by being 'Glocal', you are Global and at the same time local".

The other problem highlighted had to do with textbooks. Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) talked about books used in the Humanities programmes: "Academia is also about the place where the curriculum is taught. For instance, the guidelines could be okay for a country, but sometimes there are many twists and turns, and so there is the need for customisation". Undoubtedly, this is an area which demands attention from the responsible authorities.

One other issue that was raised by academic staff was that the teaching and learning methods used in the TNE programmes which did not suit the background of the students. As discussed earlier, the students on the courses came from an environment where they depended heavily on teachers, yet, they were expected to be using active learning methods. This presented severe challenges to some students as pointed out by Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1):

> They (students) always expect support which will make them lose the opportunity to learn independently. We should not give everything to them because they will not benefit from the experience. […] students should be made independent learners […] autonomous learners. But in fact, it is not a straightforward approach.

The emphasis here was how to help students to develop independent learning. Tahir (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) provided further clarification on the challenges faced by teachers in adapting to the local student style of learning:

The way of teaching has something to do with the context. But it does not work like that here because students expect the teacher to teach. It means the teacher has to write notes to fill two boards or three boards. Foreign teachers especially those from western countries, you know, fail miserably in this because they do not understand the nature of Omani students.

The teachers indicated that the relevance of curricula was taken seriously and in some cases when gaps were identified proposals were made to change or improve the curricula. However, the process to affect any changes to the existing curricula was considered to be too bureaucratic, involving the college authorities, the MOHE in Oman and the partner university. The complexity of the process was described by Jones (senior lecturer, Mathematic, programme coordinator, male, college 2): "There is no directive from the college to review the module. It is a long process to get a final approval. For example, once the programme is redesigned it is sent to the partner university then the Ministry of Higher Education".

There is, therefore, a tendency for management in the local colleges to avoid making any proposed changes as they feared undergoing a laborious process. This was highlighted by Masood (Senior lecturer, IT, male, College 2) who stated that "making a change to the course or a module, is a laborious plan. As a result, other options are prioritised".

I was surprised to find out that there were concerns regarding the relevance of the curricula as I expected it to address sociocultural needs, especially the local content, given that the local colleges were responsible for designing the programmes. However, there appeared to be weaknesses in the curriculum design process: the colleges were not conducting comprehensive consultations with different stakeholders including people in the industry. This was highlighted by some of the academic staff I interviewed, with Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of Quality Assurance, female, College 1) stating that "in most cases we do not have enough time to make comprehensive consultations with captains of industry". Zana, (Head of Department, Mathematics, female, College 2) also supported this view in the following statement: "we make changes without adequate consultations with

different captains of industry. I think this explains why we are not meeting the needs of society".

One of the key factors that appeared to affect the implementation of the TNE programmes is staff's lack of cultural awareness and an understanding of the Omani students' culture. All the lecturers are expected have sufficient knowledge in their subject area. However, they felt that they had problems working with the Omani students whose culture was different from their own. In both colleges staff induction was provided including on-going professional development programmes. However, these programmes did not effectively address academic staff' understanding of the Omani culture. Most of the academic staff did not understand the students' background and how to support students to learn effectively. For instance, academic staff from western cultures expected students to be independent and critical thinkers. However, Omani students grow in a society where there is an emphasis on collaboration, helping each other and showing respect for elders which makes it difficult for them to critique the views of their teachers.

6.5.6. Student Performance

There was a significant disparity between marks scored by students in examinations and those achieved in coursework. Most of the academic staff highlighted that students scored very high marks in coursework and but had very low marks in exams. As a result, the overall degree classifications are usually; 2.2 and Third Class. There were fears that if students were not passing examinations but getting high marks in coursework, then they were not achieving the learning outcomes. This problem emerged in both colleges, as can be shown in the following quotation:

> When it comes to the final exams, they don't know how to answer the questions, and thus the students' achievements are low. In this case, students fail the final exams, but they try their best to get high marks in the coursework in order to pass the modules. (Masood, Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2).

The major challenge for the two colleges was to find effective ways of addressing students' deficient performance in examinations. As discussed earlier, there was a

consensus that most of the students lacked study skills, and hence, they were unable to prepare efficiently for examinations. As a coping strategy, students would strive to score high marks in coursework with the support from peers and teachers. According to Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1):

> The fact is, the examinations questions are written here, and the teachers know the question because they wrote them. Sometimes students find them easy to answer because the teachers tend to prepare students on how to respond to them. It would be helpful if students are not aware of what questions are likely to be in the examination like what is done elsewhere.

Issues including corrupt practices by few teachers may need further investigation (if the allegation is true) because this constitutes unethical practices and a breach of academic integrity. My study did not explore this in detail but only highlighted participant's concern.

Another issue relates to plagiarism which can be linked to the cultural differences between the two cultures as argued by some staff. For example, Jones, (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Programme Coordinator, male, College 2) said:

> Plagiarism is also a concern, but I see this is a college-wide concern […]. I think many faculty members believe it is a cultural thing because knowledge creation here is a communal ownership […] So I think there's a disconnection between the two cultures [Western and Omani].

However, other academic staff believed these issues (e.g., plagiarism and cheating in an exam) were linked with the academic capability of students on the programmes. The college enrolled students without following a defined selection criterion. In this sense, some academic staff had doubts about the effectiveness of the assessments process. Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) argued that:

> There are differences in assessment between students in this college and students in the university in my home country. Right now, I feel that I have a more challenging time preventing cheating in exams as compared to my old

193

university [...] I don't think it's a socio-cultural thing, instead, it's just a student problem.

This study established that one of the problems faced in the implementation of TNE programmes is the performance of students. This was particularly evident from examination results. There was a considerable disparity between the marks achieved by students in examinations and those received for coursework. Indeed, most students only managed to pass their course with weak marks. An obvious consequence of this was that students graduate with low degrees, making it difficult for them to find employment. Participants in this study suggested lack of study skills and enthusiasm to work hard or the inability to develop a solid understanding of taught concepts as probable causes.

6.5.7. Economic Factors

It also emerged from the study that the implementation of TNE programmes was affected by financial constraints. The private institutions did not receive any direct financial support from the government. They depended mainly on students' tuition fees. All private HEIs rely on tuition fees, putting pressure on the need to increase student numbers continually. In some cases, colleges lowered their entry requirements for students, compromising the quality of students enrolled in the TNE programmes. The number of students enrolled on the programmes had a direct or indirect impact on the quality of services provided by the college as stated by Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, Programme Coordinator, female, College 2):

> There is a direct relationship between the quality of education and the intake. If you want to raise the academic standard, then this means you need to be strict in applying the rules and regulations, which may be unattractive to the students.

Designing the budget is usually based on the number of students and staff. It also includes staff qualifications, that is, PhD degree, MA degree or simply BA degree holders. Some colleges employed few staff and asked them to do more work with implications for the quality of service delivery. This was mentioned by academic staff who felt that because of heavy workloads they were not able to discharge their

duties efficiently. For example, Venice, (Lecturer, Business Management, female, College 1) stated that:

> We have staff shortage […] we are put under pressure all the time […] We should not overload people because one day that person will not perform very well. We get some complaints from the students […]. This is a significant risk for us, for the quality.

One consequence of limited financial resources was that the colleges offer low salaries, making it difficult to attract highly qualified and experienced staff to teach in the college programmes. For instance, the number of academic staff with doctoral degrees was less than those with Master's or Bachelor's degrees. Iva (Head of Department, Civil Engineering, female) from College 2 said "the college is not in competition to recruit PhD holders, indeed top management in this college are recruiting staff with lower qualifications who can work for longer hours".

Financial constraints made it difficult to provide conditions that attracted academic staff and retain them according to participants. Each year, the colleges need to recruit fresh staff to replace those who leave immediately after completing their first two years' contract. It was difficult to achieve continuity on the programmes; hence, putting the quality of the programme implementation at risk. This view was reiterated by staff from both colleges. For example, Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of Quality Assurance, female, College 1) said, "staff turnover is high in this college. It feels that very few faculty members enjoy staying long in the job". Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female) from College 2, reported that, "the quality culture in the college and poor working conditions including low salaries make it difficult to achieve given the high staff turnover". This above suggests that each time a new member of staff joined the college they needed time to understand how the system worked to help them understand the culture and perform well. Failure to retain lecturers could have serious negative repercussions on the development of a quality culture.

It was also indicated that the management tended to prioritise investing in the infrastructural developments such as classrooms, libraries and administration offices.

There was frustration among some of the academic staff who felt that they were not being provided with good staff offices or other facilities like a staff club or lounge where they could relax and socialise with their colleagues. For example, Alia (senior lecturer, English language studies, quality assurance coordinator, female, College 1) stated that "for me as a teacher I should not be sharing an office with 6 people if I want to do proper consultations with my students and academic advising". In the same vein, Morgan (senior lecturer, IT, female, College 2) posited that "there is no privacy at all in our offices. So, it is impossible to do administrative work (marking assessments and exam papers) in these offices because there is no privacy and people come in so often".

Academic staff felt that having shared office affected their ability to give individual support to students during the administration hours including the adequate preparation for lessons. It is possible that some colleagues could be loud, and there may be many distractions which might make it difficult to concentrate or have confidential conversations. Julia (Senior Lecturer, IT, Programme Coordinator, female, College 1) stated that:

> There should be some facilities for staff, a staff common staff room is necessary. You need moments of respite, and there should be also for students, particularly a sports complex. It depends on how a company projects its earnings with its investments.

There was a strong feeling among some of the participants that the college was prioritising profit by attracting as many students as possible into the programmes without focusing on the quality of students enrolled. In college 2, Roman, (senior lecturer, IT, male) reflected on this by stating:

> Now we understand what the college wants. They want profit, and they want as many students as possible to pass the exams and graduate so that more students can be attracted and thus more money. So, they are looking for quantity (starting new programmes and how many students graduate). They are not looking for the quality of the graduates.

Other challenges that colleges faced included attracting international students to generate more income to fund their operations. Tahir, (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) highlighted this problem as follows: "given the changing economic climate, for sustainability, we have to start thinking about ways of recruiting international students." The same view was echoed by Sonia (Lecturer, IT, female College 2) who reported that:

> Our college is now trying to market itself in the region to ensure we get students from outside and boost our student numbers and income. With the current government cuts in Oman, scholarships for local students are likely to be reduced by the Ministry of Higher Education.

The data revealed that the participating private higher education colleges relied on tuition fees mainly from home students for funding all their operations which included the provision of learning materials, staff salaries, and infrastructural development. The limited financial resources constituted one of the factors affecting the implementation of TNE programmes in diverse ways. For instance, the colleges were unable to provide competitive working conditions to staff, hence, making it difficult to attract highly qualified staff to teach on the programmes.

6.5.8. Dealing with Multiple Stakeholders

The implementation of TNE programmes involves different stakeholders including the local colleges, the MOHE, the external university, Ministry of Manpower as well as heads of industry. Participants saw the massive number of stakeholders as creating potential problems for changes in curricular and quality assurance. For example, Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of Quality Assurance, female, College 1) stated that:

> We have our curriculum, learning objectives, assessments are designed based on specific curriculum from the UK, but when it comes to the accreditation, we follow the regulations that are stipulated by OAAA for the BA programmes in Oman. I'm sure that in the policy we cross-check with whatever learning objectives we have in the degree programmes.

197

For some academic staff, the different standards of OAAA, for quality assurance and accreditation standards had created problems for the Omani universities and colleges as emphasis. According to Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, quality assurance coordinator, female, College 2):

> OAAA's direct job is about standards. However, the problem is that they use different international benchmarks to create them and sometimes the parameters do not apply to our situation here. They go through a lot of pilot studies and training and redesigning and refining. They should look a little bit more in the context of the international benchmarks when deciding these standards. For example, when you want to implement Australian standards, mixed with American, Australian and UK standards here, it may not work because of that.

There was also a feeling among staff that working with different stakeholders created too much administrative work. For example, the process of reviewing modules was an excessively lengthy process because it involved consultation with various stakeholders including, a board of trustees, MOHE, and partner Universities. In this regard, Jones (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Programme Coordinator, male) from College 2 stated that:

> For example, currently I have a module that I'm teaching, and I feel that these maths modules are designed by non-mathematicians so now I have difficulty in teaching because of that. I have first to submit a proposal. If these suggestions get to be accepted by the college, then it has to be approved by the partner university and the MOHE eventually. So, I'm not sure because it takes a lot of time and effort and we all work under pressure.

It also appeared that staff recruitment took a long time due to the bureaucratic processes involved. Different organisations were required to ensure the final approval of a staff member coming from a foreign country causing delays in filling academic positions. This problem sometimes results in heavy workloads or/ and teachers teaching modules, and in some cases, the teachers had no appropriate knowledge of the subject. This was revealed in an observation made by Muller (Senior Lecturer, IT, male) from College 1 who indicated that "the teachers are under high stress, the teaching environment is stressful, people are appointed in the wrong positions". Clearly, dealing with different system actors was a source of additional

administrative work which caused academic staff to work under pressure with serious implications for teaching and learning.

In sum, there were multiple stakeholders involved in the implementation of the TNE programmes including the local colleges, external partner institutions, quality assurance agencies, government bodies and heads of industry. The number of stakeholders appeared to pose problems and challenges to the local colleges in the implementation of TNE programmes.

In this section, the factors affecting the implementation of TNE in Oman from the academic staff perspective have been presented. The aim of next section is to present measures of improving TNE in private Omani colleges.

6.6. Improving TNE in Private Omani Colleges

Participants shared views on how the implementation of the existing TNE programmes could be improved. They reported that there were many aspects of TNE programmes that were positive. However, the study found that there were areas in need of improvement. Participants expressed different ideas on how the implementation of the TNE programmes can be improved and the key areas they identified include:

- The role of the foreign partners;
- The role of the local Omani colleges;
- The role of the MOHE;
- Programme design.

6.6.1. The Role of the Foreign Partners

There was an overwhelming consensus among the participants that the external partner should play a more prominent role in the implementation of the TNE programmes. For instance, the academic staff felt that the partner should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching, learning and assessment practices. Instead

of just validating courses and having meetings with senior management. The staff also felt the need for the external partner to scrutinise who teaches what module and whether teachers had expert's knowledge of the allocated modules. Tuba, (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) captured the overall views of the academic staff:

> I think the university has a minimal role to play. There are external examiners, the assessment packs are sent there for moderation. They control everything, but in a way, it's our internal system that controls. It's the local management who controls. I mean the partner university should also look at the number of working hours and the suitability of individual teachers to teach on the allocated module.

This view was also echoed by Maria (Senior Lecturer, Engineering, Programme Coordinator, female) from College 2 as follows:

> I think that the partner university only interacts with the management level. Thus, the partners will always be getting all the good news [from management]. These partners should be involved more, go beyond what the administration is presenting to them, maybe talk to the academic staff and students, and engage more people to understand what is happening. They must not just rely on what the management give to them.

There were calls from lecturers in the study for more help from the external partner in the form of training opportunities, guest lectures and the sharing of good practice between the institutions. In line with this, Venice (Lecturer, Business Management, female, College 1) stated that:

> We have many best practices here in our college that we can share with the partner university and they can share with us too. […] they don't have much involvement other than the link tutors' visit in a semester or communication by email once or twice per semester […] this needs to improve.

Lecturers also suggested that the partner Universities should give teachers and students access to library materials, handouts and sharing of good practice in technology on teaching and learning contexts. In support of this view, Maha (Lecturer, English language studies, female college 1) highlighted that:

For a long time, we have been asking them to share their learning rooms on MOODLE. So, we wanted them to share different topics; What handouts do they have? How are do they do their assessments? […] However, we are not able to get all help we need.

One other key point that was raised was the need to pay attention to the local needs. Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2) stated that:

Frankly speaking, although the collaboration with the academic institution is right, it needs […] customisation because when these universities try to apply their rules and their regulations here, they usually do not pay attention to the local context or the local requirements.

The study established the need to rethink the role of the external universities working with the local colleges. It was observed that external universities could do more to improve their current role in the implementation of the TNE programmes. The academic staff in the local colleges expected the external partners to be involved in the decisions around allocation of modules to ensure objectivity.

6.6.2. The Role of the Local College

Most of the academic staff suggested that colleges should strive to improve the implementation of the TNE programmes. They wanted to see changes in module allocation with teachers' expertise and developing mechanisms to change the student attitude towards education. They also felt promoting a culture where students are inspired to learn independently was important as this could help them contribute to the society. The need for better working conditions, setting up research units and, having a right balance between making a profit and ensuring the quality of education was emphasised.

The staff maintained that colleges need to ensure lecturers to teach their subject areas. In this case, most of the teachers pointed out that it was difficult to be asked to teach a module where one did not have the necessary disciplinary or professional

training. Amina (senior lecturer, IT, director of quality assurance, female, college 1) stated that:

> My college should not be with forcing teachers to teach modules which are not relevant to their area of teaching for any reason. This should not be acceptable academically. This can make you miserable, and you just teach the basics, and then students are left to read and study by themselves. In this case, you do not have the intention of giving more support to the students in need of help because you are already under stress and not prepared to do anything else in addition to lesson delivery. I would suggest that the employment department needs to find a solution to this challenge by ensuring that there is enough staff to cover each module before the beginning of each semester.

The same view was reiterated by Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) who added that:

> The problem arises where there is no sufficient academic staff to teach some of the modules. Usually, management people just ask another teacher to handle a module in the same field, but these teachers are not experts in those modules. So basically, we give the students the broad knowledge of the courses and do not cover all module aims and objectives which undoubtedly affect the quality of education. Our partner university can play a role in solving this challenge by providing the college with suitable staff and the appropriate curriculum.

The other critical issue that was highlighted by the academic staff was the need for the local colleges to work hard and come up with mechanisms to change student attitude towards education. It was noted that most of the students were not working hard, but instead focusing on passing the examinations only. Roman (Senior Lecturer, IT, male College 2) captured the views of most of the academic staff when he explained that: "I get along very well with students […] however, motivation is an issue; they [top management] have to care about learning. The college has to promote an atmosphere of encouraging students' competition and rewards the best ones".

According to the academic staff, most students were not committed to their learning. The colleges' recorded problems of absenteeism with students opting to go on

holidays or staying at home for no reasons other than just absenting themselves from lessons. Students need to take their studies seriously and not just to want to receive a certificate. The academic staff talked about the need to develop a culture where students are inspired to learn for their future success in society. Another example from Muller (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 1) is that:

> The students are not very serious with their studies […], there is no motivation to achieve higher grades. So, the college should encourage competition among students and reward them with gifts or scholarship for ten top students to pursue their education.

It was also clear from the study that lecturers expected to see more research activities in their respective colleges. They were of the view that they needed more support and training in conducting research and how to integrate findings into their teaching. Calls for research–teaching nexus were best expressed by Mohammed (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College 1) who said, "I strongly think that any strong academic institution needs effective institutional research unit. The idea is clear; it has to integrate teaching and research to achieve outstanding innovation in teaching and learning". Furthermore, most of the academic staff wanted their colleges to create a conducive working environment to retain their staff. Participants said formulation of policies and provision of guidelines and procedures could help teachers work with confidence and have clarity of purpose. This was supported by a a number of academic staff including Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) who said:

> The college policy should promote a balanced working environment. We have seen that some of the qualified staff left because of the stressful working conditions. If your working environment is right, then you are more likely to retain excellent staff. Honestly, what the college is looking for is how to cover all the modules and at the same time find the right people.

Similarly, Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 2) posited that:

> I must say that Omani people are friendly. [...] so, I will request the top management and authorities here in the higher education sector to create a productive, warm environment without stress [...] so the college can involve academic staff in decision making, have a promotion system and introduce reward schemes.

As mentioned previously, most of the academic staff in my study felt that the foundation programme did not meet the needs of the students, that is, most students were graduating and enrolling on the undergraduate studies without developing adequate knowledge and skills in the English language as well as the development of study skills. The suggestions made include extending the foundation studies from one year to one and a half or two years. (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2) said:

> The problem is that we need to bring them up in a brief period to an acceptable level, that qualifies them to take classes and to do their academic work in this language [English]. Most of the institutions are taking between 2-3 semesters for teaching students the English language, and I think such time is not enough. They need about two years to reach the expecting level of English language to understanding and writing in English.

They also suggested a review of the foundation programme; that is, the content, the teaching methods, and the assessment methods. They believed the revised courses would help prepare undergraduates to be on the same level as the students at the partner university. The academic staff also talked about the setting up research units or efficient quality assurance units to make sure programmes were up-to-date and aligned with societal needs.

> The higher education institutions themselves need to create an active institutional research unit to make sure that the programmes are up to the desired standards. [...] Colleges should ensure that they have excellent quality programmes that compete favourably on the market through effective quality assurance mechanisms and processes (Jones, senior lecturer, Mathematics, programme coordinator, male, college 2).

The commercial side of education was also a sensitive area that the colleges need to tackle carefully. Sonia (Lecturer, IT, College 2) believes it is essential to strike a

right balance between making a profit and ensuring the quality of education when she said:

> There should be a mechanism to diversify the income generation to keep the balance between the quality of education system and the quality of students enrolled in the programmes. The college also could consider introducing services such as consultancy and research activities which would provide another source of money.

The above quotes show that participants wanted the colleges to focus on the quality by admitting better-qualified students rather than lowering standards for profit.

In summary, staff reflected on the need for the local college to put in place a systematic review of programmes and different support mechanisms for both lecturers and students to improve the implementation of TNE programmes. They indicated that a considerable number of students lacked the right attitude towards education, and were not self-directed as they should be. Participants also discussed recruitment, staff expertise, conducive working conditions and opportunities for research. Curriculum development was a vital issue that needed attention, and there were concerns about programme review to ensure that content, teaching methods, and assessments aligned with student needs and societal expectations. As a result, academic staff suggested that programme review should be prioritized by the local colleges, especially the foundation programme.

6.6.3. The Role of the MOHE

Most of the participants were of the view that the MOHE should play a significant role in ensuring the successful implementation of TNE programmes. Some academic staff felt that MOHE should monitor and evaluate the courses regularly to ensure the implementation of the agreed partnerships. Alia (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1) stated that "the Ministry of Higher Education should keep an eye on the evaluation and implementation of the academic programmes and insist on monitoring this aspect". Zana (Head of department, Mathematics, female, College 2) also said:

The Ministry of Higher Education should be more involved, for example, they should look at the working conditions including salaries and job promotions and the availability of resources for teaching and learning. This will ensure that all colleges are focusing on providing excellent quality education.

One other critical area that academic staff felt the MOHE should intervene and improve was their working conditions. They felt the MOHE should monitor the implementation of guidelines on working hours and staff promotion which were currently perceived as obscure. According to Mohan (Head of Department, Associate Professor, Management, male, College 2):

With the conditions of limited sources, HEIs are usually trying to survive and maximise the profit, and this cannot be achieved without affecting the quality of education […] The MOHE need to ensure the institutions are working up to the standard.

The issue of creating right working conditions was further buttressed by Amina (Senior Lecturer, IT, Director of Quality Assurance, female, College 1) who said "I think the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Higher Education should have a new policy on workloads. Teachers should be given less teaching hours if they want to improve the quality of teaching". Currently, private colleges are expected to recruit a right mix of people from different nationalities. However, it appears that this policy was not followed. Academic staff in the study suggested that the MOHE should find a way to achieve this. For instance, Morgan (Senior Lecturer, IT, female, College 2) stated the following:

There is one nationality dominating in Oman among the expatriate communities. This is because half of the population in Oman are expatriates who come mainly from the Sub-Indian continent and 80% of the teaching staff in the college is from this region. So, the government should monitor and ensure that other nationalities are well presented.

The Omani staff also suggested that the MOHE should ensure that a concerted effort is made to implement the Omanisation programme which could see more Omanis lecturers with some in senior management positions to ascertain the contextualisation

of the TNE programmes. This was well captured in a comment by Rolla (Senior Lecturer, Mathematics, Quality Assurance Coordinator, College 2) as follows:

> The best-qualified tutors left the college because of pressure from the senior management team. Every year about 50 Omanis resigns from our institution […] so, I think we should have more Omani teachers, then there we would not have what is happening now.

This view was expressed by most Omani academic staff who felt that the management in the colleges was not creating conducive working conditions for them. It is understandable that in Oman, the working conditions in government sectors are very different from the private ones. The government institutions tend to provide favourable or friendlier working conditions, and this would explain why Omanis tend to leave their jobs in the private sector.

Another major area that emerged from conversations with the staff was about steps to be taken by the MOHE to improve TNE and how to address problems with the structure and implementation of the basic education programme. According to Kerry (senior lecturer, IT, female, college 2) "the lack of study skills, I believe, comes from the fact that in basic education they are not developed to have study skills. […] They should be trained towards this in basic education rather than in higher education".
As a result, academic staff in my study suggested that an effort should be made for the MOHE to work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education to identify the gaps in the current systems and address them. One of the academic staff, Namir (Head of Department, IT, male, College 1) stated that "the strategic focus of the Ministry of Education should be to improve the system from the bottom. If we can do that then definitely the system is going to be improved". Tahir (Senior Lecturer, Business Management, college 1) supported the above by the following: "in Oman, I believe that schools should be reformed, every single school should be reformed as per the international standards […]. There is a need to fill the gap between school level and higher education level". It was interesting to note the clarity of academic staff regarding what they considered to be the fundamental cause of some of the problems they faced in their work with students at higher education level. This is an area that requires further scrutiny which is something beyond the scope of my study.

Furthermore, the participants also felt that for more sustainable TNE programmes, the MOHE should conduct analysis and provide guidelines on the possible relevant future programmes. For example, Masood (Senior Lecturer, IT, male, College 2) stated that:

> I think the MOHE could be a little bit more active in the sense of anticipating the work demand […] we need some guidelines about programmes in the country's development agenda. I think a level of awareness should be there in schools, career orientation should be there in schools, much stronger than it is right now.

Some of the participants thought that the MOHE should look at education as a public good rather than private to promote the provision of sustainable quality education. According to Malika (Head of Department, Business Management, Quality Assurance Coordinator, female, College 1):

> Education has become a big industry now. It has lost its older sanctity of humane approach or remarkable job. It's another job, another sector, money minting industry and people in the senior management levels are more than businesspeople because they must to reach a target, academically you cannot reach the pinnacle.

Tuba (Senior Lecturer, English Language studies, female, College 1) also said "my opinion about academia is that we shouldn't make it a business industry. Therefore, the colleges expected to receive more government financial support. However, the government doesn't give private colleges anything, so they have to work hard for it". So, they have to work hard for it".

While there was an appreciation of the role played by external partners in advancing higher education in Oman, there were feelings of resentment against this system. Some academic staff felt that there was a need for a change in policy.

> Personally, I feel that a country like Oman needs to establish its standards its own higher education framework. There should be a kind of gradual move away from the existing collaborative partnerships. I'm not saying that they should not make any collaboration with the foreign universities or foreign

institutions, but it must be at the minimal level. (Muller, senior lecturer, IT, male, College 1).

However, some argued that to respond faster to the social and market demands the colleges should have more freedom or autonomy from MOHE and partner university:

> We can do better if the institutions are given more freedom from the MOHE and partner Universities […] [then] changes can be made to the curricula to reflect the new requirements of the society. There should not be interference from the MOHE or by the partner Universities. In that sense, changes can be implemented quickly. Thereby, the quality of education can be enhanced (Naila, Lecturer, IT female, College 2).

> One good thing is that the Ministry of Higher Education does not interfere the academic aspects. They trust the colleges regarding delivery, so that gives some form of academic freedom to the colleges and staff and this help in raising the standards so […]. I think it's a good thing that's a happening (Tahir, Senior Lecturer, Business Management, male, College1).

To sum up, academic staff suggested that the MOHE should monitor and evaluate the implementation of the TNE programmes more comprehensively and systematically. Academic staff would like to see the MOHE involved in defining guidelines for conducive working conditions for staff including working hours, salaries, promotions and the availability of teaching and learning resources. This study reveals a lack of communication between HE and Basic Education in determining a consistent set of requirements to support and prepare students for HE. Some of the problems emerged from implementing the TNE programmes were traceable to perceived deficiencies in the Basic Education system. Academic staff considered that the MOHE should work in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to identify the gaps and intervene to address these concerns.

6.6.4. Programme Design

There was a feeling that the TNE programmes needed to undergo regular reviews to ensure that they were up to date with the developments in society. Participants said there should be more comprehensive consultations with a range of stakeholders in

the country. The local college should take a leading role in ensuring that relevant discussions were made to inform the designing of the curricula. Academic staff also talked about knowledge of culturally sensitive topics. For instance, Venice (lecturer, Business Management, female, college 1) stated that:

> Selection of content in modules should reflect our culture. For example, if the consumer behaviour module is being taught differently in other countries, we must to give some examples from our culture. We assess students by the cultural background and the kind of content we use in class. We need to be to ensure that it is acceptable in our context.

To ensure that colleges introduce relevant programmes, the MOHE is expected to conduct a needs analysis on a regular basis so that it can provide expert advice to colleges when designing new courses. It is essential for the current ones to address the societal needs within a global context. For example, the MOHE should forecast required job skills to encourage educational programme designers to embed the development of critical attributes that can help graduates to compete favourably in the job market.

6.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter addressed the findings of my research. I presented the responses of my participants about the relevant research questions. The data shows that building capacity is the main reason for adapting TNE programmes in Oman. Private colleges have to have an academic partnership with a credible foreign university to ensure high-quality degree programmes. Although the roles and scope of services of each partner were defined, some staff members were not happy with the nature of partnerships stating that the partner Universities were not supporting them effectively. They asked for a closer collaboration with staff and the expanding scope of services to develop a full picture of the dynamics involved in the implementation of the programme. Regarding programme design, although the academic teachers were happy with the programme's development, many challenges were facing the execution of TNE programmes. Based on the theoretical framework (see section), these problems and obstacles appeared in both institutional and national levels. The

former l includes curriculum relevant, staff-centred issues, student academic support services, and quality culture. The latter encompasses socioeconomic context, domestic policy, the role of the MOHE in Oman, basic education and type of student enrolled, and dealing with multiple stakeholders. The academic participants presented some suggestions of improvements for different stakeholders including, MOHE, foreign partner Universities, and local Omani colleges. The next chapter will discuss the findings in the light of relevant literature in the field of TNE.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented my research findings. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings drawn from the study in light of the literature. The discussion is guided by the study's conceptual framework, hence, an effort is made to articulate how different factors at institutional, national and international level affect TNE in Oman. A number of higher-order themes have been identified from the main findings and these include: transnational education: regulation vs autonomy; private HE: tension between academic standards and economic constraints; partnership between Omani private HEIs and UK universities; academic programmes: design and socio-cultural context; and academic voice: suggestions for improving TNE. The following paragraphs focus on the discussion of each one of these themes.

7.2. Transnational Education: Regulation vs Autonomy

The Omani government controls the private HEIs and TNE activities through the MOHE. The MOHE provides policy guidelines to be adhered to by the private colleges and universities in the establishment of partnerships. This was illustrated by Mohan, Head of Department from College 2, when he expressed that MOHE's role is to "regulate the faculty and programmes". Apart from providing the regulatory framework, the MOHE provides financial support directly and indirectly to private HEIs. The direct funding is provided in the initial stages of setting up the colleges with the government providing free plot of land and subsidies to help with the development of infrastructure in private colleges. The indirect financial support comes in the form of government scholarships aimed at helping students to enrol in the private colleges. The government views private HEIs not as profit making entities

but as partners helping to address the national need to develop skilled manpower. As a result, the government feels obliged to share the burden of providing TNE.

As mentioned in chapter 2, all private HEIs have to get approval from the government prior to admitting students on TNE programmes. This is to make sure the institutions have put in place the necessary infrastructure and facilities for the provision of TNE. In addition, the MOHE is responsible for approving the partner Universities and the programmes to be offered, including the human resources, that is, the academic staff who work in the local HEIs. Furthermore, the MOHE inspects these private HEIs regularly to make sure the relevant infrastructure is provided; for example, classrooms, libraries, laboratories and IT facilities. This is an example of how the state monitoring the private education sector in Oman. In my study, the participants were generally positive about the involvement of the MOHE, citing that the government control is necessary to ensure that quality education is provided to the students and educational processes are organized and run systematically. For example, Mohammed, a senior lecturer at College 1 stated that: "control by the government is justified for the supervision of these TNE programmes". Similarly, views of other teachers were captured by Naila, a lecturer from College 2, who felt that the government was important to ensure the programmes "reflected the new requirements of the society". The MOHE monitors the private HEIs to ensure that "the institutions are working up to the standard" (Mohan Head of Department, College 2) and funding and support strategies are consistent with the national strategic goals. Similarly, HEIs in China including, foreign universities, do not have full autonomy over key decisions such as hiring vice chancellor, curriculum, and academic freedom issues (Wilkins, 2016 b).

There is no doubt that internationalization and globalization elements have an increasing influence on HEIs which reshapes their patterns of governance as well as the higher education systems where they are located (der Wende, 2017; Knight, 2009; Teichler, 1999, 2004). The regulatory role of the government on TNE has been discussed widely in the literature (Stella, 2011; Altbach, 2010; Knight, 2006a; Woodhouse, 2006; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001). Many of the commentators recommend that receiving countries should establish quality assurance bodies or

accreditation agencies as well as putting in place appropriate regulation to protect local HE systems and students from low quality provision (McNamara, 2013; Hallak & Poisson, 2007; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2001). The call for the receiving countries to control TNE came as a result of some bad experiences of TNE provision in some countries where the quality of education provided by foreign partner Universities has been a concern. Most of the governments are aware of the need to put in place quality control mechanisms to ensure that the provision of TNE is in line with the countries' development agenda (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal, 2008). Apart from government intervention, in an effort to ensure quality, some international and regional organizations including OECD, UNESCO, and INQAHE have offered quality guidelines on TNE for both the sending and the host nations. Indeed, the government's influence on universities is not a new phenomenon. Historically, in the mid-19th Century, the government's influence was visible, especially regarding funding (Hénard & Mitterle, 2010). This interference is justified as governments are responsible for producing a regulatory context that assists institutions in meeting the social expectations (Santiago et al., 2008).

However, the influence of governments has affected the purpose and the nature of higher education and has also reduced the autonomy and self-regulation of institutions (Enders, De Boer, & Weyer, 2012; Jackson, 1997). There were concerns regarding the inefficiency of the bureaucratic processes involved which kept the "teachers under high stress" (Muller, Senior Lecturer, Colleges 1). Academic staff in the study made reference to the demanding task of keeping all records updated. Similar concerns were raised when independent quality assurance bodies were established in different countries. For example, in a study conducted in 2001 on the views of academic staff on the emergence of quality assurance agencies in the UK, many British academic staff complained of increased administrative work, bureaucracy, and intrusion (Henard, & Leprince-Ringuet (2008). Hence, it can be argued that HEIs need autonomy from considerable political or corporate influences in order to function optimally (Enders et al., 2012). Similarly, Christensen (2011) contends that some elements such as management, stronger environmental pressure and weaker academic-professional roles have decreased the real autonomy of HEIs. As a result, many governments in Europe stepped back from the traditional mode of

state control and have initiated more flexible frameworks of governance in their relationships with national universities (ibid). Furthermore, the growing complexity of systems of higher education has led governments to concede more autonomy to higher education providers (Knight, 2009; Enders, 2007). In addition, the independent quality assurance bodies have been perceived as a challenge to academic power and often perceived as a waste of financial and human resources (Tremblay, Lalancette, & Roseveare, 2012). In this regard, Hoecht (2006) concluded that:

> the accountability and transparency are important principles that academics should wholeheartedly embrace, but that the audit format adopted in the UK introduces a one-way accountability and provides ''rituals of verification'' instead of fostering trust, has high opportunity costs and may well be detrimental to innovative teaching and learning (p.541).

Nevertheless, Omani private colleges and universities have some degree of autonomy from the government. For instance, they have an institutional authority to identify and regulate academic activities such as programmes and degree offerings and curriculum design. In addition, they also deal with management matters including allocating budget and staff policy. Berdahl (1990) places these institutional autonomies into two categories namely procedural and substantive autonomy.

From the above it can be argued that the way in which government regulates and supervises TNE can lead to different challenges. Some of the problems associated with government control that emerged from my study are discussed below.

7.2.1. Recruitment of Staff

It emerged from this study that consulting different stakeholders created problems regarding the recruitment of new staff, in particular, the academic staff. As shown in Chapter Six, participants indicated that the process is too bureaucratic, resulting in the colleges having to wait for a long time before they can fill the vacant posts. The colleges have to deal with the MOHE, the Royal Police of Oman (ROP), Ministry of Manpower and the partner Universities when recruiting new staff. While they wait, the available staff sometimes have to manage heavy workloads and as shown by

participating teachers, in some cases "teachers are allocated modules they are not competent to teach" (Muller, Senior Lecturer, College 1) to ensure that all modules on the programmes are covered. Surely, such shortages of academic staff compromise the quality of teaching and learning of the TNE programmes. This view is consistent with Chapman and Pyvis's (2013) observation that "this problem is significant because stability in staff employment is recognized as vital for delivering quality teaching and learning" (p. 81). Relying on the approval of multiple stakeholders such as the MOHE and other government departments sometimes prolongs the recruitment process. For instance, colleges have to wait for a long time before they get to know the outcome of their applications if one of the departments delays the processing of applications. The follow up process can be an added administrative burden for the colleges which in some cases may result in financial losses. In a move to improve its service, the government of Oman has been working to provide online services to tackle this problem. Transformation to e-government is expected to facilitate business application processes by introducing advanced communication technology.

7.2.2. Management of Quality Assurance

The local private colleges work with different quality assurance agencies including Oman-based agencies such as the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) and agencies based in the sending countries such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in UK. The study findings revealed that one of the challenges for the colleges is dealing with multiple regulatory bodies. This was well articulated by Rolla from College 2 who said: "they (OAAA) use different international benchmarks to create standards and sometimes the parameters do not apply to our situation here". As stated by the participants in my study, occasionally the agencies have conflicting requirements which create problems for the local colleges. For instance, the Scottish degree awarding body requires less credits to achieve a Bachelor degree compared to Oman standards. As a result, the Omani college offering programmes from a Scottish University has to provide additional modules to ensure compatibility with the Omani requirements. This results an additional cost and differences in the lengths of programmes offered in the host and sending

216

institutions. In turn, this creates challenges for the local quality assurance agency; for example, OAAA struggled to ensure that all private colleges in Oman had similar standards despite working with partner Universities from different countries with different education systems (Ameen et al., 2007).

The MOHE in Oman uses monitoring as a tool to ensure that private institutions adhere to government policies and regulations. The work of the MOHE is complemented by OAAA, a national body responsible for monitoring the quality of higher education. OAAA has developed an evaluation criterion and procedures intended to ensure that the education offered by HEIs reaches an 'acceptable level' of quality (Trevor et al., 2013). Apart from these national bodies of monitoring and quality assurance, external monitoring from such bodies as QAA and other professional American accreditation bodies have played an important role in assuring quality of education provision in private HEIs in Oman. For instance, as part of its initiative of assuring provision of compatible higher education in the programmes provided outside UK, QAA has a panel visiting programmes for Omani private colleges that have a partnership with UK universities. Despite certain positive measures in place to assure quality, my study showed that there some concerns relating to the "bureaucracy, staff shortage, overload people financial constraints and increased administrative tasks in these processes (Venice, College 1). Danø and Stensaker (2009) partially agree that both national and international bodies protect students by ensuring some level of quality assurance, but note that such cooperation across borders brings with it the challenges of over complication to the process of improvement. Added to this is the opinion of many academic professionals who consider external auditing as causing segregation and fragmentation of academic work (Taylor, 2010a; Hoecht, 2006). This is one of the major concerns expressed by interviewees in this study; namely, that monitoring and accreditation unnecessarily add extra working hours to their already heavy workloads. This view is also supported by Coate (2009), who argues that national systems for reviewing quality in HEIs are usually ascribed a bureaucratic or managerial role, rather than an academic role. Arguably, this shows a lack of trust in academic autonomy.

Yet, it can be argued that in some national systems that are small but newly expanding, like Oman, a quality assurance mechanism can engender confidence in curricular offerings and lead to higher levels of conformity in areas such as employment and financial management and assumed equivalence between institutions (Taylor, 2009). This view is echoed by Hoecht (2006) who argues that:

> accountability and professional autonomy do not have to be polar opposites… It is high time for a proper debate between HE policy-makers and academics on how to achieve quality in higher education teaching and learning while maintaining trust and professional autonomy (p.556).

In my view, it is vitally important for the HEIs to be accountable and at the same time to have some degree of autonomy. This means that the government and other national quality assurance bodies should continue to monitor the quality of education provided in these institutions but allowing the colleges to determine what they want to achieve.

7.2.3. Changes to the Existing Academic Programmes

My study established that academic staff felt a considerable level of dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic process required to make changes to existing programmes. It emerged that the involvement of many players, including the external partners and the MOHE, in the implementation of TNE programmes generates delays in making changes to the curriculum. For example, to make simple changes, such as alterations to the assessment format, "it takes a lot of time and effort" (Jones, College 2) as this involves the partner institution and MOHE's approval. The MOHE provides guidelines and the template to be used for effecting changes to the curriculum and all this requires time to be completed. The MOHE imposes specific time frames for the submission of requests for change, often resulting in colleges having to wait before they can submit their requests. Frustration was also expressed at the seemingly undefined and vastly differing period of time after submission before receiving feedback from the MOHE. A faculty member considered this unnecessary and to be a constraint in the development of private HE to serve market demand. This is despite my own personal observations whilst working for the MOHE which have

shown me that a considerable number of decision makers in the MOHE believe this consultation process to be beneficial for both individuals and for the economy. This bureaucratic process prevents timely responses to the social and job market demands.

The delays in the processing of requests and the general bureaucratic nature involved when dealing with government agencies is typical of many developing or newly developed countries, including GCC states. This bureaucracy is evident in both the state system and within the universities themselves. The findings of this study resonate with observations made by Altbach (2013a) who established that bureaucracy is one of the main barriers to the creation of effective academic institutions in China and the Middle East. As further evidence of this problem, Kemp (2014) reported that the Indian higher education is also faced with similar challenges.

Arguably, streamlining the process would certainly be desirable in order to both speed up the process of change when change is necessary, and allowing academic staff to feel more capable in addressing more immediate concerns of duties directly related to teaching itself. Use of technology or the deployment of technological initiatives, such as the e-government initiative in Oman, can be instrumental in accelerating the process and hence, improve efficiency in the system. Besides that, there is need for HEIs to be allowed a degree of autonomy to ensure that minor changes to the curriculum can be managed at institutional level.

The next section focuses on the discussion of the second theme that emerged from my study.

7.3. Private HE: Tension between Academic Standards and Economic Constraints

The study revealed that private education institutions are working under financial pressure to provide education that is comparable with their partner Universities. This is due to private colleges relying mainly on student tuition fees for all operational costs: staff salaries, purchasing of learning materials and the construction of learning facilities. The study showed the implementation of TNE programmes is faced with a

number of financial constraints. Contracting staff from countries with relatively poor economies and without high-level qualifications and lowering entry requirements for students in order to increase enrolment numbers are only two examples of the way in which financial constraints affect the quality of teaching and learning in these institutions. Rolla from College 2 stated that, "honestly, there is no progress in the academic field. In theory, the college's main goal is the students, but in practice, money is more important". The existence of financial problems have been documented in literature, for instance, a decade ago, Wilkinson and Al-Hajri (2007) stated that private higher education in Oman had started to face financial constraints that were potentially threatening to their future. Similarly, a study conducted on private HEIs in Malaysia and Singapore that are affiliated with Australian universities found that private higher education providers lacked the necessary funds and support from their governments to operate as successfully as they might otherwise (Lim, 2010). This issue seems particularly serious with regards to branch campus models. According to Heffernan and Poole (2005), compared with sending countries student programmes, the financial returns from receiving countries programmes are less certain. The reasons they provide for this are that receiving countries programmes require significant initial investments, resulting in a period of non-profitability. This is compounded with the issue of student demand for the institution, which may be depleted within a few years. Currency fluctuations are also a serious consideration, as these can erode profits from student fees. Institutions in UAE have been shown to face these issues for similar reasons. According to Lane (2011a), international branch campuses in Dubai also rely solely on student tuition fees as a revenue source and, therefore, struggle to remain profitable.

This study reveals further tensions related to the Omani government's policies related to access and funding in the higher education system. Whilst an increase in the number of private higher education institutions in Oman has enabled the government to achieve its goal of providing higher education to the citizens, some problems have emerged. For example, private colleges cannot charge fees based on market changes since they are limited by the government policy. Although the government provides scholarships to students to study in the private colleges, they pay less money than what the colleges actually need to provide high quality

education. In this regards, McBurnie (2008) as well as Clarke et al. (2016) argue that quality assurance and equivalence are critical factors in the emerging transnational education arena as they often raise tensions between academic and commercial needs in transnational programme.

Private colleges in Oman do receive a certain level of government support and this could distinguish them from other private HEIs elsewhere. However, it emerged in my study that they actually "expected to receive more government financial support" (Tuba, College 1) to address all their problems and challenges. This is an unrealistic expectation given that in the main, they are private entities that should not be getting the same kind of financial support as the public institutions do. However, it is understandable that these private colleges are facing huge challenges, for instance, they have to accept a lower level of secondary school graduates, leading to their students requiring more time, support and effort to achieve a compatible standard to students of partner Universities. Logically, the private institutions should charge higher fees to ensure adequate support is provided to the students. The government is not allowing this to happen as they want to be seen to be fair to the students who have no other choice but to go to private colleges for their tertiary level studies.

As noted above, limited financial resources constitutes one of the factors affecting the implementation of TNE programmes in different ways. Some of the felt problems include: difficulties with the recruitment of qualified academic staff, lowering of admission standards, inadequate student support, increased administrative work, poor working conditions, and lack of a quality culture. Some of the problems emanating from the financial constraints faced by the participating private colleges are discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

7.3.1. Staff Recruitment and Staff Turnover

My study results showed that most of the teaching staff employed in the two colleges had a Master's degree qualification and very few had PhDs. This is consistent with the records in the MOHE which indicate that currently, PhD holders in private institutions constitute 36% of the total teaching staff (MOHE, 2016). More details

regarding the statistics of teaching staff in private colleges in Oman are provided in chapter 2.

There was a feeling that the colleges were failing to attract "highly qualified people …with good qualifications and … appropriate for this system" (Amina, College 1) that is, staff with PhDs were difficult to recruit due to the low salaries they offered and poor working conditions. Most of the academic staff indicated that they expected the colleges to hire more PhD staff than Master's degree holders. It appears that the salaries were not good enough, especially when taking into account the amount of work that academic staff were expected to do. The failure of the colleges to hire enough academic staff resulted in "poor working environment for the available staff who had to bear with heavy workloads" (Alia, College 1). This result is consistent with observations made by some authors including Issan (2016) and Ameen et al. (2009) who comment that a small proportion of the total revenues in colleges goes to the academic staff who are recruited with lower salaries. Surely, if most of the academic staff are being paid low salaries this can affect their motivation and commitment to work and uphold high standards in the implementation of TNE programmes.

The failure to recruit high quality academic staff in TNE has been discussed in a number of studies (for example, Altbach, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2012; Knight, 2014). Altbach et al. (2015) reports that one-third of academic staff in China have only a bachelor's degree and do not earn enough money to live a middle class lifestyle and also have heavy workloads. In the same vein, Johns Hopkins Medicine branch in Singapore was forced to terminate its operations in 2007 mainly due to issues related to its failure to recruit qualified senior faculty members (Witte, 2014). One of the causes of this failure to recruit qualified faculty is suggested by Robertson (2010) who contends that differences between the working conditions in the home and host countries usually deter qualified staff from wanting to move to the host country. For instance, the academic mobility evident within Australian Universities has enabled Chinese academics to live in an academic environment which is not possible in China. Wilkins et al. (2012) argue that most IBCs are somehow new and thus have not had enough time in order to obtain the quality of home campus. In the same vein,

a number of authors discuss the issue of heavy workloads as one of the negative factors influencing staff morale and the quality of delivery of academic programmes (Altbach et al., 2015: Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). In the context of transnational education, studies show that, although the expectation is that people working on the TNE programmes in the host country should have the same qualifications as those in the external partner institution, this is not always the case. For example, in a study conducted by Jamjoom (2012) in Saudi Arabia focusing on the delivery of programmes in private higher education it was indicated that academic staff in the branch campus had lower qualifications compared to the academic staff in the external partner university. Similarly, a study conducted in Malaysia also revealed that teaching staff in branch campuses had lower qualifications compared to their counterparts in the external university (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). Altbach and Pacheco (2013) argue that even when academic staff are allocated from the external University to teach at the branch or twinned campuses, they are not generally the research-active staff with the most prestigious status.

In addition, PhD holders are frustrated by the lack of research opportunities in colleges that tend to be teaching-oriented. In general, PhD holders are interested in developing their research profile rather than spending most of their time teaching. Here, the importance of funding to support the colleges' research agenda is imperative as "any strong academic institution needs an effective institutional research unit" (Mohammed, College 1). In a study on recruitment and retention of academic staff in higher education, Metcalf, Rolfe, Stevens, and Weale (2005) concluded that one way to tackle recruitment and retention difficulties is to ensure increased allocation of research time whilst reducing the administrative workload. Thus, the Omani government may need to review its policy so that colleges evolve to include research in their agenda as a way to attract highly qualified staff. Indeed, the standards for input, such as the minimum qualifications and commitment of the teaching staff employed by private higher education providers, has been suggested as one of the most important factors that quality assurance systems should place their focus (Knight, 2014: Lim, 2010).

It emerged clearly in my study that one of the factors influencing the recruitment of highly qualified staff is "lack of competitive salaries and the desire to make profit" (Mohan, College 2). Oman offers pay at the lower end of the scale in comparison to other Gulf countries. However, the problem of low salaries is not unique to Oman private HEIs. According to Wilkinson & Yussof, (2005, p.375) private colleges in Malaysia "may employ substantial numbers of junior and possibly less qualified teaching staff" in seeking to maximise profits. In a study conducted by Jamjoom (2012) in Saudi Arabia focusing on private HEIs, it was revealed the use of English language as the medium of instruction in private institutions in the neighbouring GCC states has increased the difficulty of recruiting faculty. She argues that the low level of remuneration in private institutions as compared to public is the main reason for this. In addition, she mentions that the majority of the faculty hold a Master's degree with only a few being PhD holders, and a few having only completed their Bachelor degrees. By regional comparison, academic salaries in other Gulf States such as UAE, or Qatar are significantly higher than in Oman. For example, Qatar Foundation provides attractive packages which include staff salaries, relocation support, housing and school allowances for children to facilitate the transition of academic staff to the campus in Qatar (Ibnouf, Dou & Knight, (2014). However, as a general characteristic, academic salaries in many developing countries are low in comparison with developed countries (Enders, 2007). As Altbach and Pacheco (2013) state, the difficulty of attracting highly qualified staff is not only unique to developing countries, it is a global problem affecting all educational institutions; however, institutions in developing countries face the problem more severely than developed countries due to more restricted economic conditions and the general lack of infrastructure.

The other significant problem haunting the colleges is high staff turnover. Most of the recruited staff tend to leave as soon as their first contract expires or even before finishing the contracts. This was highlighted by Amina from College 1 who stated that "very few faculty members enjoy staying long in the job" (Amina College 1). The colleges were finding it difficult to retain staff due to "the quality culture in the college and poor working conditions including low salaries given" (Morgan, College 2). The academic staff tend to look for greener pastures in neighbouring countries in

the region which in turn compromises the quality of higher education provision in local institutions. This finding echoes what is discussed by Isaan (2016) who argues that some private universities and colleges in Oman have faced high staff turnover because there are no clear salary scales and there is lack of transparency in the recruitment process. High staff turnover impacts negatively on the implementation of TNE programmes, for instance, lack of continuity in terms of the teaching staff on the programmes affects the quality of programme delivery.

7.3.2. Lowering Student Entry Requirements

My study confirmed that private higher education colleges tend to enrol students with lower results compared to those who enrol in public HEIs. This reverberated in all discourses held with teachers and their views were well articulated by Namir from College 1 who said: "Omani students and their parents usually look at private HEIs as the last choice". In Oman, after basic education, students with higher grades choose to either enrol in public institutions or study abroad. Private colleges tend to have relaxed entry requirements making it possible for students with low grades to enrol on degree programmes. This result is consistent with findings by a number of Omani researchers who posit that private higher education institutions are attracting low quality students (Issan, 2016; Chapman et al, 2007). One of the biggest challenges is that most of the students enrolled on the programmes come with very low grades in English. According to my study findings this "tendency to accept all students who wish to study in the college […] compromises the quality of education" (Naila, College 2). For instance, despite going through a foundation programme, students face challenges with the use of English Language as the medium of instruction and do not have well developed study skills to help them cope with their studies. Academic staff stated that they have to make adjustments in their teaching in order to operate at the level of the majority of their students which might mean compromising on the expected standards of the international degree programmes. According to Al-Najar (2016), there is a strong agreement among authors regarding the ineffectiveness of the basic education provision in terms of preparing pupils for HE or a career. She discusses some key weaknesses found in secondary education in Oman including weakness in English language skills, weaknesses in personal and

communication skills and weaknesses in the development of study skills. The private higher education institutions are playing a significant role in helping the government to achieve its goal of providing access to higher education to many students; however, the challenge is to uphold quality. Literature shows that student selection and admission is an essential aspect for quality control in the implementation of TNE programmes (Dobos, 2011).

The problem of enrolling students with low grades in higher education is not unique to Oman. Some Asian and other Middle Eastern countries, where the capacity of public HE has not been sufficient to cover the booming demand, the private HE sector is the place for those who do not get access to public one (Fang, 2012; Dobos, 2011; Hill et al., 2014). A study conducted in China and Malaysia showed that some students choose TNE programmes that are hosted by private HEIs as they cannot access other competitive domestic programmes (Fang & Wang, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2012). As Maria from College 2, insisted "there is a direct relationship between the quality of education and the intake". Surely, failure by local institutions to adhere to admission standards for the TNE programmes- which should be similar to the affiliated university- compromises the quality of programme delivery and also affects the relationship between the sending and receiving universities (Hill et al., 2014; Eldridge and Cranston, 2009; Dunworth, 2008). It appears that the compromise of entry requirements is also being experienced in branch campuses. For instance, Lane (2011b) argues that the American branch campuses in the Middle East receive many applicants who have not taken the appropriate examinations that are needed by universities and colleges; nor they have adequate language skills that could permit them to succeed in the course of study when they join the university. In the same vein, a study on the relationship between Malaysia and Australian universities shows that students are also recruited with low grades to maximize profits (Hill et al., 2014). Similarly, in a comparative case study conducted by Dunworth (2008), it was reported that there was tension between the number of enrolments and educational standards. It was observed that there was a tendency among the management in the hosting universities and colleges to recruit large numbers of students over strict adherence to partner Universities entry criteria (ibid).

Literature shows that student selection and admission standard is an important aspect for quality control in the implementation of TNE programmes (Dobos, 2011). It is argued that entry standards have to be similar to the affiliated universities in terms of prior academic achievement and language requirements because the different admission requirements can jeopardize the achievement of similar outcomes in sending and hosting institutions (Waterval et al., 2014; Castle & Kelly, 2004). Nevertheless, Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) raise the dilemma of higher education marketisation and profit orientation. On the one hand, HEIs must behave as for-profit organizations and "to accept all students who wish to study in the college" (Naila, College 2) in order to survive, prioritising revenue creation. On the other hand, as they are perceived traditionally as the public good and serving the society, they have to be a non-profit institution. This is precisely the dilemma which is faced by Omani private HEIs.

In an effort to resolve the problem of students enrolling on programmes with low quality results, Lane (2011a) suggests that entry levels can be solved by introducing an obligatory foundation year in order to bridge the gap between sending universities entry criteria and host country's secondary education. However, based on academic staff views, my study shows that one foundation or preparation year is not sufficient to cover both students' study skills and English language requirements for good progress on the programmes. Apart from rethinking the length of study for the foundation programme, it is also vitally important to review the basic education programme to ensure that it prepares students for higher education.

7.3.3. Poor Working Conditions

My study explored staff experiences and perceptions regarding working hours, timetabling, module allocation and the relationship between management and teaching staff on the TNE programmes. In general, the study found that academic staff from both colleges were not satisfied with their working conditions. For instance, it was felt that "there is a lot of pressure … we need to work beyond our stipulated time per day. Working from morning to evening is very cumbersome" (Masood, College 2). Teachers were teaching for more than 20 hours a week. On top

of that, academic staff were expected to engage in other activities including office hours to meet and discuss with students and to engage in research and community services. The academic staff felt stressed and expressed that in practice, teaching long hours left them with no time "to prepare for our teaching sessions or engage in any meaningful research activities" (Amina, College 1). It seems that long working hours is a global issue, with many academics around the world feeling that their working conditions have deteriorated as their working hours have increased (Currie & Vidovich, 2009). For example, all academic staff in a Malaysian branch campus expressed that workload was an issue because there were many administrative tasks that need to be done on top of the current heavy teaching duties (Dobos, 2011).

Other issues that emerged from the study include the feelings of unfair treatment by staff from underrepresented groups. This includes unfair practices in timetabling and module allocation as well as unequal opportunities for staff development and promotion into senior positions within the colleges. For instance, some academic staff felt that they were unfairly allocated to teach more evening sessions in a week compared to others. In the same vein, module allocation was biased, as some time the "department forced [staff] to teach modules that do not even fit in [their] profile" (Roman, College 2). Moreover, certain teachers were allocated new modules every semester. This was aggravated by the lack of clear policies on workload and module allocation in both colleges. As suggested by Knight (2014), greater attention must be given to conditions under which these faculty members are hired to deliver courses in the host institution setting. Hill et al. (2014) argue that top management would expect academic staff to be revenue-productive in connection with teaching as much as they could. However, academic staff would prefer fewer teaching hours in order to devote some of their time to undertaking research and updating teaching materials.

The problems bedevilling institutions of higher education in the non-OECD countries have also been discussed in literature and resonate with my findings. For instance, Currie and Vidovich (2009), assert that the working conditions in non-OECD countries are extremely insecure and require many academics to "moonlight" in other jobs. Furthermore, Shin (2015) found that job satisfaction is decreasing in several countries particularly those that have been through a strong managerial reformation

228

such as UK and Canada. It is clear that the poor working conditions have affected the academic staff in terms of providing quality education. The precarious nature of academic work and the declining working conditions often lead academics to consider changing jobs.

One of the key themes that emerged in my study is that the implementation of TNE is affected by the nature of partnership between Omani private HEIs and foreign universities. The following section discusses this theme in more detail.

7.4. Partnership between Omani Private HEIs and UK Universities

My study identified various issues regarding the partnerships between local private HE colleges in Oman and foreign universities and these will be discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs. The function and role of foreign partner institutions which include "approval of the programmes, moderation of all assessments and assuring quality of education provision" (Zana, College 2), has been reported in many countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and China (Ziguras & Pham, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2011; Dobos, 2011). The way that collaborative partnerships are being implemented in Oman is similar to other countries in the region. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the government has regulatory frameworks for private higher education and is responsible for approving collaborative partnerships between local and foreign institutions, and supports the sector financially through provision of grants and other operating incentives such as exemption from taxes, and assessing, evaluating, and controlling the quality of the sector (Jamjoom, 2012). A look at the situation in other countries shows that the partnerships are being managed according to international standards. For example, Waterval et al. (2014) identified the allocation of responsibilities between host and sending institutions in terms of TNE curriculum partnership: "(a) the host institution is largely responsible for the recruitment of (often local) students and staff, (b) while the home institution provides the educational program, and (c) is responsible for quality assurance". (p. 66).

It is important to note, however, that institutional responsibilities depend on the type of partnerships in place. For example, in my study the formal contract of partnership between the two local colleges and their foreign partners is considered to be a 'validation agreement'. In this case, the local Omani colleges "provide buildings, facilities, the entire infrastructure, and hiring of qualified staff to run the programmes" (Rolla College 2). The college is also meant to design and develop the programmes which are then approved by both the foreign partner university and the MOHE in Oman. Basically, both parties work towards enabling course designers to meet professional, and partner university requirements as well as the national framework. In the following section I discuss in more detail the sub-themes associated with the theme under consideration.

7.4.1. Nature of partnership between local and UK HEIs

According to my study findings the agreements between the local colleges and external universities were limited in their scope focusing particularly on course validation, awarding of degrees and moderation of examinations. Academic staff had a feeling that "the partner university should be more involved. It should get involved more in consultancy, training for staff and student exchanges…. (Morgan, College 2) on a regular basis to ensure that there is effective sharing of good practice to improve the quality of programme implementation. There was also a feeling that the foreign partners should have a key role in ensuring the development of a quality culture in the implementation of the academic programmes through provision of staff development opportunities, staff and student exchange programmes and monitoring and evaluation of the academic programmes. In the same vein, the academic staff questioned whether the local programmes provide a comparable student experience to that available at the sending university in UK and argued that the partner "must provide more support for supporting quality culture and dealing with academic staff issues and working environment" (Iva, College 2). Furthermore, providing staff from Omani HEIs with the opportunity to visit the university to observe and participate in teaching, assessment, programme management, student feedback sessions, and university administration practices was not part of the practice in the colleges. Moreover, most of the participants stated that most of the responsibilities in terms of

quality assurance of teaching and learning were not implemented properly. Therefore, the participants felt that "this kind of affiliation is just on paper and was drafted simply to satisfy official MOHE requirements" (Morgan College 2). They reiterated the need to have regular meetings between academic staff and students in the hosting institutions and staff from the sending universities to share their experience on programme implementation. This view is consistent with observations by Castle & Kelly (2004) who say that: "regular meetings with hosting partner's institutions are essential, where the partners review current programmes and implement improvements that they agree will maintain and advance the quality of design and delivery of programmes" (p.55). It is possible that the academic staff in local private colleges were not fully informed about the nature of the partnerships as this was a preserve of the senior management.

Lack of clarity on the role of the partnerships in terms of the development of quality programmes in Oman is highlighted by OAAA report on quality of private higher education (Roper et al., 2013). One of the key findings stated in the report indicate that while external partners play a pivotal role in the provision of quality education, their efforts need to be complemented at local level. In the report cited earlier, a number of partnerships were considered as ineffective because of the lack of clarity among stakeholders about the aim of the academic partnership agreement. Arguably, the quality of higher education provision can be seriously compromised in such situations. It is significantly important to ensure that the role of each partner is clearly defined as failure to do so can lead to a serious deterioration of TNE relationships. Previous studies have reported conflict and lack of clarity not only between the partner institutions but also between the management in home institutions and the academic staff. For instance, in a study on the partnership between Australian and Malaysian universities, Hill et al. (2014) found a lack of a common understanding of the meaning of partnership between management and academics. Arguably, these partnerships can deteriorate when members of staff at the home institutions do not endorse the significance of the affiliation agreement (Sidhu, 2010; Lane, 2011b; Shanahan & McParlane, 2005).

The other factor is the lack of communication between the faculty at local colleges and colleagues from external partner institutions. For instance, during visits from the UK partner university to local Omani private college, it was reported that feedback from the teaching staff was not elicited. The visits "tend to focus on meetings with senior management" and do not include meetings with the teachers (Muller, College 1). By depriving them of the chance to voice their opinions, many issues bedevilling teaching and learning were not communicated to the foreign partner, greatly reducing the chances of them being addressed by the institutions. It seems short-sighted and counter-intuitive for there to exist such a lack of communication between the academic staff at local colleges and colleagues from external partner institutions. Lack of communication and a lack of understanding of quality assurance processes were also experienced between Malaysia private colleges and affiliated Australian Universities. According to Lim (2008), two out of the three Programme Coordinators from Australian Universities were not able to articulate any details of the university's quality assurance policy and communication problems frequently occurred with academic staff.

The importance of building good relationship between the local and external institutions as an important factor of success for the TNE has been discussed in literature. Heffernan and Poole (2005) highlight the importance of these relationships citing that good relationships are a key factor for success: "it appears that high quality relationships lead directly and indirectly to higher quality academic programmes and support services" (p. 78). This view is also supported by Chapman and Pyvis (2013) who cited that sound communication, collaboration, and a positive rapport between the sending and receiving academics were critical means to overcome any challenges between institutions. Therefore, effective communication between the local and external partner providers at all levels can be key to the success of transnational programmes and to maintaining quality of teaching, learning and assessment (McNamara & Knight, 2014; Dixon & Scott, 2004). However, this is challenging as acknowledged by Dunn and Wallace (2008) who contend that the complexity and difficulty of ensuring effective communication between management and academic staff is increased in transnational settings.

7.4.2. Monitoring and Evaluation of Academic Programmes

Based on of academic staff experiences regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the TNE programmes, my study reveals that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the quality of programme delivery is not compromised. The colleges have developed internal review mechanisms and these were complemented by cooperation with foreign partners and the MOHE. The quality control mechanisms in place are similar to those that exist at the regional and international level. For example, an Australian university with partnerships in China and Malaysia operates in the same way as TNE programmes established between local colleges in Oman and UK Universities (Pyvis, 2011; Dobos, 2011). The local colleges in Oman work in collaboration with their partner institutions in the UK during the design of programmes, delivery and assessment. The UK partners "keep on guiding us and monitoring us in the process" (Namir, College 1). In this regard, the UK partners play a supervisory role making sure that the programmes are designed, delivered and assessed in a way that satisfies the quality assurance expectations of the UK Universities. The partner Universities in UK, therefore, organise and make visits to their units at the host HEIs once a semester.

More than 75% of the participating academic staff were generally positive about the involvement of external players in the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes, stating that this enabled the programmes to establish a strong reputation, which in turn provided the students with "a competitive advantage on the job market" (Naila, College 2). Although the degree to which monitoring and evaluation of TNE programmes was found to be satisfactory in my study, is open to scrutiny. Some participants felt that the partner University should play a significant role in ensuring that the programmes on offer in Oman private colleges are comparable to those offered in the UK partner Universities while at the same time ensuring that the curriculum is relevant to the local context. This observation is consistent with findings highlighted in previous research that focused on the quality of private education. For instance, a recommendation by OAAA for a private HEI states that it should:

implement a formal, clear and consistent process for the regular review and revision of the curricula across all its academic programmes in order to ensure its programmes effectively support development of appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills for students in Oman (Roper et al., 2013).

The notion of partner Universities ensuring that programmes at hosting universities are of a similar quality to those at sending universities or "comparable… to the international standards" (Mohan, College 2), has also been discussed in literature (Smith, 2017; McNamara & Knight, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Castle & Kelly, 2004). If programmes are not monitored and evaluated rigorously there is a possibility that institutions might end up providing irrelevant curriculum that does not help address local needs (Castle & Kelly, 2004). Issan (2016) points out that the quality of TNE programmes provided in Oman is questionable since many graduates lack the knowledge, skills, and competencies required on the labour market.

However, there is also a counter argument that local institutions should be responsible for ensuring the quality of their programmes as these are implemented in a higher education system and socio-economic context that is different to those of the sending university. For instance, Hill et al. (2014) contend that while the external partner should contribute towards the quality of TNE programmes, the local institutions should have a bigger role. According to Hill et al. (ibid.) the external institution should be responsible for validating the degree rather than providing hands-on teaching support. The same view is echoed by the OAAA in Oman when it states that: "all institutions of Higher Education must accept primary responsibility for the quality and relevance of their programmes and services. This responsibility remains with the institution itself, regardless of any partnership that institution may have with external organisations" (OAAA, 2004, p.11). Understandably, quality assurance on TNE programmes should be a shared responsibility, however, the OAAA expects the local institutions to have a bigger responsibility and to be accountable for the programmes they offer. In the same vein, Heffernan and Poole (2005, p.81) posit that any partnership should be "based on a win–win model that expresses values that are universally shared across cultures". However, identifying those values is rather laborious, complex and perhaps unattainable.

234

7.4.3. Moderation of Assignments and Examinations

Moderation of assignments and examinations has been put in place to ensure that the quality of assessment of students' work is comparable to that of the parent HEI (Dobos, 2011). UK universities have a good reputation for their academic excellence and are expected to maintain it even when awarding degrees to partner institutions. From this point of view, the academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience in Omani private education institutions should be equivalent to those of the home universities. In this regard, the local colleges work closely with their colleagues at sending universities during the designing of formative and summative assessments. In this regard, partner university "visits the college at least twice a year for that purpose, and assessment packs must be sent to them for moderation" (Zana, College 2). However, my study findings confirmed the existence of some challenges. For instance, there are some conflicts between standards on the receiving institutions and those of the sending institutions. This makes it difficult for the receiving institutions to implement all the feedback shared by their colleagues in the sending institutions (Smith, 2017; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013).

Additionally, in my study, moderation by external university coordinators was perceived by some academic staff to indicate their lesser professional status, and was also seen as somewhat disrespectful and disruptive. Similarly, in a study of the Australian and Malaysian partnerships, it was also revealed that the majority of participants were resentful of the Australian academics in charge of the moderation (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Dobos, 2011). In some cases, academic staff cherry-picked assignments and examinations. According to Sonia from College 2, teachers "give the moderators from partner University excellent exam papers". This helps them to get the desired results in the moderation process thereby making it difficult for the moderators to develop a clear picture of the students' performance. It is clear, therefore, that communication between institutions and among administrative and academic staff can be complex in transnational settings resulting in quality issues which threaten to compromise it (Dunn & Wallace, 2008). It can be gleaned that some activities associated with moderation and assessment of examination are not academic decisions but business oriented. If done properly on academic lines,

moderation of assignments and examinations can help to develop the delivery of good quality education in home institutions.

My study established that the TNE provision was constrained by socio-cultural factors and it was also evident that programme design affected the student learning experience. This theme is discussed in more detail in the following section.

7.5. Programme Design: A Collaborative Approach

Programme design includes the organisation, delivery and assessment of higher education curricula; therefore, it is closely aligned with teaching and learning. The study findings showed that programme design was done collaboratively between the partners. This offered academic staff opportunities to participate actively in the curriculum development process. The participation of local staff in curriculum design is supported by Ziguras (2008) who suggests that locally employed tutors of transnational programmes are well placed to help develop curricula that reflect the culture and context in which their students are learning.

As specified in the MOHE policy guidelines, each local institution has the responsibility to design programmes to ensure that they meet societal needs (MOHE, 2005). To this end, the academic staff conduct market research and consult with other stakeholders including "the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Higher Education together with the academic staff and alumni from the college" (Namir, College 1) and other public and private sector organisations. This is meant to ensure curriculum relevance; that is, the designed curriculum should help equip graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful participation in the society in which they live and work. These partner institutions also play an important role by validating the designed programmes. Their input is important because it helps the local institutions to ensure that the programmes they offer are both current and aligned to international standards. The MOHE in Oman encourages this collaborative approach to curriculum design as it views this to be one of the most appropriate mechanisms for ensuring the provision of top quality higher education in the country (Issan, 2016; Al-Barwani et al., 2010). This is consistent with findings in the

236

literature which show that these types of partnerships can help developing countries to provide high quality education (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; OECD, 2004; McBurniei & Ziguras, 2001).

The academic staff felt that "these programmes are well respected everywhere" (Roman, College 2) and were designed to meet both local and international standards and, therefore, would provide certain advantages to their students whilst also contributing to the overall development of Omani society. This view is consistent with advice from academic experts. For example, Leask (2008) states that the curriculum for the transnational classroom should be both internationalised and localised. This suggestion has been wholeheartedly taken up not only in Oman but in many other receiving countries. For instance, in China, great attempts have been made to combine the western style with the local content in the country, focusing particularly on student needs and their future careers (Huang, 2006).

Although an effort was being made by local institutions to collaborate with all the relevant stakeholders in the curriculum design processes, this did not always happen as expected. As a result, problems such as lack of curriculum relevance, materials and assessments (Sonia, College 2) have become apparent in the receiving countries such as Oman. My study findings indicate that key stakeholders, including employers and alumni were not always consulted during the market research stage of the design of new programmes. Moreover, a considerable proportion of academic staff either implicitly or explicitly noted the disconnection between the way in which programmes were designed and the realities of the workplace. It also emerged from my study that cultural differences impacted on the learning styles of students and therefore there was a need to ensure that the teaching and learning approaches were adapted to the local contexts. Some of the conspicuous issues regarding the design of programmes and implementation challenges at institution level are discussed in more detail in the following section.

7.5.1. The Impact of Sociocultural Context

My study findings confirmed the notion that the implementation of TNE programmes is fraught with various socio-cultural challenges. For instance, it emerged that a certain proportion of learning resources, such as textbooks from abroad, were not always in line with the cultural standards of the local institutions. There is, therefore, a need to make use of authentic learning materials and contextualised examples which appropriately reflect the experiences of the students. Some of the academic staff, and, in particular, expatriate staff; expressed the challenge they encounter when selecting learning materials and appropriate teaching methods adapted to the cultural standards of their students. As Morgan, College 2 argued "Academia is also about the place where the curriculum is taught … there are many twists and turns, and so there is the need for customisation". Oman, being a Muslim country, has a conservative culture. This makes it imperative for programmes run in partnership between western and local HEIs to be designed carefully to ensure that cultural clashes are avoided. Knight (2014) has also noted the issue of imported curricula from home campuses as being one of the major challenges facing university-level education in countries such as Oman. Knight (2014, p.58) states that these curricula "would not reflect the local identity and any adaptation to the curriculum would risk a change to the standard of education offered". OAAA has also reiterated the need to contextualize the curriculum citing that currently TNE programmes being implemented in Oman are not culturally sensitive (Roper et al., 2013). The importance of contextualising academic work in terms of underpinning socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-historical processes is supported by many authors who argue that the context of academic practice is highly significant (Waterval et al., 2014; Shams & Huisman, 2012; Stella & Woodhouse, 2011; Heffernan et al., 2010; Fanghanel & Trowler, 2007; Coleman, 2003). This issue is not merely confined to the tension between Muslim and western culture, but is also apparent in cooperation between non-Muslim nations. For instance, a study on the development and implementation of programmes in China has shown that the cultural differences between China and Australia are significant, and that Chinese students possess unique characteristics that differentiate them from western students (Heffernan et al., 2010). Understandably, knowledge transfer across borders can be a challenging

process because of potential mismatch or clash between programme contents and host country's sociocultural norms and religious values.

In my study, cultural differences were cited as one of the challenges being faced in the implementation of TNE programmes with academic staff stating that pupils in Oman rely heavily on the teacher, that is, "they always expect support which will make them lose the opportunity to learn independently" (Namir, College 1). From my own experience, Omani basic education has been designed in connection with cultural and traditional norms in which memorization is a vital element in the education system. Therefore, the vast majority of Omani students have difficulty to cope with western teaching and learning styles which seek to promote active learning and critical thinking. It becomes imperative for the academic staff to understand the underlying cultural background in order for them to plan and organize teaching and learning activities effectively.

For many engaged in TNE, recognition of students' learning styles, teaching and assessment are considered as an important factor of an effective teaching strategy (Smith, 2017; Knight, 2014; Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Wilkins et al., 2012; Heffernan et al., 2010). My study found that students were characterised by academic staff as teacher-centred learners, that is, "students expect the teacher to teach. It means the teacher has to write notes to fill two boards or three boards" (Tahir, College 1). Students were used to receiving information from the academic staff without taking responsibility to engage in research, be academically and intellectually critical of ideas and raise questions. Oman has an examination-oriented system which impact on students' approaches to study and learning. From the academic staff' perspectives, students are surface learners, focused on aspects of texts or assignments in isolation to other aspects, treating learning as a memorization exercise so as to increase their chances of exam success. This observation finds parallels in Case and Marshall's (2009) study which found that memorization is highly valued in the Chinese culture and is utilized hugely in teaching settings.

This presented challenges to academic staff who were delivering programmes designed from a western perspective. That is, the provision of curricula that seeks to

239

promote learner autonomy or independence in the learning process. As a result, they were faced with the difficulty of adapting to this philosophy of learning in higher education. Accordingly, "we must be very careful in trying to apply those strategies and methodologies here because of cultural barriers, for example, the concept of "flipped learning" which is well known in the west" (Mohan, College 2). Similar findings were obtained in other countries. In Malaysia TNE programmes delivered in partnership with Australian universities, problems were found in the transition from the more bookish approach in Malaysia to the more open-ended approach in Australia (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). In Australia, teaching strategies include small group discussions, debates, problem-solving projects, case-study approaches, and independent learning tasks, yet, in Malaysia the dominant methods are teacher-centred. The challenge being faced by the Malaysian and Australian institutions are similar to the situation in Omani institutions working in collaborative partnerships with UK universities. Local colleges in Oman were forced to transition from a teacher-centred to the learner-centred approach promoted in the UK higher education system. A similar view is highlighted by Heffernan et al. (2010) who also suggest that there are substantial differences in learning strategies between students in Australia and China. Consequently, programme managers should take into account such variation when structuring TNE programme for students in hosting countries to ensure that contextual factors are addressed.

However, the participating academic staff thought that taking a western approach to pedagogy meant being left with the difficult task of instilling students with the desire to learn how to learn: imparting the importance of the journey from "spoon-feeding", as Maha from College 1 expressed, to taking responsibility for their own learning. Pyvis (2011) argues that it is necessary to change students' behaviour from being focused on passing examinations to the development of knowledge and deep understanding of concepts. However, there is a difficult balance to achieve between adapting to teaching and learning style of western universities and potential violation of students' cultural understandings.

While the academic staff in my study were in favour of the idea of adapting the curriculum to local contexts, by being 'Glocal', you are Global and at the same time

local" (Alia, College 1), some contrasting ideas emerge in the literature. Commentators argue that adapting the curriculum to suit local contexts might dilute the curriculum thereby impacting on its quality. Stella (2011) contends that adapting the curriculum to local needs should be done carefully and all stakeholders including students and employers should be consulted to ensure their views are taken on board in the process. Many students are attracted to TNE programmes by the reputation of the foreign university and wish to be exposed to cultural differences in order to enhance their chances of getting jobs on the international labour market, so if the curriculum is changed, they might lose interest in enrolling on the programmes (Shams & Huisman, 2012). Dunn and Wallace (2006) reiterate that students engage with a Western degree to broaden their worldview by gaining a new outlook through a western curriculum and pedagogy. Similarly, Debowski (2004) argues that students appreciate the quality of the degrees from western countries and would like to have the same experience as students in the main campus. However, this can be seen as a new form of colonialism which is detrimental to the local societies (Shams & Huisman, 2012; Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

In agreement with authors such Coleman (2003), it may be necessary to take a pragmatic stance in the handling of the topic on curriculum relevance. A mix of academic content and teaching methods in local colleges (or host countries) is inevitable. Academic staff themselves also come from various cultural backgrounds. Students in receiving countries may not receive the same education as students at the universities in sending countries. This is due to the existence of various factors that affect the learning and teaching processes such as academic performance, staff qualifications, student social background and culture, linguistic factors and the current infrastructure. In an effort to adapt the curriculum, it might be useful to add local examples and case studies to the learning materials designed for local students (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). The need to be sensitive to cultural differences has also been highlighted by other scholars who argue that there are distinct learning styles with regard to students from different cultural backgrounds such as Oman, who are used to more 'teacher-centric' methods of learning, as opposed to 'student-centeredness' in Western countries, and therefore, programme managers have to

align their curricula and pedagogical approaches accordingly to meet student expectations (Heffernan et al, 2010; Dunn & Wallace, 2004).

In conclusion we can say at present, there is 'room in the curriculum', to use a term mentioned by Heffernan and Poole (2005), to bring in additional material which relate directly to the Omani context. If key stakeholders in positions of responsibility in the Omani workforce are excluded from the curriculum design process, it is more than probable that the designed curricula will fail to meet societal and market needs. It must be borne in mind that meeting societal needs remains a challenge, especially in the face of on-going rapid changes in our modern day societies.

7.5.2. Links with Industry

My study findings indicated some concerns regarding the alignment of the curriculum to the industrial needs of the country. The study revealed that "our graduates are not equipped with the core and soft skills required" (Rolla, College 2). As a result, calls were made by the academic staff to ensure that curriculum design included participation of the captains of industry, among others, so that the curriculum could reflect their expectations and needs. This argument is underpinned by a perception that students should be equipped with knowledge and skills that enable them to provide the needed manpower on the job market. The World Economic Forum's Executive Survey in 2012 indicated that inadequately educated workforce is the second most problematic element in conducting businesses in Oman (Ameen, 2013). Commenting on the situation in Oman, Al-Balushi (2012) contends that there is a skill gap between the graduates of the private college and the market demand which can be noticed clearly when they join the workplace (Al-Balushi, 2012). The situation has not improved over the years making it imperative for concerted efforts to be made to resolve the problem by the different stakeholders.

The findings from my study echo what has been discussed in literature. Fang and Wang (2014) argue that curriculum should ensure that graduates are equipped with skill sets and competences needed on the local labour market. Arguably, graduates should also be prepared for jobs on the international market, hence, the curriculum

should offer opportunities for addressing both local and international labour market needs. According to Krause (2009), the expectations of students, industry groups, governments and communities now represent significant forces shaping such areas of academic work as course offerings, curriculum design, modes of delivery, assessment standards and professional development needs. These changes should shape academics' approaches to teaching, selection of curriculum content, and the types and volume of administrative and service tasks in which they engage in on a daily basis. Despite a lack of empirical evidence, others argue that the main cause for the apparent lack of knowledge and skills possessed by transnational HEI graduates is the profit-driven institutions themselves (Lim, 2010). Whatever the cause, a survey of graduates from Oman's private higher education institutions in 2010 indicated a worrying deficit in generic skills: creativity at 37%, communication skills at 31%, problem solving ability was at 38%, and critical thinking was 34% (Ameen, 2013, p, 15). There is, therefore, a pressing need for educational institutions to build strong relationships with key players in industry, and their alumni, by conducting a "tracer study and interview the leaders of workplace where our students work" (Alia, College 1), to ensure that they incorporate the necessary changes to the curricula for them to remain relevant to both the local context and the world at large. "The mechanism for doing this should be made available" (Iva, College 2).

As it can be noted in the preceding sections, the implementation of TNE programmes is faced with a number of challenges. My study established a number of practical suggestions from the academic staff regarding ways of improving TNE provision. The views of the academic staff are discussed in the following section.

7.6. Enhancing TNE Provision in Oman

One of the main areas of focus for my study was to establish ways of improving the implementation of TNE programmes in Oman. The TNE programmes in Oman are still relatively young compared to other countries having been in existence for just two decades. From the academic staff perspective, there are many possibilities for future changes. The degree to which these programmes will change and the direction of change is dependent on stakeholders such as external partner Universities,

government bodies, and the hosting private institutions themselves. A number of proposals were made by the academic staff and these indicate that each of the players involved in the implementation of TNE programmes has a significant role to play in making these programmes more effective. The key ideas shared by the academic staff are discussed in the following section.

7.6. 1. Safeguarding Staff and Working Conditions

Academic staff morale was considered as a key factor for the effective implementation of TNE programmes. As a result, it was suggested that every effort should be made to cultivate a conducive working environment and to safeguard the welfare of the academic staff in the local colleges. This can be achieved by ensuring that the different stakeholders including the MOHE, the partner Universities in the UK and the senior management in local colleges work together to monitor and address any concerns raised by the academic staff.

One of the main areas of concern is the academic staff workload in the local colleges. As "the college policy should promote a conducive working environment" (Alia College 1), the academic staff felt that the external university "should get involved more in consultancy, training for staff and student exchanges… (Morgan, College 2), and should do more to monitor and ensure that academic staff in local colleges were working under the same conditions as their counterparts in the external university. However, this might be a difficult task for the UK Universities as they might be struggling to provide less stressful conditions for their own staff. It is important though to ensure that the government supervises to ensure that staff in private colleges are treated fairly by their employers. Creating conducive working conditions would help to retain academic staff and maintain continuity on the programmes.

Academic staff suggested that the MOHE should monitor and evaluate the implementation of the TNE programmes in a more comprehensive and systematic way compared to the current practice. Academic staff, as expressed by both Mohan from College 2 and Mohammed from College 1, would like to see the MOHE involved in defining guidelines for conducive working conditions for staff including

working hours, salaries, promotions and the availability of teaching and learning resources. The MOHE should provide a standards' framework to be used by each college in the implementation of the TNE programmes and not to over-rely on external universities for quality assurance. The academic staff consider that the MOHE should ensure that private colleges are following the guidelines provided. For example, regarding staff recruitment, the MOHE "needs to keep an eye on a variety of nationalities among the academic staff" (Morgan College 2, to ensure that colleges uphold the call to diversify the nationalities of employees. In addition, it was suggested that the MOHE should be involved in the implementation of the Omanisation programme to ensure that a good number of qualified Omani staff are also placed in key positions in the colleges including teaching roles.

Since provision of TNE through private institutions has been seen by governments as a way to provide developed curricula and ensuring the quality of education (Coffman, 2003), the government of Oman "should keep an eye on the evaluation and implementation of the academic programmes and insist on monitoring this aspect" (Alia, College 2). In order to do this, it needs to revisit policies and regulations related to private educational institutions. More importantly, it should ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to ensure institutions adhere to such regulations. However, with growth and expansion, and with increasing complexity, the government can introduce other approaches to maintain quality of education in private providers. For instance, the government could ensure that they are accountable for; enhancing quality, raising quality culture awareness among higher education providers, promoting change to stimulate competition and comparisons, and informing the allocation of resources. According to Currie and Vidovich (2009) this accountability could take the form of "annual performance management reviews, prescribed performance indicators, quality audits, teaching portfolios, graduate surveys, student evaluations, and research and teaching assessment exercises" (p.448).

However, the role of government in TNE higher education in terms of providing regulations is arguable (Altbach et al., 2009; Stella & Bhushan, 2011). The imposition of a wide range of regulations can be a burden to the TNE providers and

therefore, "we can do better if the institutions are given more freedom" as Naila from College 2 revealed. On the other hand, the need to monitor and evaluate HEIs has been reinforced as the importance of higher education to economies and societies all over the world has been recognized (Taylor, 2009). This view is supported by Altbach (2013):

> the world also needs clear regulation, probably by government authority, to ensure that national interests are served and students and their families are not subjected to shoddy business practices by unscrupulous education providers. This will also help academic institutions themselves think about their motivations for entry into the global education market (p.40).

The same view is held by Stella and Bhushan (2011) who contend that the partner universities should ensure that the programmes offered at local colleges are contextualized and at the same a mirror image of the programmes at home campuses. However, Pilbeam (2009) argues that the level of government oversight is highly dependent on geographical and political context. In Western Europe, for example, market conditions are predominant whilst in other areas, such as central Europe, the historically authoritarian nature of their governments translates into strong government oversight. Added to this is the trend, as noted by Altbach, et al. (2009) for governments to play a more validating role in oversight and for institutions to gauge their performance against that of other institutions. They argue that governments are more concerned with statistics related to the outcomes of higher education, rather than the inner workings of the organisations themselves.

In Oman, the establishment of OAAA is aimed at fostering the provision of good quality higher education. However, as highlighted above, this agency should work closely with the MOHE to monitor and support the provision of TNE programmes in local colleges. As stated by the participants in my study, there is need to reinforce the role of the government in higher education system to encourage robust quality assurance systems that are sensitive to the objectives of the programmes and the benefits they can bring to the hosting Omani institutions.

7.6.2. Staff Recruitment and Module Allocation

My study showed that the academic staff in local colleges were disgruntled with the way in which staff recruitment and allocation of modules was being handled. The local colleges need to recruit adequate teaching staff to ensure that modules are delivered by people who are experts in their fields. There was a consensus among the academic staff that the foreign partners should be involved in the decisions around allocation of modules to staff to ensure that this is done objectively. In terms of hiring academic staff, typically the Omani colleges send the employment history and details of the selected candidate to the UK partner universities for their approval. This system is applied in other countries, such as Australian universities that have partnership with Asian countries, which allow the university to exercise some degree of control (Stella, 2011). However, it appears that, even when the university exercises such control, a number of academic staff are still assigned to teach modules in which their expertise is not entirely relevant (Roman, college 2). Each module should be taught by experts in that particular area. Indeed, this practice usually occurs when there is a shortage in the number of staff at the beginning of a semester and is a temporary solution when the specialised academic staff is absent or has left Oman suddenly. Therefore, some academic staff suggested that "the employment department needs to find a solution to this challenge by ensuring that there is enough staff to cover each module before the beginning of each semester (Amina, college 1). This view finds parallels with stakeholder views in other countries delivering TNE such as China and Malaysia (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013). McDiarmid (1989) has rightly pointed out that assigning academic staff to modules in which they do not specialise brings with it the danger of students being provided with inaccurate information. A similar situation might be experienced in the partner Universities too making it difficult for them to address the concerns being raised by the academic staff in local colleges.

According to academic staff, this issue should be addressed when partner universities conduct site visits. "Partner Universities [should] … check who is going to teach the module and what the specialisation of that teacher is" as Masood form College 2 argued. They also indicated that academic staff should be consulted for a clearer

picture of progamme implementation. Therefore, I argue that the partner universities should conduct such an investigation during its annual visit and ensure that the Omani colleges are adhering to the academic agreement. Design mechanisms should be put in place to maximise the effectiveness of the partnership to a level which satisfies both partners. It is important to note though, that "overburdening local academics or marginalizing them in any way will cause increased friction in what can be an already strained situation where issues of quality and value are evident" (Hill et al., 2014, p. 958). The academic staff asked for external University to engage deeply with them on issues around the teaching and learning environment in local colleges as this is a key factor for the success of the TNE programme.

7.6.3. Increased Participation in Assessments

The academic staff in my study suggested that academic communities from the external partners should be engaged in a more meaningful way in the design and delivery of the assessment activities. Currently, external universities simply participate in the moderation process: giving feedback which, in some cases, is not comprehensive and helpful in terms of ensuring that the same quality of assessment is maintained in the local college as stated by some academic staff including Jones from College 2. Assessment is significant in determining the quality of student learning in higher education and moderation is seen as a means of monitoring and controlling the standards to ensure that the students' results in hosting colleges are comparable to those of students at the sending University (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013; Wallace, Mahmud, Sanderson, Yeo, Briguglio & Hukam-Singh, 2010; Lim, 2008). Literature provides general advice on assessment in TNE programmes such as the use of marking guides by academic staff in the hosting countries (ALTC., 2010; Castle & Kelly, 2004). However, according to Wallace et al., (2010), the concept of moderation can vary in nature between sending and receiving TNE institutions.

In UK higher education, assessment is expected to be designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of the programme and that all students should receive timely feedback on their assessments (Smith, 2017). This is the same expectations held by HEIs in Oman, however, my study found that the

academic staff struggle to achieve the set standards and at times "teachers tend to safeguard their jobs by ensuring that students get whatever they want" as Tuba, from college 1 argued. The differences between UK and Omani HEIs might be caused by the disparities in social, cultural and political spaces. On the other hand, it is possible that other factors, for example, lack of clear guidelines might also affect the delivery of assessment. As observed by Chapman and Pyvis (2013) the key problem with internal quality assurance has been the absence of guiding principles that receiving institutions can follow to ensure they are delivering TNE teaching and learning quality that is "equivalent" or "comparable" with sending University.

7.6.4. Communication and Trust between Partners

My study revealed that the relationship management between institutions is problematic and critical. There was a marked lack of communication between Omani and partner institutions which directly affected the design and delivery of TNE programmes. According to the academic staff when "the partner university visits us they talk to the dean and the assistant dean only. [They] need to talk to the teachers to gain a better picture of how things are going" as expressed by Roman a senior lecturer from College 2. It also emerged that sometimes the sending University takes long time to respond to queries raised by the receiving institution. This includes, for example, enquiries of "sharing [with partner university] learning rooms on MOODLE … [however] we are not able to get all the help we need" as Maha a lecturer from college 1 highlighted. From the academic staff perspective, to improve communication with partner university

> we need to be in contact…, they should have dedicated officers for partner Universities so that this liaison is faster..., they should have staff members who can visit for six months and see how we implement their programmes, the facilities we have, and so that they learn about unfamiliar cultures, I would like to see an exchange programme between us. This is what is missing here, it happens usually in international partnerships (Tahir, College1).

This is certainly an issue which needs addressing, as the establishment and maintenance of smooth and effective communication between partners is,

undoubtedly, crucial to the success of transnational programmes. Similar concerns have been discussed in literature, for instance, Chapman and Pyvis (2013) highlights the importance of maintaining clear communication between partners citing that the communication need unambiguous statements about the mediation, moderation, and benchmarking processes of transnational courses.

The study also revealed that it is significantly important for the partners to build relationships based on trust. One-sided approaches have been shown to lead to misunderstandings and possible resentment and distrust. The importance of trust and clear communication also extends to the relationship between the local colleges and the MOHE. It was highlighted by the academic staff, including Zana from College 2, that the MOHE should provide clear guidelines to be adhered to in terms of staff recruitment, promotion as well as the provision of conducive working conditions.

7.6. 5. Promoting Professional Development and Enhancing Students' Learning Experience

The participants in my study felt that TNE programmes could be enhanced by providing opportunities for academic staff and students to engage in exchange programmes. For many, "the partner university is meant to share their good practices […] have exchange programmes, exchange academic instructors and exchange students (Tuba, College 1). It was indicated that this can be achieved by ensuring that this clause is included in the partnership agreements. The academic staff suggested that this arrangement would be beneficial as they would be exposed to the teaching environments of the sending university, thereby experiencing that county's higher education system and teaching/learning methods. Chapman and Pyvis, (2013) also found this to be a point of concern for academics interviewed in their study in Malaysia. They argue that the universities should provide opportunities for overseas partner staff to be involved in professional development activities to ensure currency and competency in appropriate pedagogical practice. Accordingly, "there is a lack of provision of these professional development programmes" as expressed by Julia a senior lecturer from, College 1. Such professional development opportunities of academic staff are considered to be essential for the effective implementation of TNE

programmes. Academic staff need to be provided with opportunities for training in research and other areas of interest. It was observed that, in some cases, teachers were not given access to on-going professional staff development opportunities as a way for the college to save money and increase their profits. In this regard, Academic staff suggested that there should be a good balance between profit making and enhancement of the quality education through investment in staff development.

As indicated earlier, professional development opportunities and student exchange arrangements should be set out in the initial agreements between institutions. However, Bovill et al., (2015) argue that a mismatched expectation between partnerships can happen regularly even if it is undertaken professionally and thoroughly. This misunderstanding can only be avoided by having negotiations in the early stages where the expectation should be presented explicitly by both parties. To help the academic staff and students to understand clearly how the TNE programmes should work, well-structured exchange programmes should be considered. This would enable academic staff to learn from their colleagues and at the same time provide excellent opportunities for students to expand their cultural experiences. Exchange programmes for academic staff can also help to expand research synergies between the institutions.

In international contexts, academic staff usually expected to work in environments which are culturally very different from their home (Smith, 2009). In Oman, the majority of academic staff are from the Asian countries, where they are more likely to have completed a degree from countries in which the academic pedagogy practice is non-western oriented. As a result, there were calls for intensive and comprehensive induction programmes in the local colleges, particularly for the staff working on the TNE programmes. Therefore, "teachers should be given some cultural awareness lessons before they go to the classroom… if you don't have the experience then you do not know how to work with Omani students, and they can perceive you as rude" as emphasised by Zana form College 2. This view is echoed by a number of researchers including Heffernan and Poole (2005), Smith (2009), Lim (2010), Shams and Huisman (2012) emphasized on the significance of a development induction

251

programme for academics in order to minimise differences in content knowledge and didactic skills.

The academic staff called for opportunities for pursuing higher degrees as part of their professional development. The partner Universities can play an important role in facilitating these kinds of opportunities to ensure that delivery of programmes is done by academics who are well equipped to teach on TNE programmes. Macdonald (2009) argues that the impact of academic staff development on student outcomes is significant in terms of enhancing student success and learning outcomes. There are enormous benefits to providing professional development opportunities for transnational staff including allowing the ability to transform their perceptions and practices and can also allow academic staff in both sides to develop greater understanding of ways of working and cultural norms (Smith, 2015).

Research activities are considered as a major aspect of ongoing professional development. As teaching is the main objective of private higher education, not only in Oman but in many countries (Hunt et al., 2016), it is not surprising that research activity constitutes very little proportion of the college annual budget (Tuba, College 1). The concentration on teaching and neglecting research activities has affected staff academic professional and teaching quality as well (Altbach et al, 2009). According to staff interviewed for this study, including Amina from College1, the lack of time and financial support allocated affects the research capabilities in these colleges. This is worrying given that research is considered a main pillar of higher education. This finding is in line with Harthi's (2011) study, which concluded that Omani private HEI's contribution to scientific research is effectively nil. It is against this backdrop that participants in my study called for more investment in research activities in the local colleges. The support for the academic staff requires some changes in the perspectives of the college leaders. This view is supported by Lee (2009) who says, the main elements which must change in order for this to happen are senior staff perspectives and institutional values. Therefore, Omani colleges can learn how to support staff from the partner institutions.

7.6.6. Promoting Learner Autonomy among Local Students

My study indicated that a significant majority of the students lack the right attitude towards their education. The Academic staff felt that students are not as enthusiastic as they should be choosing to rely on their teachers and lacking in learner autonomy. In the first place, the academic staff felt that the local colleges should ensure that there are mechanisms to help students develop positive attitudes towards their learning. Given that the majority of students enrolled in these institutions are of low academic attainment levels, it was felt that the local colleges should put in place additional support mechanisms to meet the students' needs. In this regards, Suad a lecturer from college 1, stated that "the problem … is their [students] lack general study skills. So usually performance depends on the skills and habits they bring with them from the school level". This should include support in academic writing and study skills development aimed at promoting learner autonomy. Staff views on the level and type of student support necessary for them to adapt to western curricula and pedagogy to facilitate learning across cultures has been widely discussed in the literature (Leask, 2013; Gopal, 2011; Smith, 2010; Prowse & Goddard, 2010; Dunn & Wallace, 2006). In Oman, as in many Middle Eastern and East Asian countries, the pedagogical strategy is that of a teacher-centred approach where students rely on the teachers and need considerable guidance. With this approach, the students expect a higher level of guidance and are not given opportunities to develop critical-thinking skills or independent learning. It is therefore understandable that the Omani students require more direction and support when studying western curricula.

7.6.7 Raising English Language Proficiency Level among Students

The use of English language as the medium of instruction is another fundamental aspect of TNE. The academic staff in both colleges voiced concerns over the English proficiency of their students. According to Hunt et al. (2016) the low entry requirements remove effectively a major barrier to entry. The academic staff, including Leon (an English lecturer in College 2) reported that their students needed more English language support as their level is normally not sufficient to complete tasks to an appropriate level. Drawing upon the experiences of the academics who

were involved in teaching, this study considers that the students require more personal and academic support in transition period from basic education to higher education "if you want an efficient implementation of those TNE programmes" (Tahir, college 1). This view is supported by many authors, including Prowse and Goddard (2011) who argue that "If students cannot relate to the class material or have culturally distinct expectations, then the quality of education may suffer" (p. 32). It is important for students to be supported in their transition from one level to another, for example, from high school to university life or from the foundation to degree programmes. This might involve rethinking the basic education curriculum to ensure that students are exposed to a good foundation of English language skills and other study skills that are key for successful undergraduate studies.

7.6.8. Restructuring the Foundation Programme Curriculum

My study results appeared to show that the foundation programme has not been effective in terms of bridging the gap that exists between secondary and higher education. As a result, academic staff suggested that the foundation programme review should be prioritised by the local colleges. The foundation programme, in the context of Oman, is a non-credit programme developed to provide support to new students in terms of enhancing their English language, IT, Mathematics and general study skills (Al-Balushi, 2012; Al-Lamki, 2006). The vast majority of students entering into higher education in the country are first required to undergo a general foundation programme (Carroll et al., 2009). As presented in the chapter six, it has been argued that the time allocated to conduct a full foundation programme is not enough given the level of students who enrol on the programme. The questions raised by the participating academic staff are "How does one foundation programme help develop all their skills in 6 months (two semesters)? ... How I can help them [students] achieve a higher score of 4.5 in IELTS [The International English Language Testing System] […] It's impossible (Tuba, College 1). The current foundation programme runs for between one and one and a half years, and it appears that, from the academic staffs' perspective, the length of the programme is not sufficient to equip the students with adequate English language skills and other

relevant study skills to enable them to undertake their undergraduate studies successfully.

This result is consistent with various studies focusing on the obstacles confronting foundation programmes as a bridge between secondary school outcomes and higher education requirements (Al-Mamary, 2012). One of the key recommendations made by the academic staff involves increasing the length of study on the foundation programme and a review of the content and assessment methods to help prepare students adequately for enrolment on the undergraduate programmes. However, some academic staff, including Mohammed a senior lecturer in College 1, criticised the idea of extending the length of the foundation programme and argue that "the foundation programme is not a reliable solution to the problems faced by most of the students when they embark on the undergraduate studies. The English language proficiency must be addressed much earlier at the grassroots level". This view is echoed in the Omani literature which argues that improving English instruction in basic education is crucial to achieving the level of English required on the TNE programmes (Al-Mamary, 2012; Baporikar & Ali Shah, 2012). The issues raised by the participants indicate the need for all the key stakeholders to come together and rethink the framework and national standards for the provision of the foundation programme in the country.

7.6.9. Enhancing Curriculum Relevance

To ensure that colleges are introducing relevant programmes, the MOHE is expected to conduct needs analysis on a regular basis so that it can provide expert advice to colleges when designing new programmes. It is important for the new programmes to address the societal needs within a global context. For instance, Masood a senior Lecturer in College 2 calls the MOHE to be "a little bit more active in the sense of anticipating the work demand, [providing] some guidelines about programmes in the country's development agenda, … and career orientation should be there in schools, much stronger than it is right now". The MOHE should forecast required job skills to encourage educational programme designers to embed the development of key attributes that can help graduates to compete favourably on the job market. Teichler

(1999) noted that universities are very much aware of the need to work closely with governments and industry to ensure that they are preparing their graduates appropriately for gainful employment but argues that:

> the links between study and employment cannot be solely explained as an interaction between a "homo economicus" student and a "rational actor" employer. One has to take into account a potential diversity of their values, the impact of lack of information and valid measurements as well as other motives affecting the search and recruitment process (p.181).

The academic staff revealed that currently the link between the industry and colleges is not strong and there are difficulties when it comes to the designing of new programmes. This can be resolved by stepping up government involvement in the designing of new programmes through provision of future perspectives on the job market. This would help colleges to design programmes which meet the socio-economic needs and at the same time prepare students with generic skills, employability skills, knowledge and competencies that fit with the job market demands (Brandenburg, 2012).

Surely, to deal with the challenge of unemployment, private higher education must take responsibility for preparing students for the demands of the workplace but this requires the government support. To respond to social and economic development, private HEIs should establish a strong link with the labour market to close the gap between skills learned by graduates and skills demanded by real jobs. MOHE has a crucial role to play in the facilitation of cooperation between the work sector and higher education institutions in terms of the exchange of information regarding graduates and labour market needs.

7.6.10. Developing Basic Education

One of the issues that emerged from my study was the need to focus on the development of the country's basic education system. According to my study findings, some of the problems bedevilling the implementation of the TNE programmes are traceable to deficiencies in the Basic Education system. For

example, most Omani students struggle with the use of English language as a medium of instruction and demonstrate a lack of study skills on the undergraduate degree study programmes. Accordingly, "the strategic focus of the Ministry of Education should be to improve the system from the bottom. If we can do that then definitely the system is going to be improved" (Namir from College 1). Academic staff feel that the MOHE should work in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to identify the gaps in basic education in order to address these concerns. One of the problems linked to basic education is the poor English language proficiency. This has been identified in some studies, for instance, Al-Mamary (2012) and Chapman and Pyvis (2013) indicate that the low level of the English language of school graduates is one of the biggest challenges faced by students on TNE programmes.

My study revealed a lack of communication between HE and Basic Education in determining a consistent set of requirements to support and prepare students for HE. Most studies on the education system in Oman have detected weaknesses in pupils' English language and study skills. In this sense, poor Basic Education system lies at the root of the problem of students failing to cope with the demands of HE (Al-Mamary, 2012; Baporikar & Ali Shah, 2012; Al-Maashani, 2011; Al- Najar, 2004). Therefore, "the students should be trained towards this in basic education rather than higher education. It is late to be giving them full training on study skills in higher education" according to Alia a senior lecturer from College 1. These points highlight that the secondary education system might have to adopt a new curriculum and new pedagogical philosophy in order to prepare students for a smooth transition from basic to HE. Foundation programmes, as highlighted previously, are insufficient for "bridges the gap" as expressed by Leon from College 2. The academic staff concurred with Al-Najar's (2004) recommendation that both the MOHE and MOE have to establish better links between basic and HE. This kind of synergy requires some collaborative studies between the two Ministries to help identify areas for improvement with a view to supporting enhanced student learning experience.

7.7. Chapter Conclusion

The chapter discussed the key findings drawn from the primary data in light of the literature and my personal reflections. The government is aiming to regulate the private higher education sector to ensure the provision of high quality education. However, its efforts are faced with some challenges such as bureaucracy which appears to affect the dynamic relationship between private HEIs and the society. I argued that undoubtedly the government should play a pivotal role in monitoring private HEIs to protect students from low quality education. However, my study established that there is a need to find a suitable balance between encouraging institutional autonomy on one hand and securing public interest on the other.

In terms of academic partnership, the participants were generally not convinced about the role of affiliated universities. There was a feeling that more could be done in terms of monitoring, evaluation and provision of academic advisory services. They raised issues of communication and trust and offered suggestions on how these could be improved. In addition, the academic staff expressed the wish that affiliation agreements would cover other areas such as research cooperation and staff and students exchange programmes.

The implementation of TNE programmes in the two Omani colleges has shown that the participants are generally satisfied with programmes design and their involvement in the process of curriculum development. However, in the implementation of TNE, some challenges are experienced in the following areas: academic pedagogy (teaching, learning, and assessment), programme relevance to the societal needs and labour market needs. Some of the factors that affected the implementation of TNE programmes are beyond the institutional level and are linked to national level and other stakeholders such as the MOHE, MOE and industry. In order to improve the provision of TNE, the academic staff provided some suggestions that have also been discussed in the chapter. These include increased involvement of the partner Universities in the supervision of programme implementation at local institutions as well as the creation of conducive working conditions by the local institutions. In addition, the MOHE is also expected to be

more active in monitoring and guiding the implementation of TNE programmes in the local colleges. This calls for cooperation of all the key stakeholders involved in designing and implementing the TNE programmes.

The study illustrated that quality of TNE provision is inseparable from policy and sociocultural context and programme implementation at institutional level is affected by these national factors. Therefore, the nature and complexities of TNE, solving challenges facing the TNE programmes implementation in Oman can only work by involving all stakeholders including, notably, academics.

As this chapter discussed the findings of the study, the next chapter which is the final one focuses on discussing the conclusion and recommendation from the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This study focused on exploring transnational education (TNE) in private Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in Oman. The study sought to examine the perceptions of academic staff involved in the implementation of TNE programmes by exploring the policy context and the working environment surrounding the implementation. In addition, the study sought to examine factors influencing TNE in two private HE colleges as well as the challenges faced by those colleges in the implementation of the TNE programmes. More specifically, the study elicited academic staff"s views regarding ways of improving the TNE in private HEIs. The participants were recruited from two private colleges in Oman. A case study design which employed qualitative approaches for data collection was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main instrument for eliciting the academic staff's views. In analysing the interview data qualitatively, thematic analysis was used as an analysis tool. Documentary analysis augmented the findings arising from the interview data and provided useful contextual information about national level policy and the higher education sector. This final chapter provides a summary of the main findings from my study including a reflection on the strengths and limitations of the study and a highlight of the contributions of my study. Lastly but not least, the chapter presents a discussion of the implications of the findings and provides recommendations for possible further studies. Following below is a brief overview of the work included in each of the chapters in my thesis.

8.2. Summary of the Study

The first chapter of this study provided the background and context of the research, research problem, the aims and objective and the research questions. In addition, it addressed the significance of the study and presented my positionality. Chapter two introduced some background information about Oman including the sociopolitical context, education system the development of private higher education and background of TNE in private HEIs. The chapter also presented some general information about the private HEIs, types of international academic partnerships, types of TNE programmes provided, number of students enrolled, academic staff, and quality of education. Chapter three presents the literature review and the first section contains an overview of internationalisation of HE. The role of WTO and GATS in facilitating cross border education is also discussed. The chapter also presented an overview of TNE which includes the drivers and the modes and form of TNE programme mobility. It also discussed the key benefits of TNE and the main critiques and challenges of TNE. Experiences of academic Staff in TNE are also presented. The chapter concluded with a conceptual framework of the study. Chapter four covers the research methodology and the ethical considerations underpinning the conduct of this study. I made explicit the research paradigm guiding the study, which is constructivism. I also described the data collection methods and procedures. This chapter also included information regarding how the quality of my study can be judged. In the final part of this chapter, I described the method of data analysis adopted in my study. Chapter five focused on addressing the first research question which sought to explore the way in which the TNE policy in Oman was implemented at national and institutional level. It included the rationale for embracing TNE policy and the regulatory framework that TNE and private HEIs are working on. In addition, the chapter highlighted the academics' views on the role of the government in the implementation of TNE programmes and discussed the factors that influenced the private colleges' choice of foreign partners. Chapter Six presented the themes that emerged from the interview data in response to research questions two, three and four. Chapter Seven discussed the findings in light of the current literature and personal reflections based on my professional experience. The following section presents a summary of findings from the research questions addressed in this study.

8.3. Addressing the Research Questions

As indicated earlier, the study sought to develop an understanding of the development of TNE in Oman and explored the implementation of academic programmes in selected private HEIs.

8.3.1. Research question one: How has transnational education policy in Oman been implemented at national and institutional level?

The question sought to find out the government policy regarding TNE and the regulatory framework that shaped TNE activities in the private HE sector. These include exploring mainly the rationale of TNE in Oman and how the government policy affected the implementation of TNE programmes. In addition, the academic staff views on the role of the MOHE and government policy in the TNE implementation are also explored.

The rationale for establishing TNE in Oman

The findings revealed that private HEIs in Oman are seen as a government initiative meant to address the increased demand of higher education in the country. In order to accelerate the provision of good quality higher education, the government came up with a policy that encouraged all private HEIs to establish academic partnerships with reputable foreign Universities. Therefore, based on my research findings, it can be argued that the adoption of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges is driven by government policy.

Unlike the situation in other countries, academic partnerships in Oman are not a result of competition among HEIs to attract students and to build an international reputation but rather a government policy to provide affordable and, at the same time, internationally recognized qualifications locally. The government provided a regulatory framework to ensure that the TNE programmes meet national requirements and are aligned with the Omani national qualifications framework. In an effort to preserve the country's cultural heritage and values, the government insists

that all TNE programmes should be delivered through an Omani higher education partner. In other words, no independent branch campuses are allowed in Oman. Hence, regulation of foreign providers through such mechanisms as qualifications authorities, customs regulations, and limitations on foreign ownership are characteristic of Omani policy regarding the provision of TNE.

The choice of partner institutions

The choice of partnership for TNE programmes in Oman is driven by government policy and the market demands which place emphasis on the need for high academic quality. It emerged that there is a common perception among different stakeholders in Oman that UK, US and Australian degrees are of better quality compared to the rest of the countries in the world, hence, most of the partnerships are established with Universities from those countries. Given that the private colleges in my study are teaching-oriented, they tend to establish academic partnerships with similar teaching-oriented Universities in the UK. Therefore, one can argue that TNE in Oman is not designed to provide superior education to that which exists in the public University by importing semi-elite institutions but rather its function is to fill the gap created by social demand for higher education in the country.

Government control vs Institutional autonomy

One of the key findings from my study is the involvement of the government in the provision of higher education through private colleges. Although this is not a new phenomenon (Henard & Mitterle, 2010), my study confirmed some of the problems associated with government control with particular regards to the issue of quality assurance. While government control is justified in the context of providing a regulatory framework, there were concerns regarding the inefficiency of the bureaucratic processes involved. The academic staff raised concerns about the increased administrative work which saw them engaged with lots of paper work, in particular, the keeping of records, to satisfy the requirements of the MOHE. There was a feeling among the academic staff that the private colleges should be given more autonomy in terms of managing the programmes to minimise inefficiency. One

of the areas where the academic staff felt a considerable level of dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic processes is when they wanted to make some changes to the existing programmes. The private colleges usually found themselves waiting for responses from one or several key players involved including either the MOHE, OAAA, the Ministry of Manpower or the foreign partner University. Understandably, the bureaucratic processes prevented timely responses to the social and job market demands. This echoed the observations made by Altbach (2013a) when he categorically pointed out that bureaucracy is one of the main barriers to the creation of effective academic institutions in different countries including China and other countries in the Middle East region. A good balance has to be achieved between government control and institutional autonomy to promote efficiency and enhanced student experience in private colleges. Giving private colleges some degree of autonomy would not only help them to speed up the processes of change when change is necessary but will also allow the academic staff to feel more capable in addressing more immediate concerns of their duties directly.

The challenge of working with multiple quality assurance agencies

The private colleges were also faced with the formidable challenge to comply with a range of requirements set out by different quality assurance agencies. For instance, they currently work with the OAAA in Oman and the QAA in UK, among others. It emerged that it is not always easy to work with different bodies for the colleges and some of the concerns raised revolved around bureaucracy, financial constraints and increased administrative tasks in the processes. Once again, this further buttressed observations by Dano and Stensaker (2009) who pointed out that although these national and international bodies help to protect students by ensuring some level of quality assurance, on the other hand, they bring with them some challenges of over-complication to the processes of improvement.

The impact of financial constraints

Financial constraints appeared to constitute a persistent problem in the private colleges. The colleges relied fully on tuition fees and apparently this was not enough

to meet all their financial obligations. As a result, they offered low salaries and unattractive working conditions to their staff. In a way, it was difficult for the private colleges to be able to match the conditions at their partner Universities. As coping strategies, they resorted to hiring of academic staff from countries with relatively poor economies and without high-level qualifications (for example, PhD) and lowering entry requirements for students in order to increase enrolment numbers. The colleges were unable to attract highly qualified staff due to low salaries and poor working conditions. As expected, most of the academic staff in my staff indicated that they wanted to see a situation where more PhD staff were hired compared to master's degree holders. For this to be a reality, the private colleges will need to find alternative sources of money as tuition fees alone do not appear to satisfy their needs.

8.3.2. Research question two: What are the academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges?

This is a broad question which mainly sought to explore academic staff experiences and perceptions regarding TNE in Omani private HEIs as well as developing an understanding of academic staff's concerns regarding the delivery of TNE in their institutions. Consequently, the responses were varied and touched many aspects which I clustered in five overarching subthemes: Curriculum development & delivery, Academic partnership between Omani and the UK HEIs; Staff-centred issues, student academic support services, and Quality culture.

Curriculum development & delivery

The study findings confirmed evidence of satisfaction on the part of academic staff in the way the programmes were designed, however, some concerns were raised regarding the quality and delivery of the programmes that were viewed as predominantly western. Both Omani and the UK parties work towards enabling course designing to meet institutional, professional or national requirements, through the development of learning outcomes, alignment to national frameworks, and calculation of credit weightings. However, problems such as lack of curriculum

relevance, the disconnection between the way in which programmes are designed and the realities of the workplace in which the students will find themselves after graduation have become apparent. It appears the staff were aware that though the programmes would make the graduates marketable on the global market, the programmes were falling short in terms of addressing the needs of the local job market. This would make it imperative for the local colleges to revisit their programmes and explore ways of ensuring that they align the curricula to the local needs if they are to remain relevant. Moreover, the implementation of TNE programmes is fraught with various cultural challenges. For instance, the teaching and learning approaches, some of the learning resources, and assessment processes present challenges to the academic staff who have to find ways of customising the western perspectives to suit the Omani culture. Some disparities were highlighted between the way programmes were delivered in private colleges in Oman and their UK partner Universities. A significant number of the participants felt that the partner Universities should play a significant role in ensuring that the programmes on offer in Oman private colleges are comparable to those offered in the UK partner Universities. On the other hand, the academic staff also wanted to make sure that the curriculum remained relevant to the local context. There was, therefore, ongoing tension between the quest to address international quality standards and adaptation to local cultures and needs.

Academic partnership between Omani and the UK HEIs

In terms of the role and commitment of the Omani and UK institutions in the provision of TNE, the study findings indicated mixed feelings on the part of academic staff, particularly, regarding the implementation of institutional responsibilities. On a positive note, more than half of the participating academic staff cited that the external partners were making an effort to ensure that they fulfilled their responsibilities. These include helping to ensure that the quality of programmes in hosting colleges is comparable with the foreign partner institutions. The partner Universities assisted with monitoring and moderation processes, supervision of programme delivery through panel visits, online contact (for example, email),

delivery of lessons and workshops and provision of a link tutor to facilitate communication.

On the other hand, about 25% of the academic staff were not convinced that the partner universities were as involved as they should be. For instance, it was cited that there was a lack of direct communication between the colleagues from partner Universities with academic staff in Omani colleges. This group of academics considered that the visits made were superficial and that no attempts were made to ensure that important issues faced by the academic staff were addressed. There was an additional sentiment expressed that the partner institutions should offer more support than their current provision. For instance, academic staff indicated the need to have student and staff exchange programmes between the partners. This would, in their view, facilitate the sharing of good practice. My study findings demonstrated that the implementation of TNE is affected by the nature of partnership between Oman private HEIs and foreign Universities. Although the academic staff in the private colleges expected their partner institutions to provide more services and opportunities for them, it was not always possible for this to happen as the partner Universities adhered to what was stipulated in the partnership agreements. This explains why staff and student exchange programmes that the academic staff expected to have were not implemented.

Staff-centred issues

A number of factors such as staff recruitment processes, induction, opportunities for staff development, promotion and incentives, and the general working conditions have impacted on the provision of TNE in Oman. Due to the low salaries being offered, the private colleges are unable to attract highly qualified staff. The study findings reveal that staff shortages, heavy workloads, and inadequate opportunities for conducting research is affecting the implementation of TNE programmes in the private colleges. Given the shortage of staff, in some cases, academic staff are being asked to teach areas in which they have no expertise. It can be argued that this is not a unique problem to Oman, however, this compromises the quality of delivery and the quality of graduates being produced by these colleges. The study also established

that teachers are not provided with comprehensive induction to help them to cope with the new socio-cultural milieu. This constitutes a big challenge as academic staff come from different cultural backgrounds and lack of knowledge about the Omani culture compromises their ability to do their job effectively in that context.

Regarding professional development, in general, the findings show that academic staff do appreciate the efforts being made by the colleges to provide on-going professional development opportunities. However, there were complaints from some of the staff that the provision of staff development opportunities was marred by lack of equality of opportunity. It also emerged that the promotion process was not clearly defined as no policies on promotion existed in the colleges. There was lack of transparency in the way promotions are handled. In addition to this, the academic staff were not satisfied with the existing working conditions such as the excessive workload which is a result of staff shortages. The academic staff felt stressed and expressed that in practice, long teaching hours left them with no time to engage in any meaningful research. The combination of time constraints and lack of funding made it difficult for staff to engage in meaningful research activities. There were feelings of unfair treatment from staff from underrepresented groups. Low morale caused by lack of opportunities for on-going professional development among some of the academic staff affects the implementation of TNE programmes. Some staff felt that they were left behind the latest developments in their fields as well as in pedagogy and the use of new technologies in teaching and learning contexts and this affected their effectiveness.

Student academic support services

Academic support services include registry (student admission), foundation programme, teaching and learning resources, library and IT services. This constitutes an important element of the teaching and learning process. A number of themes emerged from the study including how private colleges lower student entry requirements to increase numbers of students admitted on programmes and the ineffectiveness of the foundation programme offered to students in preparation for undergraduate studies. The study shows that the type of students enrolled in the

colleges require a significant amount of academic support. The majority of students rely mostly on the teachers and one of the major challenges that the colleges in this study face is the lack of English language proficiency as well as study skills. The study showed that most of the students enrolled on the programmes come with very low grades in English language. This tends to affect the quality of programme implementation as students struggle to cope with the demands of international degree programmes. The academic staff indicated that they have to make adjustments in their teaching in order to operate at the level of the majority of their students which might mean compromising on the expected standards of the international degree programmes.

In addition, the results of this study appear to show that the foundation programme has not been effective in terms of bridging the gap that exists between secondary and higher education. There was a feeling that the time allocated to conduct a full foundation programme is not enough given the level of students who enrol on the programme. Currently, the foundation programme ranges from one to one and a half years and the academic staff feel that this time should be doubled to ensure that all the students with very low grades can be fully equipped for graduate level studies. This might be helpful but I think there is need to ensure that the basic education curriculum is looked at closely to enhance the curriculum. In this case, the MOHE will have to work closely with the Ministry of Education to rethink the curriculum.

Regarding the teaching resources, there was evidence that the available resources met the requirements of the TNE programmes on offer. Both colleges possess adequate teaching and learning resources; adequate numbers of classrooms, well-equipped laboratories, and in-class audio-visual systems to support teaching and learning activities. It appears that both colleges have invested heavily in library, IT facilities, and this facilitates the provision of TNE programmes. The study findings also show that the external partners help the local colleges by giving students access to online resources in their libraries which helps them to access latest journals and other useful learning and research materials.

Commitment to the provision of high quality education

My study generated mixed views from the teachers regarding the provision of quality education under the TNE programmes. It emerged that, although primarily private institutions are profit making organisations, a good balance was being achieved in the colleges to ensure that teaching resources, the necessary facilities such as IT services and library, classrooms and other facilities for students' extracurricular activities, are available. On the other hand, those academic staff who were critical of management practices pointed to heavy workloads for staff, lack of strong links between the college and industry to inform curriculum design, limited interaction with alumni, recruitment of students with poor academic results, and a lack of serious involvement of external partners in the delivery of the curriculum, as indicators of a lack of the colleges' commitment to the development of a quality culture. In general, there was a feeling among this group of academic staff in both colleges that the colleges were much more concerned with profit than the delivery of good quality education. Although the comments by this group of academic staff might sound harsh, it is true that for the TNE programmes to continue to be relevant, it is vitally important to ensure the development of a quality culture. If the working conditions are not attractive, this will have a negative impact on the implementation of TNE programmes. In general, more than 70% of the academic staff in both colleges were not satisfied with their working conditions. For instance, they raised concerns regarding the long working hours citing that on average they were teaching for more than 20 hours a week. In the other public institutions in the country, academic staff had shorter teaching hours per week of up to 12 hours. The other problem linked with teaching was the lack of clearly defined policies on workload and module allocation in both colleges. There were feelings of unfair treatment by staff from underrepresented groups. This included unfair practices in timetabling and module allocation as well as unequal opportunities for staff development and promotion into senior positions within the colleges. There is, therefore, need to supervise how all the academic staff are allocated modules and to ascertain whether staff development and promotion in these colleges is being done fairly.

8.3.3. Research question three: From an academic staff perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the implementation of TNE programmes in private colleges in Oman?

My study sought to identify the key factors that were affecting the implementation of the TNE with a view to establishing ways of enhancing TNE provision in the private colleges in Oman. In this regard, a number of factors were identified and these include: leadership in the local colleges, the role of the MOHE in Oman, the nature of partnership between local and foreign HEIs, basic education and the type of students enrolled, curriculum design and cultural differences, and economic factors.

Leadership or "top management" has been identified as a key factor for the effective implementation of TNE programmes. The academic staff had a clear understanding of what top management should do to facilitate the implementation of the TNE programmes. For instance, the problem of heavy workloads, lack of sensitivity to the welfare of academic staff, admission of students with poor results, compromising of quality standards in a bid to accommodate students, and a lack of time for academic staff to engage in personal professional development and in research activities. The academic staff felt that top management should address all these issues in order to promote effective implementation of the TNE programmes. Surely, effective leadership plays an important role in the implementation of the TNE programmes. It was highlighted that the leadership in the private colleges should safeguard academic staff and promote the creation of conducive working conditions which should include but not limited to attractive salaries, reasonable teaching hours, equal opportunities for staff development and admission of competent students onto the international degree programmes. As can be seen here, the issues that require effective leadership cannot be addressed by the college leadership single-handedly. All the key stakeholders, for example, the MOHE and the foreign partners should collaborate with the private colleges to ensure that the academic staff's welfare is looked into and that the conditions of work are attractive.

The MOHE constitutes one of the key players in the implementation of TNE in Oman. It is responsible for approving the establishment of private HEIs and has a supervisory role to ensure the provision of good quality degree programmes.

However, the study revealed that the MOHE was not doing enough in terms of monitoring and evaluating the TNE programmes. The MOHE should do more in terms of supervision of the implementation of the TNE programmes ensuring that the local and foreign partner institutions adhere to the partnership agreement details. Academic staff felt that the MOHE should be more closely involved with the monitoring of teaching and learning conditions to make sure that the academics' working conditions are up to standard and that the development of a quality culture remains a top priority in the private HEIs. In contrast, during my informal conversations with some of the senior management members from the private colleges it emerged that they felt that the MOHE should stay away from the daily academic matters of private education institutions. The private colleges preferred to be autonomous rather than have the MOHE interfering with their day to day business. It appears that the level of participation of the MOHE merits further discussion among the key stakeholders to help define the extent to which the MOHE should be involved. The study revealed the need to avoid bureaucratic processes which prolong decision-making processes and result in delays in the making of necessary changes aimed at improving the quality of TNE programmes. The academic staff in private colleges felt that if colleges were given more autonomy, this would speed up processes of change and also enable the staff to engage with teaching related issues directly.

Basic education system and the type of students enrolled had an enormous influence on the quality of delivery of the TNE programmes. Private higher education colleges enrolled students with lower quality results compared to those enrolled in public institutions. My study established that academic staff felt that most of the students in private colleges struggled to cope with the demands of international degree programmes. For instance, students faced challenges with the use of English Language, which is the medium of instruction, and did not have well developed study skills to help them cope with their studies. Based on my study findings it might be useful to examine the provision of basic education and assess ways of preparing secondary school graduates more effectively for higher education studies. This calls for collaboration between the MOHE and the MOE to promote serious consideration of the contents and scope of the basic education curriculum.

The nature of academic relationship between private colleges in Oman and the foreign partner University was cited as one of the most important factors for the success of TNE. The study revealed that the existing academic relationships between the local colleges and external universities were limited in their scope, focusing mainly on course validation, moderation of examinations and awarding of degrees. The study participants felt that there should be much more to this, for instance, provision of staff development opportunities, staff and student exchange programmes and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the programmes to ensure their currency and relevance to the country's social and economic needs. In other words, foreign partners should play a pivotal role in supporting the development of a quality culture in the implementation of the academic programmes in hosting colleges. The foreign partners can share their wealth of experience gained over many years of delivering these programmes with the relatively young private colleges in Oman. This is consistent with the government's policy which seeks to provide good quality higher education to its citizens by capitalising on the expertise of the foreign Universities.

Lack of intercultural awareness, in particular, the academic staff's lack of understanding of the Omani students' culture, was shown to be one of the main factors that appear to affect the implementation of the TNE programmes. Most of the academic staff did not have an understanding of the students' cultural and social background and how the students can be supported to learn effectively. Teachers from western cultures expected students to be independent and critical thinkers, yet, Omani students have not been sufficiently equipped with these skills and attitudes to learning during their compulsory basic education. These students grow up in a society that places emphasis on collaboration, helping each other and having respect for elders which makes it difficult for them to be critical in and outside the classroom. There is, therefore, need to provide the academic staff with comprehensive induction which focuses not only on teaching and learning issues but which offers staff opportunities to understand the students' socio-cultural background.

Limited financial resources emerged as one of the key factors affecting the implementation of TNE programmes in Oman. The private higher education colleges relied mainly on tuition fees for the funding of most of their operations which include the provision of learning materials, staff salaries and infrastructural development. As a result, the colleges were unable to provide competitive working conditions to staff (such as good salaries and good staff accommodation options), hence, making it difficult to attract highly qualified staff to teach on the programmes. Most of the academic staff employed in the two colleges had a Master's degree qualification and very few had PhDs. The ideal situation is to have more PhD holders than Master's degree holders in the teaching team. Here the assumption is that the higher the academic qualification, the deeper the level of understanding of content and other skills which can help enhance students' learning experience. This is proving to be a big challenge due to financial constraints, colleges realise that PhD holders expect higher salaries which they cannot afford to give. Failure by the private colleges to offer competitive salaries and to make the working conditions more attractive resulted in high staff turnover. This affected the quality of programme delivery and students' learning experience.

Working with different stakeholders including the MOHE, the external university partners, the Ministry of Manpower as well as captains of industry and quality assurance agencies appear to pose problems and challenges to the local colleges in implementing TNE programmes. This creates problems such as management of quality assurance and decision making in updating the current curricula. The colleges cited problems including bureaucratic processes they have to go through before decisions such as changing the module structure and content can be made. This causes unnecessary delays which impact on the effectiveness of the programme delivery. It is important for the colleges and their partner Universities to work out effective ways of dealing with the other key stakeholders such as the MOHE to ensure that the efficiency of their academic activities is not compromised.

8.3.5. Research question four: From an academic staff perspective, what measures can be taken to improve TNE in private colleges in Oman?

The participants in my study reflected on a number of key issues that they felt needed to be looked into in order to improve the quality of education in the implementation of TNE programmes. Suggestions made focused on the role of the hosting Omani local private colleges, the role of the sending external partner universities, and the role of the MOHE as a representative of the government. The study also provided some suggestions that focused on the improvement of the design of TNE programmes. The key suggestions are summarised below. Although the suggestions made have been categorised in broad groups, it is important to appreciate that all the ideas for improvement should be looked at collectively as they are all closely connected.

Foreign partner universities

The study established that there is a need to rethink the role of the external universities in the way they work with local colleges. The need to explore areas where more could be done was highlighted. The academic staff in the local colleges expected the foreign partners to be involved in the decisions around allocation of modules to staff to ensure that this is done objectively. This sounds good but can be a big ask for the external Universities as they also struggle to deal with similar concerns in their own backyard. They could provide advice and support, however, the local colleges should work closely with the MOHE to ensure that there are clear guidelines for recruitment and allocation of staff in the academic departments. Another suggestion that emerged from this study is that external universities should provide opportunities for staff and student exchange programmes as well as the exchange of teaching and learning material resources according to the needs of the local colleges. This might call for the review of memorandum of agreement documents if the existing agreements do not cover such activities. As indicated by the study findings, the implementation of TNE programmes depends on the nature of partnership between the local colleges and the foreign partners.

Omani private colleges

The study findings highlighted the need for the local colleges to put in place different support mechanisms for both academic staff and students including a systematic review of the programmes on offer. To ensure that academic staff deliver their programmes effectively, it was suggested that the local colleges should create conducive working conditions to retain their staff and maintain continuity on the programmes. The local colleges need to recruit adequate teaching staff to ensure that modules are delivered by people who are experts in their fields. Understandably, it can be a challenge to find experts for each module, however, ongoing continuous professional development opportunities should be in place to help support the academic staff to handle modules they teach with confidence to avoid compromising students' learning experience. This calls for an exploration into new ways of generating the needed funding for staff recruitment or further training, otherwise, this would remain a dream. In addition, staff need to be provided with opportunities for training in research and other areas of interest. According to the academic staff, one other key area that should be addressed by the local colleges is related to curriculum development. There were concerns that programmes were not being reviewed properly to ensure that content, teaching methods and assessments were aligned with student needs and societal expectations. As a result, the academic staff suggested that programme review should be prioritised by the local colleges. An example of the programme that needed reviewing is the foundation programme which was shown to be inadequate and failing to prepare students effectively for the undergraduate studies.

The role of the MOHE

The participating academic staff suggested that the MOHE should monitor and evaluate the implementation of the TNE programmes in a more comprehensive and systematic way compared to the current practice. The academic staff wanted to see the MOHE involved in defining guidelines for the creation of conducive working conditions in their work places. This includes but not limited to the quality of the academic staff, the workload, salaries, promotions and the provision of teaching and learning resources. This study revealed a lack of communication between HE and

Basic Education in determining a consistent set of requirements to support and prepare students for HE. Some of the problems bedevilling the implementation of the TNE programmes were traceable to the deficiencies in the Basic Education system. The academic staff in my study felt that the MOHE should work in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to identify the gaps and act to address any concerns. There is, therefore, need for the MOHE to work hand in glove with other organisations to come up with plans to ensure the country produces the experts needed on the job market.

TNE programme design

To ensure that colleges are introducing relevant programmes, the MOHE was expected to conduct a needs analysis on a regular basis so that it can provide expert advice to colleges when designing new programmes. It is important for the new programmes to address the societal needs within a global context. For example, the MOHE should forecast the required job skills to encourage educational programme designers to embed the development of key attributes that can help graduates to compete favourably on the job market. The importance of authenticity in content and student learning that reflects on their culture cannot be overemphasised.

Promoting learner autonomy among local students

The TNE programmes being implemented in private colleges in Oman are designed to mirror the western culture. This was shown to present some challenges to the Omani students whose cultural background is different. For instance, the western curricula places emphasis on critical thinking and learner autonomy, among other attributes. The academic staff felt the need to inculcate these attributes right from the basic education level among the Omani students to ensure that they are better prepared to undertake the international degree programmes. For the academic staff to be able to promote the development of learner autonomy, it is imperative for them to be autonomous as well. This means, efforts to enhance the development of learner autonomy should be linked to similar efforts aimed at developing teacher autonomy. In addition, this also underscores the need for important synergies to be established

between the MOHE and the MOE to ensure that a carefully designed basic education curriculum can be produced that addresses the concerns raised in my study that focus on the development of study skills.

As can be gleaned in the preceding paragraphs, efforts to improve the implementation of TNE programmes should involve the collaboration of all the different stakeholders. The following section highlights the strengths of my study.

8.4. Strengths of the Study

The study generated and analysed the views of various academic staff from two private HEIs in Oman where the academic staff from different backgrounds enriched the findings. I selected two colleges with similar characteristics and the participants from each college were carefully selected to reflect a range of views and to provide enough data to reach justifiable conclusions regarding my research questions. The advantages of using multiple-case designs are considered to be better than using a single-case design as suggested by Yin (2009). The inclusion of various participants from different backgrounds has been approved as an element that can lead to have fruitful and rich data (Mason, 2002; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Yin, 2011).

I also hold the view that my study findings would be helpful to different stakeholders (including MOHE, private colleges and external Universities) who are likely to gain important insights of the nature of issues and challenges surrounding the implementation of TNE as well as benefits and opportunities that could be obtained. In addition, the study addressed the TNE from different aspects including programme design (curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning), the influence of macro and micro elements in the implementation of TNE such as the local education system, sociocultural context, and the working environment of institutions where the programmes are delivered.

Furthermore, the fact that I had practical experience of working within the higher education sector in Oman can be considered as a strength because my existing relationships helped me to gain access to a variety of participants. In the same vein,

my knowledge of the people and private HEIs made it easy for me to identify the appropriate institutions to work within the conduct of my study. This helped me to work with staff in a relaxed atmosphere which made it possible to generate different narratives. The data were gathered using a combination of interviews and secondary sources including documents from the MOHE and colleges and these sources made the study findings credible. On the other hand, my previous position in the MOHE constituted a challenge during fieldwork as I had to explain and make a clear distinction between my study and my job in the MOHE. The management in the colleges wanted to treat me as an official from the MOHE, however, I was clear about the ethical principles of conducting research, for instance, I made it clear that I was a researcher-qua-researcher and that no one was under any obligation to participate in the study. Apart from the stated challenges, this study potentially constituted an important contribution to educational studies in Oman as it provided important insights into the implementation of TNE programmes across the country.

8.5. The Contributions of this Study

Given the dearth of research studies focusing on TNE in Oman, this study is an important addition to literature on TNE in general and in particular, to the literature on TNE programme implementation and practices in Oman. The study provides new findings about TNE as well as confirming results from previous studies.

To my knowledge, this is one of the first studies in which academic staff were asked about their views regarding transnational education issues within private providers. Therefore, the study adds academic staff voice that is seldom heard in this type of research. The study provides both a theoretical and an empirical basis for better understanding of the benefits of international agreements between HEIs from developed and developing countries. The study established comprehensively that there are many advantages that Oman has derived from hosting TNE programmes, including the acceleration of the development of the higher education system and national capacity building over a short period of time. However, there are factors and obstacles that have influenced the provision of quality TNE programmes. In this context, the study is a potential and a significant contribution to the contemporary

overall transnational education debate and issues particularly in relation to developing nations such as Oman. The study enriches the debate on the potential value of TNE programmes and highlights the importance of being sensitive to issues that arise when academic pedagogy is implemented in different educational systems. The thesis will be made available via the MOHE website and I am hoping that the findings of the study will be published in journals, book chapters and conference papers.

From the results of this exploratory study, there are clear indications that cultural factors, the working environment, and the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation of adherence to the policy guidelines by the MOHE are some of the major factors impacting on the implementation of transnational education in Oman. In addition, the thesis contributed to reshape my own view of the way TNE is working in Oman and this could lead to change of practice in the way the MOHE addresses issues around the provision of quality education in private HEIs. Finally, my study provides a platform for further research in the field of TNE.

8.6. Limitations

Purposefully selected study cases of private colleges were utilised where various data were gathered, analysed and synthesized in order to provide a "rich picture" of the issues arising in those settings. Therefore, the findings in this study context are specific and could not be generalised to every context or situation. However, the findings provide important insights into similar institutions where TNE programmes are being implemented. Extracts from the data provided together with the analysis would enable researchers to judge the transferability of the findings to various settings or situations.

According to Bryman (2012) many qualitative researchers focus on their participants' interpretations of social reality. The study explored a specific group of actors, namely academic staff, in a specific context through detailed contextual analysis. To get a broader view of TNE, the views of other stakeholders especially students, senior administrative staff in the colleges and people in charge of partner

universities, especially in areas such as quality assurance and international partnerships has the potential to add valuable insights, providing opportunities for extending this study. In its current form, the study would be beneficial to other researchers who investigate TNE in Oman or beyond.

8.7. Personal Reflections

At a personal level, conducting such a piece of research has a professional developmental impact on me as both a policy-maker and an educational researcher. My previous research at the Master's degree level was mainly involved with descriptive statistical analysis. My doctoral journey has been the first huge experience of being engaged and immersed in enormous volumes of data and literature. Thus, the study has developed my capacity and skills in research methodology and methods as well as the enrichment of my knowledge about the TNE and the implementation of international academic programmes in Oman.

In terms of research skills, this journey enabled me to develop into a more experienced practitioner in research ethics and data management. I engaged thoroughly in the qualitative data collection and analysis during the conduct of my study. The doctoral journey has significantly improved my skills in designing and implementing educational research projects. The completion of this research has boosted my confidence and assisted me to go beyond the fear of failure. Carrying out this study helped me to believe in myself more and to learn many skills including the cultivation of a strong conviction that even the impossible can be possible.

My work experience in the MOHE mainly involved engaging with senior administrative staff in the private HEIs. The doctoral journey has been my first time experience of engaging with academic staff who are experts in their different disciplines as well as focusing on academic issues such as the implementation of TNE programmes on a daily basis. Regarding the effect of this research on my personal knowledge, it made me aware of the potential value of TNE, the obstacles and the factors that influence the effective implementation of programmes. I strongly feel that the provision of good quality education is a shared responsibility which

involves different stakeholders across countries, in particular, in HEIs, international/regional organisations and governments. In addition, adapting/adopting "western style of teaching and learning" into new cultural contexts should be carefully investigated as cultural factors might constitute a barrier in the delivery of good quality TNE programmes. I have seen many people who just think adopting developed curricula from "reputable western universities" is an easy way to produce qualified graduates without looking carefully at the other important factors. This expectation from curriculum designers in TNE has threatened the development of international academic partnerships in Oman and other countries as revealed from literature. In addition, I have distanced myself from an earlier naive perception of TNE programmes being unproblematic with the only requirement to have instructors who can work to achieve straightforward programme objectives. I have come to appreciate the role of culture of the local education system, and the impact of the working environment on the success of TNE implementation. For instance, concepts such as students' critical thinking skills and learner-centred approaches should be introduced with great care and awareness of the type of students, that is, their background is vitally important. I had underestimated the importance of the socio-cultural context in the successful implementation of TNE in the era of globalisation where the "world has become a small village" with developments in communications technology and transportation. However, The PhD experience has enabled me to realise that TNE education is more than adopting advanced programmes and syllabi, these need to be contextualised so they can be relevant and compatible to societal settings and expectations.

Finally, I understand that resource constraints have affected private colleges in their effort to implement these international academic programmes. As part of my job in the MOHE, I feel I am now better placed to advise colleagues on TNE matters than before. The following section discusses the implications of the study findings.

8.8. The Implications of the Study Findings

It is my hope that this thesis would add value to the development of TNE in Oman by triggering a new way of thinking about the nature of TNE and the surrounding educational environment in the country in order to enhance the quality of education in private HEIs.

I hope the insights from this study are likely to inform the MOHE staff who are responsible for TNE programmes. In Chapter 1, I explained my earlier professional role as a director in charge of educational services in the Ministry of Higher Education, thus, my study could contribute to reforms of supervision of private HEIs. The study has highlighted a number of issues that could be included in discussions around the monitoring and evaluation of TNE programmes in the country. It is, therefore, my intention to make the thesis findings accessible to the private HEIs and to the MOHE in Oman. This would enable the different stakeholders to consider the key issues involved when seeking to enhance the quality of TNE in the country.

8.9. Suggestions for Further Research

The word limitation and the main purpose of this study did not allow me to present in more detail the study findings of the historical aspects of the two private colleges. My study focused on exploring how academic staff experience and view the implementation of TNE programmes in their specific contexts. Other interesting areas for future research could be the output of TNE in terms of students' skills and competences and the labour market demands. Other studies could investigate the experiences of senior and administrative staff in Omani HEIs and partner universities engaging with TNE as well as how partner Universities contribute to maintaining quality TNE programmes in the Omani context. Finally, more studies focusing on curriculum content and practices such as pedagogy/teaching methods, knowledge, assessment, skills and evaluation procedures, could shed light on issues of how local knowledge and practices can be infused into the TNE programmes.

8.10. Recommendations

8.10.1. There should be effective communication and trust between the local and foreign partner providers at all levels for the success of TNE programmes.

In order to minimise the tensions which are inevitable in any partnership as shown in my study, the development of effective communication between sending and receiving institutions is critical. It is important to ensure that both parties are clear about every aspect of the partnership including a clear understanding of the context of relationships as well as the goals, objectives, academic structures, and an understanding of the political and socio-cultural context. Necessary steps to modify the agreements and adapt to the context are important for the success of the partnerships. As my study established, all key stakeholders[2] should be aware of the nature of the academic relationship, the scope of services, and the role of each partner in the TNE. It appears that teachers were expecting services that were not included in the agreements between the colleges and their UK partners, for example, staff and student exchange programmes. This underscores the need for clarity of the nature of partnerships for all stakeholders. It is also important to establish and maintain contacts with all stakeholders to share the information and improve the links between academic and administrative staff. To ensure the transparency of the role and type of academic partnership, information should be shared effectively among all key stakeholders. In addition, it is important to encourage staff to communicate with their colleagues at the sending university to facilitate sharing of ideas for effective teaching and assessment of the modules on the TNE programmes.

Undertaking of visits between host and home countries is highly important in building effective relationships. More importantly, is the need to include students in academic exchange programmes. Furthermore, involving academic staff in research activities and providing easy access to resources, for example, database of foreign partner universities will help to build capacity of local HEIs. Inclusion of some of the foreign university members in the Board of Trustees, College Board, or Board of

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[2] Stakeholders refer to all those involved in the TNE programmes at the strategic, management and practice level.

Directors can be a useful way to facilitate exchange of ideas, knowledge, and perspectives on different issues.

Building of mutual trust, and the encouragement and demonstration of commitment between partners mean that quality should be part of everyday practice. In this case, both parties should adhere to written or verbal contracts as well as demonstrate mutual expectation of honesty and benevolence between the parties. Quality assurance system could provide a platform for mutual trust and mutual cooperation.

8.10.2. It is important to recognise the need to have more creative and effective consultation and supervision from government and foreign partners on assuring TNE quality provision.

In transnational education, quality assurance is one of the main challenges for policy makers. In Oman, as the country is in the process of developing its quality assurance system and accreditation, the government has invested its trust in the quality of the foreign HE partners. However, As the study shows, there is need for additional national initiatives on assuring quality of TNE provision. Initiatives such as strengthening of international cooperation and networking, building comprehensive frameworks for quality assurance systems could be some of the government's focus in building an effective higher education system. There is need for a stricter quality assurance system and a more systematic regulatory system to be put in place.

An effort should be made to develop the country's capacity-building framework which should be an important part of the overall strengthening of national qualified staff who are able to work in higher education environment tackling the challenges raised by the growth and diversity of TNE programmes. The MOHE should review current regulation in order to enhance quality of education. It is important to review regulation such as the role and expectation of foreign partner universities, academic to student's ratio, and academic working conditions. The MOHE should strengthen the links and collaboration with sending HEIs and enhance the mutual understanding of different systems and context of higher education. In the meantime, it is essential

that the government continues to work on sustaining and strengthening the existing OAAA as a national accreditation body that is responsible for monitoring and assessing the quality of higher education provision in the country and providing adequate information to the public.

Foreign partner universities should monitor teaching, learning, assessment, and staff recruitment to ensure qualified academic staff are employed to deliver the TNE programmes effectively. Revising the way and level of monitoring, sharing good practices, inter-institutional networks, and mentoring and training systems are examples of ways of building robust relationships between institutions. Involving academic staff in any academic visits, listening to the feedback and suggestions and involving them in any academic and pedagogical issues can help to improve the quality of TNE provision. The follow-up after evaluation to ensure suggested improvements are put in place are highly recommended. Bench-marking is another set of tools that should be adopted by HEIs to achieve sustainable efficiency and productivity. More important, the supervision should be based on the agreed principles, standards, and norms of conduct.

8.10.3. In order to run their international programmes effectively, private colleges need to source adequate funding to be able to hire and retain highly qualified staff with PhD, develop effective Foundation programmes, and to create a conducive working environment.

In the era of globalization in which the economic climate is unstable and public funds for HE have decreased all over the world, private HEIs have to diversify their sources of revenue to overcome financial constraints. All private HEIs are required to carry out strategic planning and prepare their mid-term and long-term business plans. In order to vary their income sources, private HEIs could provide different services such as community consultancy and conduct research in public or private organisations. Private HEIs could also get benefit from the facilities and educational infrastructure by providing evening courses and on the job training opportunities. Furthermore, private HEIs can encourage foreign students to come and study in Omani to generate extra income for their institutions.

Staffing remains one of the biggest challenges facing TNE in Oman and other parts of the world. Delivering TNE programmes effectively and efficiently depends largely on highly qualified staff. This is confirmed by Shams and Huisman (2016) who contend that the quality of service depends highly on the quality of faculty. In other words, employing academics with low-level qualifications could harm the educational services in cross-border activities and this may lead to the undermining of confidence in professional qualifications on the job market in the long run. In this context, both MOHE and foreign partner universities should recognize the critical role of the qualified faculty and the creation of good working conditions that foster the delivery of good quality TNE programmes. It is important to recognize that quality teaching and research is made possible by the availability of good quality of faculty and the quality of their working conditions. A partner university has to keep a heavy hand on the approval of academic staff in Omani partner colleges and keep monitoring the recruitment of good quality staff. It is highly important to support good working conditions and terms of service. A competence model of education should be introduced in Omani HE system in order to improve the quality of provision of cross-border higher education. And Finally, encouraging potential students to ask appropriate questions prior to enrolling in private HEIs and TNE programmes is important in raising quality and competition among the institutions.

Reforming foundation programme is one way of improving the level of English language and study skills of enrolling students. In my experience, lack of language skills needed on the labour market is considered to be one of the main challenge facing graduates of TNE programmes which might damage the reputation of Western HEIs degrees in the long run. Therefore, private HEIs need to review their Foundation programmes in terms of content and length of study. Providing English language support at different academic levels could also help students to achieve the necessary language proficiency.

8.10.4. As part of curriculum development process, academic programmes should be reviewed on a regular basis to ascertain their alignment with local context and relevance to the country's socio-economic development.

The study revealed that Omani private colleges are given a degree of autonomy from partner universities in the area of curriculum design in which Partner university is responsible for overseeing the curriculum design. By default, academic programmes should be reviewed on a regular basis to be updated and matched with the developments in the relevant knowledge and skills. However, delivering TNE programmes with the same quality standards of partner university while at the same time ensuring that the programmes are relevant and appropriate in the social contexts is a hard task. The approach requires collaboration and commitment from both parties. A strong rapport between students and lecturers is also needed to build up a level of trust so that effective advice and counselling can be provided.

In order to meet the requirements of employers for graduates who are 'fit for purpose', HEIs need to modify the curriculum and how it is taught and assessed. For such a change, however, significant investment in staff development and monitoring of the change process is necessary. Tracing students and conducting graduation surveys has to be developed and used to improve graduate quality. It is also important to elicit workplace feedback with a view to improving academic programmes, ensuring a close link between graduate attributes and the labour market needs. To be aligned with local context, levels of contextualisation in curriculum are necessary. For example, the adjustments can include providing case studies based on country context. Localisation is also important in some teaching materials such as humanities and social sciences and examples should reflect local people in their daily lives. Finally, all academic programmes offered in higher education should be in alignment with local socio-economic development and address the labour market needs. This means private HEIs should be flexible and possess the dynamic capabilities to drive change in their academic programmes to fit with socio-economic development and job market demands both nationally and internationally.

8.10.5. TNE programmes should recognise the centrality of the academic staff in the curriculum development process and TNE programmes implementation

Academic staff should be involved in the development of curriculum and teaching methods as well as play an active role in promoting quality and lead the improvement of cross-border higher education learning outcomes. The views of academic staff who are in the front line of the teaching process are also important in curriculum development. Therefore, bottom-up approaches to curriculum development should be prioritised. In addition, industry sector and student feedback is also valuable in revision of academic programmes and in modifying the curriculum to fit with the prevailing socio-economic context.

8.10.6. Partner Universities should conduct thorough investigations during their visits to hosting colleges to ensure that the Omani colleges are adhering to the academic partnership agreements.

As an awarding body, the parent university should share the responsibility for offering the same quality of education in the receiving partner college. To make sure that Omani private colleges provide education comparable to sending countries, conducting an evaluation of educational service is essential for foreign partner universities to make sure that Omani HEIs obtain academic standards in delivering TNE programmes. The partner university should be checking whether the Omani college maintains the standards that are agreed in the contracts. Giving feedback to the MOHE on the effectiveness of implementation and recommendations for improvement is crucial for improving the quality of TNE in the country. Furthermore, Omani private HEIs should take full responsibility to ensure that recommendations for improvement and guidance provided by their partner HEIs are implemented effectively.

8.10.7. Finally, the MOHE and the MOE should work together to find ways of ensuring that students are equipped with skills and competences that are needed in higher education, in particular, in TNE programmes.

One of the main challenges facing TNE in Oman is a mismatch between recent secondary school outputs and higher education demands. In general, students with low attainment levels enrolling in private HEIs, lack the requisite competence and study skills. In this context, the existing school system recognizes teacher-centred pedagogy, testing memorization of information, and rigid bureaucratic structures. Therefore, linking basic education to higher education sector is essential if any progress is to be made. This could be done by increasing awareness of active learning approaches. Introducing effective ways of teaching, learning and assessment among stakeholders including teachers, students, administrative people and parents is necessary. And secondly, by taking action on reforming basic education curricula and pedagogy and modernising the school system as a whole to meet the demands of the contemporary society.

The programmes should be designed to offer a core curriculum plus a number of electives from which students can choose. This means there is need to develop textbooks and teacher guides to be aligned with programmes development. Shifting towards increasing autonomous learning and critical thinking is essential to build national capacity. Assessments should be designed to be less on rote learning (memorisation) and rely more on critical thinking and innovation. This approach is needed to persuade both teachers and senior administrative staff in the MoE about the importance of change as well as training teachers sufficiently in the new system. Encouraging teachers to engage in lifelong learning and training them in the use of student-centred approaches and use of modern learning resources is the cornerstone for reforming education. Classroom organization should reflect student-centred approach. Providing learning resources, teaching materials, computers, and sufficient and equipped lab is needed in schools. Obviously, this is not an easy task as it is costly and time-consuming. Academic and researchers in HEIs in Oman can help in guiding and consulting with the basic education sector to bring about the necessary changes.

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314

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Private HEIs and their Foreign Partners' Universities

No	University/ College	Year of Establis hment	Area	Programmes offering	Academic Affiliation
1	Majan College	1995	Muscat	Business, computer sciences, English language	University of Bedfordshire, UK
2	Modern College of Business & Science	1996	Muscat	Business & economics, computer science	1. University of Missouri-St.Louis-USA 2. Bond University- Australia
3	Caledonian College of Engineering	1996	Muscat	Engineering, science	Glasgow Caledonian University- UK
4	Muscat College	1997	Muscat	Computer science, business	1. Scottish Qualifications Authority- UK 2. Sterling University- UK
5	International College of Engin.& Management	1998	Muscat	Fire safety engineering, engineering, facilities management	University of Central Lancashire UK
6	Al-Zahra College for Girls	1999	Muscat	Business, computer sciences, English language, design	Al-Ahlia Amman University- Jordan
7	Mazoon College for Management & Applied	1999	Muscat	Business, computer science, English language	University of Missouri-Rolla-USA

	Sciences				
8	Oman Medical College	2001	Muscat	Medicine, pharmacology	West Virginia University-USA
9	Waljat Colleges of Applied Sciences	2001	Muscat	Computer science, electronics, business	Birla Institute of Technology-India
10	Sur College	2001	Sur	Business & commerce, computer sciences	Bond University, Australia
11	Oman Tourism & Hospitality Academy	2001	Muscat	Tourism & hospitality management	University of Applied Management Science. International Institute of Tourism & Management (ITM)- Austria
12	Sohar University	2001	Sohar	Business, computer sciences, engineering, education	University of Queensland- Australia.
13	Middle East College	2002	Muscat	Information technologies, electronics, design	-Manipal Academy for Higher Education- India -Coventry university, UK
14	Nizwa University	2004	Nizwa	Arts & science, engineering, business, pharmacy & nursing	Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Jordanian University, Jordan Oregon State University, USA Leipzig University, Germany University of Exeter, UK University of Reading, UK
15	Dhofar University	2004	Salalah	Arts & applied science, business & commerce, engineering	American University of Beirut, Lebanon
16	Gulf College	2004		Business & commerce, computer science	University of Staffordshire-UK University of Hull, UK University of Reading, UK
17	Al-Buraimi College	2003/2004	Al-Buraimi	English Language, business, computer science	California State University-Northridge, USA

18	Oman college of Management & Technology	2004	Barka	Business, interior design, computer science	Al- Yarmouk University- Jordan
19	Scientific College of Design	2004	Muscat	Graphic design, interior design, fine arts	Lebanese American University Lebanon
20	International Maritime College Oman	2005	Sohar	Marine engineering, port & transport management	Shipping & Transport College (STC) Group the Netherlands
21	German University of Technology in Oman	2006/2007	Muscat	Geosciences, tourism, urban planning & architecture	RWTH Aachen University, Germany
22	Arab Open University	2006/2007	Muscat	Business, English language & literature, computer sciences	Open University, UK
23	Oman Dental College	2006/2007	Muscat	Dental surgery	A.B Shetty Memorial Institute of Dental Sciences, India
24	Al-Bayan College	2006/2007	Muscat	English literature & language, journalism, public relations	Purdue University Calumet, USA
25	AL'Sharqiyah University	2010-2011	AL'Sharqiyah	Business, engineering, applied sciences	Oklahoma State University in the United States of America. Texas Tech University.
26	University of Buraimi	2010-2011	Buraimi	Business, engineering, health sciences, Law	Vienna University of Technology, Austria. IMC University of Applied Sciences (Krems), Campus University of Vienna, Austria. University of Bradford,

| 27 | Muscat University | 2015/2016 | Muscat | Business, Management, Engineering and Technology, Transport and Logistics | United Kingdom.

Cranfield University and Aston University.

MLS International College of Bournemouth. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2016

Appendix 2

List of the Main Documents

State policy documents	Ministry of HE	OAAA	Private HEIs
Royal Decree No. 74/2001 Establishing the Oman Accreditation Council	Regulations and guidelines for Establishing Private universities, Colleges and Higher Institutes	Oman Standard Classification for Education Framework (OSCED)	Student Guide for college (1) 2014-2015/
The basic statute of the state	Guide Academic Affiliations between Foreign and Omani Higher Education Institutions	Oman academic standards for general foundation programs	Student Guide for college (2) 2014-2015
Royal Decree No.65/98 Establishing the Council of Higher Education	Passage to higher education (quarterly Magazine issue by the MHE)	conceptual Design Framework for General Foundation Program Audit,2015	Quality assurance manual of the
Diwan of Royal Court Ministerial Decision No. 1/2002 Issuing Conditions and Regulations for Granting Lands to Private Higher Education Institutions	Application for Establishment of Private Higher Education Institution	Report of an Audit of college (1)	Programmes approval agreement between the UK University and college (2)
Diwan of Royal Court Ministerial Decision No. 2/2002 Issuing Conditions and Regulations for Offering Financial Grants to Private Universities	MoHE Report 2011 MoHE Report 2012 MoHE Report 2013 MoHE Report 2014	Report of an Audit of college (2)	The cooperation agreement between the UK University and college (1)
Royal Decree No. 67/2000	Guide induction	Quality Audit	Final report of the

(As amended by Royal decrees 25/2001 and 97/2001) On Some Provisions Related to Higher Education Institutions	program in Higher Education Institutions	Manual Institutional Accreditation: Stage1	institutional interview review meetings, April 2009 College (2)
Royal Decree No. 41/99 on Establishing private Universities	Regulatory Guide For Student Advisory Councils In The higher education institutions	Plan for an Omani Higher Education Quality Management System ("The Quality Plan")	
Royal Decree No. 65/98 established the Council of Higher Education in 1998	Academic programs for institutions of higher education guide 2014 - 2015		
Royal Decree No. 24/99 in 1999 regarding the establishment of colleges and higher institutions	Guide book of the entrepreneurship - creativity and innovation		
	Ministerial Decision No. 34/2000 concerning the Regulatory Ordinance for Private Colleges and higher institutes.		
	Higher education admission statistics 2013-2014		
	Standards, benchmarks and quality indicators to enhance the institutions' activities and performance: surveys and data analysis		

Appendix 3

Letter of Permission-Documents- MOHE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Higher Education
Directorate General of
Private Universities & Colleges

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التعليم العالي
المديرية العامة للجامعات والكليات الخاصة

Dear Al Abri Salim,

I am pleased to inform you that , as per your request, The Directorate General for Private Universities and Colleges (DGPUC) is pleased to provide you with the documents and data needed for your study.

The (DGPUC) places Full responsibility on you for the Protection and confidentiality of these documents .

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your study.

Yours sincerely

Lara Ghassan Obeidat

Acting General Director of Private Universities & Colleges

نحو تعليم عال ذي جودة عالية يلبي متطلبات التنمية المستدامة
سلطنة عُمان ص.ب: ٤٥ روي - الرمزالبريدي: ١١٣ - هاتف: ٢٤٣٤٠٣٦٨ / فاكس ٢٤٣٤٠٣٦٦
Sultanate of Oman, P.O.Box: 82 Ruwi, PC 112, Tel: 24340368 / Fax 24340366   www.mohe.gov.om

Appendix 4

Research Ethics Approval letter- University of Sheffield

The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Downloaded: 19/04/2015
Approved: 14/04/2015

Salim Al-Abry
Registration number: 130209773
School of Education
FCS Doctoral Programmes (2013~14)

Dear Salim

PROJECT TITLE: Transnational Higher Education in Oman: An investigation into the implementation of academic programmes in selected private colleges
APPLICATION: Reference Number 002041

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 14/04/2015 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 002041 (dated 09/04/2015).
- Participant information sheet 007025 (08/04/2015).
- Participant information sheet 005901 (26/02/2015).
- Participant consent form 003117 (21/10/2014).
- Participant consent form 003115 (21/10/2014).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix 6.1

Participants' Biographies - College One, Oman

No	Name Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Subject area	work exprt. in the college	Place of interview	Date/ time of interview
1	Namir	Male	HoD, professor	IT	13	In the College campus, his office	26 April 2015 9:00 AM
2	Malika	Female	HoD, associate professor, and quality assurance coordinator	Business Management	10	In the College campus, classroom, her office	30 April, 2015 10:00 am
3	Mohammed	Male	Senior lecturer	Business Management	8	In the College campus, classroom	30 April, 2015 12:00 am
4	Tahir	Male	Senior lecturer	Business Management	13	In the College campus, his office.	3 May, 2015 12:00 pm
5	Venice	Female	Senior lecturer	Business Management	4	In the College	10 May, 2015

						campus, classroom	10:00 am
6	Julia	Female	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Senior lecturer IT, programme coordinator	8	Majan College's classroom	11 May, 2015 10;30 am
7	Amina	Female	Senior lecturer and director of quality assurance	IT	4	In the College campus, her desk	18 May, 2015 9:30 am
8	Muller	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	4	In the College campus, his desk	20 May, 2015 10:00 AM
9	Alia	Female	Senior lecturer and member of quality assurance	English language studies	6	In the College campus, classroom	1st June, 2015 10:00 noon
10	Suad	Female	Lecturer	Englishs language studies	3	In the College campus, classroom	1st June, 2015 12:00 am
11	Tuba	Female	Senior lecturer	English language studies	11	In the College campus, classroom	2nd June, 2015 10:00 am

334

12	Maha	Female	Lecturer	Englis language studies	3	In the College campus, classroom	3rd June, 2015 10:00 am

Appendix 6.2

Participants' Biographies- College Two, Oman

No	Name Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Subject area	work experiences in the college	Place of interview	Date/time
1	Kerry	Female	Senior Lecturer	IT	7	In the College campus, classroom	5 May, 2015 10:00 AM
2	Naila	Female	Lecturer	IT	3		
3	Masood	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	3	In the College campus, classroom	5 May, 2015 1:00 After noon
4	Zana	Female	HoD, associate professor	Mathematic	3	In the College campus, the teacher's office	10 May, 2015 12:30 noon
5	Iva	Female	HoD, associate professor	Engineering	3	Costa café (in quiet	

6	Jones	Male	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Mathematic	4	place)	14 May, 2015 11:00 AM
7	Maria	Female	Senior lecturer and programme coordinator	Engineering	3	The College's library (in quiet suitable room)	17 May, 2015 9:00 AM
8	Rolla	Female	Senior lecturer and quality assurance coordinator	Mathematic	4	In the College campus, the teacher's office	17 May, 2015 12:00 Noon
9	Sonia	Female	Lecturer	IT	3	In the College campus, the teacher's office	19 May, 2015 10:00am
10	Leon	Male	lecturer	English language	3	In the College campus, the teacher's office	21 May, 2015 11:00
11	Ruby	Female	Lecturer	Mathematic	3	In the College campus, in the cozy room	27 May, 2015 11:00
12	Morgan	Female	Senior lecturer	IT	4	In the College campus, classroom	1st June, 2015 1:00
13	Roman	Male	Senior lecturer	IT	3	In the College campus, classroom	4 June, 2015 11:00 am

14	Rose	Female	Senior lecturer and quality assurance coordinator	English language	5		In the College campus, Her office	8 June, 2015 10:00 am
15	Mohan	Male	HE of Dep, associate professor	Management	5		In the College campus, His office	8 June, 2015 12:00 am

Appendix 7

Participant Information Sheet for Academic Staff

1.   Research Project Title:

Transnational Education: An Investigation into the Academic Staff Perceptions of Transnational Education in Selected Private colleges in Oman

2.   Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3.   What is the project's purpose?

The present study is being undertaken in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD course I am doing with the University of Sheffield. This means that the findings of the study will be used solely for academic purposes. I am interested in understanding the impact of the implementation of Transnational Education (TNE) in private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman. This includes issues around the nature of partnerships being established between local and external institutions, curriculum development (e.g. how the programmes are designed to meet local needs and international standards) as well as an exploration of any problems or challenges that might be faced in the delivery of the programme. The project shall be conducted from October 2014 to September 2017.

4.   Why have I been chosen?

You are working in the private college that is affiliated with UK universities. You have chosen for the following reasons:

> You have taught in the college for at least two years and you are willing to share your experience about delivering international programme in this college.
> Head of academic departments who in charge in quality of education and supporting implementing the international academic programmes.
> Programme coordinators in Omani private colleges who liaising with the UK's partner university.
> Head of quality assurance department/section in the college who in charge with the matter of quality of education in the college.

5.   Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

6.   What will happen to me if I take part?

I am interested in your views and these will be sought through the use of face to face interviews, which with your consent will be recorded. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

The schedule for the researcher's visits to your college will be negotiated with you in advance. You will not incur any travelling expenses for the researcher will be visiting you on site.

7.   What do I have to do?

Your participation in this study will not impose any restrictions on your lifestyle.

8.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Your participation in this study will not expose you to any risks or disadvantages.

9.   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will make a significant contribution to the development of transnational higher education in Oman. The study is likely to generate data that can enhance different stakeholders' understanding of the issues around the implementation of the TNE programmes which may result in a review of policies and/or regulations or conducting of further research.

10.   What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case the reason(s) will be explained to the participant.

11.   What if something goes wrong?

If there is concern about any aspect of this project it should be addressed in the first instance to the PhD student, Telephone: (+44) (0)7479714432 Email: skal-abry1@Sheffield.ac.uk

If they are not satisfied contact School of Education, General enquiries Tel: (0114) 222 8177 E: edu-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk

If they are not satisfied contact the tutor supervising the work, Dr. Vassiliki Papatsiba, v.papatsiba@sheffield.ac.uk

12.   Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

13. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

To the study is seeking to get some information about the implementation of international programmes in private higher education institutions in Oman and the issues around the implementation of the programmes. Some of the questions he raises include issues around the relevance of the programmes being delivered, the

quality of the programmes, and whether the local institutions in the country have got adequate resources to deliver the programmes effectively.

It is highly important to examine the experience of the people who are dealing with cross-border higher education such as academic staff, admin, and focal people in external partner universities. They can research can't complete without their opinion and view about delivering programmes through private higher education institutions

14.   What will happen to the results of the research project?

The research results will be published during the last year of study and participants will be informed in due course how they can obtain a copy of the publication.

15.   Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being funded by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman and under the University of Sheffield supervising.

16.   Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the Department of Educational Studies' ethics review procedure.

17.   Contact for further information

Salim K. AL Abry

Researcher, School of education, University of Sheffield

Ashton Point; Flat 5. 64 Upper Allen Street, Sheffield, UK

Telephone: (+44) (0)7479714432
Email: skal-abry1@Sheffield.ac.uk

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, School of Education, 388 Glossop Rd, S10 2JA. Telephone: (+44) (0)114 222 8101
Email: @Sheffield.ac.uk
Each participant will receive a copy of the information sheet and a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form.

Thank you for considering participating in this small scale study.

Appendix 8

Participant Consent Form

Example Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project:

Name of Researcher:

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential (<u>only if true</u>). I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5. I agree to take part in the above research project

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature
(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature
(*if different from lead researcher*)
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

_____   _____   _____
 Lead Researcher   Date   Signature
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed a dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any otl written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent fo should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a sect location.

Appendix 9

Academic Staff Interview Guide

Introductory session by researcher on his study in front of the participant including:

- Explain rationale and procedure
- Explain confidentiality
- Obtain verbal consent and check participant has signed consent form
- Ask if the participant has any questions

Rapport building
- Could we start by telling me a bit about yourself? Your professional background?
- How did you become involved in this private college? Length of time involved

Affiliation with the UK University

- As the college has an affiliation agreement with the UK University, what are rational and motivations to work with UK based universities?
- How do you view the partnerships between the Omani and the UK University?
- Could you tell me about the role of the local college and affiliated university in the implementation of TNE programmes?
- How do you view of the roles and commitments of the Omani and UK institutions in the provision of TNE?

Training and supporting

- When you starting your job, were you provided with training prepared you for teaching this programme? To what extent do you think it is sufficient?
- To what extent the college has supported your professional development?

Working environment

- What do you think about the college's policy, rules, and regulations in regard of providing good working conditions/environment? (Autonomy, academic

freedom, academic promotion, competitive environment…..etc.) To what extent it applies in practice?

- Extent to what the academic staff have a clear job descriptions and understanding of their roles and responsibilities?
- Can you comment on the general working conditions in the college?

The implementation of TNE programmes in Omani private colleges

- What do you know about programme design, procedures for programme approval?
- Extent to what local sociocultural has challenged the contents and structures of higher education curricula?
- What do you think about the teaching, learning, and assessment used in the college in light of promotes international education and the recognition of relevant social-cultural context?
- Extent to what the students has obtained appropriate academic support and pastoral advice that willing them to cup with the study life?

Quality assurance

- Extent to what the academic staff are fully briefed on all relevant aspects of partner institutional teaching and assessment standards prior to commencement of teaching?
- Extent to what the college has capability for the manage quality education of programme delivered?
- Do you have any suggestions to strengthen the quality of education in the college?

Facilities and academic services

- Extent to what the Omani college has provided appropriate facilities and support services (all non-human resources, administrative support, teaching equipment, library and computing facilities)?
- To what extent the college have adequate academic support services to deliver the international programme? Student admission, foundation programme...)?
- Extent to what the students has obtained appropriate academic support and pastoral advice that willing them to cup with the study life?

Factors affecting TNE in Omani private college

- From your view, what are factors that affecting the implementation of the TNE in the college?
- From your perception, what are challenges and obstacles (if any) faced by the academic staff in the implementation of the TNE programmes?

Improve the implementation of TNE in Oman

- From your view, how the implementation of the existing TNE programmes could be improved?

General prompts

Can you tell me a bit more about that? What do you mean when you say…?

Debrief

"Those were all my questions", do you have anything to add, do you have any questions?

Thank you again for accepting to take part and as already I mentioned in the information sheet all data will be confidential and anonymous. I also may contact you in future for any further clarifications.

Switch of the recorder

Appendix 10

Summary of the Data Collection Process

Stages of data collection and field study	When	Where	Why this institution/ organisation	What was done and how the data was collected
Stage1: gaining access	May-august 2014	6 private colleges in Oman (Muscat)	Collages profile: Has a British universities partnership. Offering transnational education programmes. Convenience access. Geographic proximity.	gaining access to conduct my research study in the colleges campus
Stage1: Pilot Study	Feb.2015 until March, 2015	One college were the target of my pilot study in Muscat	Familiarity; -geographic proximity; -convenience; -access and different context: private institutions.	Visited field sites for exploration. Interviewed 2 academic staff. These interview questions were tested and improved through the pilot interviews
Stage2a: Actual study:	Throughout April-August 2015	Two private college were selected		Get information about the colleges' history, prospectus, relevant statistics, college policy document, and information on the website. Visited the colleges several times to become familiar with facilities and people

				before the interviews.
				I talked to senior admin and academic staff in both colleges. - Get a list of people through the main contact in the colleges.
				Attended a graduation ceremony at one college.
				Interviewed 27 people.
				Transcribed some recordings straight after interviews.
Stage2b: Actual study: Visit Ministry of Higher Education, and Oman Academic Accreditation Authority	Throughout year 2015	The MoHE, the place where I have working. OAAA is charged with regulating the quality of higher education in Oman	The Ministry of Higher Education is the direct official authority of leading and supervision higher education in Oman. Oman Academic Accreditation Authority is responsible for institutional and program accreditation	Meeting some directors in the Ministry of HE and OAAA to get information and documents about higher education sector in the country. Studied Omani policy documents on higher education, relevant prospectuses of institutions, media information and websites.

Appendix 11

Example of Interview Transcript

S: Salim   Date:

P : Participant : T026. FT. HEC1   Place : College 1

START

___

S: Thank you very much for your time and interest in taking part this research. My name is Salim and as mentioned in the Participant Information Document which you already have, I am conducting a study on Transnational Education in Oman and the Implementation of Academic Programmes that are hosted by your college. So if you agree to be interviewed in this study, please sign the Consent Form.

S. In the beginning, could you please tell me about yourself? Your professional background and how long have you been working in this institution?

P: my name is ---- and I am originally from ……. I gained my PhD in English Studies in 2003. Actually I am working in this college for about seven years.

S: When you started your job, were you provided with training that prepared you for this teaching environment?

P: I was put on an induction programme with some other members of staff to have a tour in the whole college. In addition, we were provided with the college regulation such as code of practice, working hours, holidays and etc. In the departmental level there was a mentor who was so helpful and professional when it comes to the academic practices in Oman. In fact, the mentor was not an Omani person but she has been working there for a long time. She was my mentor during the first three months. I also had an induction about quality assurance and induction general one on teaching and learning methods and the rules and regulations of the college was given

but other than that. There was nothing mentioned about the sociocultural practices maybe because I come from an Asian background. I got very well with senior management from the first two weeks and there was a very positive feedback from them about the ways I deal and interact with the students in the classroom environment.

S: So from your perception, to what extent do you think the training was sufficient in term of teaching and learning method?

P: They providing some training, but I think it is not suitable for me because I have experience in teaching English as a foreign language. As I told you previously, I have a PhD for a long time and I have done a lot of English language teaching. I also have taught English in my home country and I have led many workshops and seminars in teaching English as a foreign language. So, I think they training was not meant to be for me and I don't think I need such kind of training.

S: Interesting! I am wondering about working conditions and the teaching and learning environment in the college. What do you think about the college's working conditions/environment?

P: I think a lot of freedom is given to us when it comes to the teaching and the environment of the college is definitely very good but there always will be a scope for improvement and no college and no institution is perfect and different people will have different things to say and it also depends on subjective kind of interpreting the place and systems and when I came here. You know, I feel the working conditions is the college is good as they provide us with all the teaching materials and equipment. Since I have a doctorate degree and a lot of teaching experiences, I was promoted within a year to assistant professor.

S: That is great!

P: But I haven't been promoted for 6 years. Now, I am not sure what criteria are to be promoted. It is a grey area for me. It has to be clear for all members of staff. So I think there need to be more transparencies about academic promotion since it is one of the most motivating factors for academic staff. Payment is also an attractive factor, but it is not the same as academic promotion. So I think it could be more

350

transparent and more clear about the ways to go about it, there should be a policy about it.

S: what about research activity? Do you get an opportunity to conduct research or attend conferences?

P: When I came to Oman, the college gave the academic staff some opportunities to conduct research. Honestly, at that time I did not like because there will be a lot of work pressure on me. Then, it turned out to be very good for us. Those people who took it positively became avid researchers. And I remember there were 4 flexi hours for us in our weekly time table to be devoted for researching. In addition, there are 10 days of scholastic or scholarly leave in a year and they provide financial sponsorships for going abroad and presenting and publishing papers. Again it was all very good, many people like us. One of my colleagues and I presented and published many papers together because we are co-researchers so we already published 4 or 5 papers. We used to get reimbursed on the total amount we spent, but now we get up to 600 Omani Riyal regardless to how much you spend. This is because they say the college is not a research oriented institution and it is mainly a teaching institution. Imagine if we go abroad like to America or Australia, it will cost us more than 600 Riyals. In this case, people tend to choose places where they don't spend more than 600 Riyals because they don't want to spend from their side so on such things. I don't blame the college because everywhere there are some restrictions and financial implications are always there.

S: As you mentioned this college is teaching oriented and private provider of education. I am interested to know how the college is balancing between academic standard and profit making.

P: Well academically how so ever we want and try to be maintaining the standard. It can always be improvised and there is always a scope. Ultimately now you will understand, you are in England? You are doing your education in England? You're paying? Your government is paying for you? You will understand that every educational institution has become an industry. Education has become an industry now. It has lost its older sanctity of a humane approach or noble job. It's another job now, it's another industry now, money making industry. It has become and even in

places where education is rooted back to 200 years ago an industry. Top management people in higher education are now more business oriented because they have to reach a target, to get into that cut off a target and they have to maintain that. I'm sure you know what I mean by this and academically you cannot reach the pinnacle where you want to reach when business is the prime requisite or business is the prime motive. So I think there's a lot that can be done especially in a place like Oman, I personally feel that Oman has given me a scope to work here so I should be very genuine to Oman otherwise God will not forgive me. When I'm with my students, I don't go beyond the certain line in the sense that if they have to fail they fail, and they have to pass in order to pass I think teaching is job which should never lose its sanctity because we create human beings, we are not creating machines and we are not creating gadgets. We are creating human beings and we should be very very genuine about it and there should not be any business involved in it but maybe I'm speaking like this because I'm a teacher and I'm not in the senior management's chair.

S: OK. From your experience, do you think the private dimension of education has an effect on the quality of education?

P: It happens all the time. We are looking at the students as costumers so they have to be satisfied and definitely in the end will affect the standard of anyone who works. Suppose you are in the teacher's role and the students are your consumers so the first thing will be to please them and to please them so they don't complain. If this happens do you think the standard can be maintained? Do you think that standard would go down the moment you have this consideration otherwise if the freedom is given to the teacher that they are your students and you are responsible for their growth and development? Some teachers tend to safeguard their jobs by ensuring that students get whatever they want. For instance, if the priority is to save their jobs then even if something is wrong, students may be left to get away with it. If this is the attitude, then the teacher will be more responsible and she/he will have multiple ways in order to take them on their side and in a positive way but if the students complain, which happens here all the time, it does affect standard and it does. It doesn't affect teacher's standard, it affects the student's standard, it doesn't affect the teacher in any way which is very very harmful. Having said that there are teachers

and I am one of them, I am very proud to say that – I don't treat my students as consumers irrespective of what the management says.

S: So, can you tell me about the college's policy regarding students' performance and academic standard?

P: I think the policy in the top management of the college don't want to receive any compliant from the students. but we have to acknowledge the fact that students might be upset especially if I scold them or get low results in their exams. If I scold them and they get upset and they complain, then I will stand by my side and say yes I did scold them and they needed to be scolded because students are still in their constructive phase. We are still constructing, punishing or scolding the students as a way of correction. However, since education is now more industrial and students are consumers as they pay for their fees, we are supposed to satisfy them as the main income is from them. So if this attitude gets into the student; they will never learn. They might get results, they might get an A+ but they will never learn. They will not learn the skill of giving respect which is a very very important skill in a person. The human skills define it.

S: You just mentioned the students' attitudes and treating them as consumers, what wo you think about your students' attitude or behavior toward education?

P: I think the students' attitude has nothing to do with the culture. It is mainly about the system. I've seen what wonderful human beings Omanis are. It's not the culture, they are very polite. Because you see – I don't know, how old is your eldest child?

S: Yes. 14 years.

P: I also have a 14-year-old child. He turned 14 the day before yesterday. Now you know that teenagers, they are very intelligent. They will assess you more quickly than you assess them. They will assess your psychology – how much freedom you can give, how much liberation you can give, how much they can ask you for. They are very intelligent. We should not underestimate them. The same thing applies to our students; everything they ask for should not be given. Then we are going to spoil them like if I have a lot of money. My child will not get whatever he asks for, he will get only what he deserves and he dhas to earn if he wants that – later so there has to

be a line drawn with this one. I'm sure you're doing the research so please publish it and make it an awareness campaign that it comes from the government that students have to be dealt strictly with then see what Oman is because the teachers are very good whether they are Omanis or the are expats but you know again another truth that comes with it when an expat comes or even an Omani in this competitive atmosphere they have to save their jobs so if the priority is to save their jobs then even if something is wrong and if I know that I should smack that child in order to save my job then I will not do that then I'm not doing justice to the student. It's a very very serious thing. And in your generation, our generation I can't imagine that I would complain about my teacher. I could not. So I think I said it.

S: now, I want to move to the Foundation progamme. From your experiences, what do you think of the Foundation programme in preparing students to study international academic programme?

P: On papers very right, the policies very upright, everything is so flowery and everything is so proper that nobody will believe if somebody says something opposite because on paper everything is so. Now I will tell you if you're going through this quality audit things, all-over in Oman in higher education, you must have heard about this. Yes? Now when you see the documents you will go bonkers. I mean I attended the workshop, I thought and there were Americans, British who were giving this workshop, there were also some very qualified Omanis – I was so impressed to meet them. Now the bottom line was that in 10 years, 12 years of their schooling, they have not got the skills so they have the Foundation programme. Now in 12 years that they haven't got it, how does one Foundation programme is given in 6 months is supposed to bridge the gap between the schooling and college levels? Is it possible? Is it achievable? I mean whatever they write in the document will be all rubbish. Yes, there are some students who complete the Foundation programme with the skills required in the college in 12 years of their schooling, the students have not got the skills so they have the Foundation programme. Now how does one Foundation programme promises to develop all the skills in 6 months (two semesters)? We receive the students with 2 in IELTS and we are supposed to pull them up to get to IELTS 4.5 in order to let them go. It's impossible to do that. I will be lying if I say we can do that.

This is my third country of work and everywhere it's the same because it's an industry. Now it's a business profit making institution. I don't' know what happens in the government school. Maybe the government sector is more genuine and they maybe. But here out of my 1, 2 groups of foundation I think maybe 20% of the students where I could really pull them up.

S: So, from your opinion, the students who pass the Foundation programme will be ready to join academic programme?

P: They're better. They're better than the ones who do not do the foundation. Because you see for 3 months that they are attending my class they will definitely learn something. Even by default they will learn something as long as they attend. I mean we do rub on them and those people who are interested they are definitely as I told you 20 – 25% of the students they get into the Dean's Honor List when they go into undergraduate. And I also teach undergraduates who are from foundation days so I know that it does make a difference but what I'm saying it is a 100% success which cannot be expected.

Again it's also not the fault of the student. How can you blame the student for whom Arabic is everything? It's his first language, a very strong language, suddenly he knows that English is important and he has to learn it, naturally second language learning is so difficult, we all know that. The same applies to them in English; schools are not doing their bid. And that is okay, I don't blame them but what I'm saying is that if we claim as a college that we can pull them up to from 2 to 4.5 is only a very flowery picture to present. That's I'm saying, realistically and honestly speaking. Although I think the college has gone a long way in 6 years, I've seen it and when I compare it to other places it's very good that it's student friendly. They student feel at home. That is very important in Academia; very important because I know my daughter is in my home county and she is out of place. Because the teachers there are not helpful and they don't even care to look at the students and the study is the student's responsibility. So that's another extreme. Here's another extreme – we are spoon feeding them. Anyway, I think I have colleagues all over.

S: Since we are talking about academic standard and ways of teaching and learning, let's move now to the role of the partner university. How do you see its role in enhancing quality of education in the college?

P: The might be but I don't think they play a big role. As far as policies are concerned, there is a guiding factor and controlling factor [government policy and guideline of academic partnership]. What I feel is that the (Partner) university has a minimal role to play. There are external examiners, the assessment packs have to be sent there for moderation. Everything is controlled, these things are controlled in there but in a way it's our own internal system that controls. It's the local management who controls. I mean the partner university should also look at the number of working hours and the suitability of individual teachers to teach on the allocated module. We don't have exchange programmes. What does a partner university mean? I think the partner university is also meant to share their good practices. We should have exchange programmes for academic instructors and students. They take so much money from the college. I'm sure they don't give their certificate and their logo without money. I mean the partner university should also look at the number of working hours and the suitability of individual teachers to teach on the allocated module. The partner university is meant to share their good practices, exchange programmes, exchange academic instructors and exchange students. But we can see is that it [foreign partner] gives its certificate and its logo because it receives money so why not take our students and expose them to different cultures.

What I'm saying is - what do the students know about affiliated university? Nothing. What do I know about the partner university in actual? As to how their teachers are better than us, I don't know anything. So students should be given an opportunity to be topped there for 6 months maybe. Give them the credit and then send them back. Send your students here, let this College accept them and teach them. But otherwise what happens now that you are an Omani, you yourself adhere to what I say and you are now studying in Sheffield. Now don't you think academia is also about the place that the curriculum has taught? Because the guidelines could be generally okay for the place that it's taught but there are so many twists and turns and so many customizations that needs to be done for the customer who is the student of Oman

and not England. So for example if you take a readymade book but it's a very closed society and if there's a picture of 2 people dating, drinking, or night party or unleashing or dressing up, it's not okay for it here but it is okay in England. What should be done is that whatever is not accepted here needs to be customized to the Omani culture. I feel like that in my home country, we have a university of the state and that governs all the colleges. Why not Oman has a university which gives permission and that becomes the university college of that university. That would be much better because they would have policies, rules because they have an open picture, a wide horizon of the people here. But again since it's an industry everything comes to that. Because Omanis are also fanatic about having a British or an American degree, so that is another fascination, it's a flowery picture. I want a University of xxx certificate.

S: So do you mean this academic partnership is more linked to the policy and market need than the academic domain?

P: I think it is about the business. of course it is about the business, everything is about the business. Everywhere, not just here, I'm sure everybody is doing it. But I'm just talking about the things that we wish to have.

S: Okay then, do you feel the college can run academic programmes without any need or support from a partner university? I mean can you work without them?

P: Yes, at any time. Like, I don't know why I'm giving you an update for your research. I will give you a concrete example about this. India was a British colony, you know that. India was ruled for long time, hundreds of years. Now if British had not come to us, the Indians would not have had many things, they would not have rails, roads, postal services, they gave many things to us. I'm talking about this positively. But when they left the Indians did not die. They took up the country and they are running the country better than when the British were there. You can see now where India is so when we began in Oman because education does not lead back to too many years here so it's okay to have them, to establish us. Now, the higher education system in Oman is established and the colleges have been operating for

about 20 years I think the system is in place and the training is already in place so of course we can do without them.

S. At this point, I am interested to know about academic programme design. How do you think the academic programmes you provide are aligned with the local sociocultural and relevance with industry?

P: Any curriculum should be aligned with the culture – that's what I said earlier. In terms of culture, I have the freedom to teach any drama, story, poetry or topic as long as they do not affect and distort the Omani culture so, I will not choose any drama which shows elicit relationship between a man and a woman to my Omani students. But I have that freedom to choose. You understand what I mean? Bridging cultural gap is very important for the student because she/he should not feel out of place in the classroom. If they don't feel comfortable in the academic scenario, they will not learn anything. So that has to be done. Many times when I say about readymade books which come from abroad such as "Headways" and all that and there are so many. There are so many publications coming. I remember a few semesters back, the foundation teachers had to cover a picture for all the 200 books because of the cultural issue and the requirements that it should not go to the students, which is fair enough. However, in education, students should also be exposed to other cultures so they have to be customized and exposed well to other cultures. That is also very important which is done and the college has been open enough to let me start literature in the BA English programme. It's not a mismatch but what I'm saying is that academia should be for the students, rules should be for the students, for the benefit of the students, not just to make them comfortable.

S: Could you please let me know your view about the government support to these private college?

P: In fact, these private colleges need the government support as they cannot survive without this support. My personal opinion about academia is that we shouldn't make it a business industry. However, the government doesn't give private colleges enough support so they have to work hard for it. You know that all these modern resources and teaching aids are very expensive. One member of the academic staff costs thousands of Riyals so it's very difficult to maintain the standards. Also the students

are not like us anymore. For us what did we require? The teacher and the board, they were the reciprocity of knowledge. Now no more they need this and that. They need, projectors. They need all the teaching aids. To buy all the equipment, you need money and in the top of that profit has to be accomplished. Everything is provided because it's a private college. The resources have to be met with the money. The government doesn't give them anything so they have to earn for it. So naturally the government has to give more support to private institutions.

S: So as you said there is a lot of money allocated to academic staff, now, how do you see the staff recruiting policy in the college? In other words, to what extent do you think the financial situation affecting hiring qualified staff?

P: Of course it is affecting. Yes, it happens as you know the majority of academic staff have got Masters or Bachelor degrees. There are a few staff who hold PhDs because it is costly for the college to recruit them. In fact, they need more teaching staff than researchers.

S: In the end of this interview, I would like to express my grateful for your time and interest to participate in this study. Do you have any questions or comments you want to add?

P: No, no. I just wish you all the best and you come out with flying colors because it's very nice. It's really nice to see an Omani person who is interested in conducting a study on academia.

S: Thank you again you very much. I may contact you in future for any further clarifications.

P: no problem. Thank you.

Appendix 13

A summary of Participants' perceptions of TNE in Oman

1- Participants' views regarding why colleges were affiliated with UK Universities.

Notes: Most indicated that the affiliation with UK universities was based on the credibility of the institutions. College 1: 92% focus on credibility; other-8%: College 2: 87% relate affiliations to credibility of UK universities, 13% indicate other factors such as good bilateral relations between the countries. On average, 85% of teachers felt that affiliations were based on the credibility of UK education system.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	credibility of the institution	Prestige of education in the UK	UK education Very popular in Oman	close political relationships between the two countries	UK degrees have a high demand on the job market	UK universities are credible on the international market	Good reputation of UK universities	Trust of quality among people and job market	credibility of the UK universities
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						

Response	Quality of UK education	value British and American degrees	UK degrees highly valued in Oman						

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	Quality of UK education	advantage on the job market	Trust on the quality	Providing advanced education	High demand on the job market	reputation of education providing	credibility of the UK universities	Good reputation	People feel proud getting UK degree
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response	High expertise in education provision	UK degrees on high demand in Oman	Long experience of UK universities in HE	political relationship and credibility	Good relationship between Oman and UK	Good bilateral relations between the two countries			

2- Participants' perceptions of the role and commitment of the UK Institutions in the Provision of TNE

Notes: Responses indicated mixed feelings, with some teachers expressing positive feeling and others expressing negative views.

On average, 37% were quite positive about the role of partner institutions while 63% felt the need for partner institutions to do more.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	they do their best	the partnerships could be improved	has a minimal role to play	The partner university does its role	They support and guide us	Need to expanding its role	not happy with the nature of partnerships	teachers should be more involved during the partner university visit	Need more interaction with staff
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response	They support us	Need much more involvement	We have good partnership						

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	We are happy with them	Our partner university is very helpful	do not check who is going to teach the	Should concentrate more on academic	I think we learn a lot from them	they should not play a very crucial	excellent" and "magnificent	involvement in the implementation of the	should be involved more in the quality

			module	issues		role		programme needed	of education
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response	Need better cooperation with the Omani team	They do their role but need extra support	not supporting effectively	lack of regular communication	Happy with the situation	They just impose things on us			

3- Participants' perceptions of TNE Programme Design

Notes: Most staff expressed satisfaction (17 out of 27, 63%). 37% (10 out of 27)had reservations about programme design)

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	We provide advanced programmes	We don't have problem with programme design	Curricula are well designed	Employability skills needed	Contextualisation of programmes necessary	The programme is well designed	The programmes are excellent	We provide very good programmes	mechanism of student feedback needto improve
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response	I am very satisfied with programmes	intercultural clashes exist	The academic programmes are well						

364

provided		designed	

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	The programme is in alignment with International standards	Need to respond to Omani culture	Challengeable in teaching and learning	The programmes are well designed.	The programmes are in line with job market needs	The programmes are well designed but there is room for improvement	Some challenge in assessment but generally well designed	market research was not sufficient	Some materials and module assessments need to be revised
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response	The academic programme very good in design	We have reputable programme	Not addressing the needs of society +lack of relevant textbooks	well respected everywhere	Our programme is the best	comparable to the international standards			

4- Participants' views on teaching and learning methods used in TNE programmes

Notes: Some of the teachers (17 out of 27, 63%) felt that their students were not prepared for active learning approaches. The minority of teachers (37%) felt that they were

coping with the challenges.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	Our students are capable of learning quickly.	I have no problem with the learning methods used	In the beginning we face problem but with time we now cope with the situation	We have some challenge of teaching and learning style. Our students are used to passive learning.	Teaching and learning not a main problem that we face	There is some challenge but We are experts in dealing with students.	Basic education not trained students to get into HE	I can say it is a challenge as our students are not used to active learning	students not adequately trained to learn in active learning environments.

Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response		We are expert in our field and we know how to minimize such challenge	Students ill-prepared						

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia

Response	Different teaching and learning is not a problem as far as students get proper training	They need some help to be familiar with university situation	we struggle in introducing new method of teaching and learning	The college should support students more in teaching and learning methods	There is some culture challenges . Students too dependent on teachers.	students who are not familiar with these way of teaching	We have culture challenge in teaching and learning	They need a lot of effort to reach them in this level. It is a problem	Teaching and learning is one of the challenge we face here as students are not used to active learning
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response	Our students learn quickly	We don't face a real challenge with students in the classroom	cultural barriers	I think one of the main challenge is students not well transformed to new educational pedagogy	We have wonderful students who are keen to study and learn different things	Omani schooling system not conducive to the Western style			

5- Participants' perspectives on the induction program. **Notes:** Most of the participants (20 out of 27, 74%) indicated there were some gaps in the induction programme. 26% felt the induction programmes were comprehensive enough. However, some of these were Omanis who understood their students' culture already.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia

367

Response	Our induction programme is not comprehensive enough	We have a good induction programme	I think giving more attention to the culture is important	The programme is adequate for new academic staff	programmes were not comprehensive	There should be some culture instructions such as do/don't	programme need improvement and adding other issue such as dealing with students culture	Giving induction on Omani context is very important for new academic staff	Programme need to focus on culture issue
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response	Programme should addressed culture issue	It will be nice if they add more social culture matters	I know our students and their behavior as I am an Omani citizen						

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	Not comprehensive	The induction programme is concentrated on academic issues	induction focused mainly on technical issues	Need to understand the Omani culture	I have experience in Omani students	not familiar with the culture of students	Programmes need to focus on the issue of cultural differences	I think giving more culture awareness is important	Yes. The induction programme was sufficient to deal with new culture

Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
			mainly						
Response	I think the induction is not covering all areas for e.g. understanding students' culture is missing	Induction programme not comprehensive	I have Arabic and Islamic background	Yes. We need a comprehensive induction to deal with our students	Induction was helping us to cope with new system	Induction is not comprehensive	██████	██████	██████

6- Participants' perceptions on the quality culture in the two colleges.

Notes: Generally, there were mixed feelings with some teachers stating that the colleges were committed to the development of quality culture and others indicating the need for more work to be done. In particular, 41% were positive and 59% were not happy with the colleges' approach to quality culture.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	Our management is providing all things that we need	they are on their toes to keep it to that level; up to the internationa	The top management provide adequate teaching and learning	There is no compromise on quality	Profit is the heart of private education	college has always supported the quality aspect	work beyond contractually designated work hours	There is little done on students support and students survey after	lack of strong links with industry

369

		I standards	resources					graduated	
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response	The quality more on the paper than on practices	This is always a business side of education in private education	The college accept all students without standard						

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	the top management is trying their	We are working under	Heavy workload	More emphasis is laid on the	Not all material are	the top management was more	they are also looking at the other side −	there is no progress in the academic	weak relationship between with

							quality	field.	partner Universities has a negative impact on the quality of education
	best	pressure		formal	provided	interested in making a profit rather than ensuring sound academic standards			
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response	I think everyone here do their best to maintain the standard	The quality is there	in practice there appears to be a gap	Lack of evaluation studies	We have good infrastructure and equipment that need in teaching and learning	the existing quality control is not functioning properly			

7. Participants' perceptions on assessment practices

Notes: Generally, teachers were happy with the provision of clear policies and support to ensure effective assessment practices in the colleges. However, 25% of the teachers felt the need for improvement citing problems of poor communication and poor feedback from moderators.

College 1

Participant	Namir	Malika	Mohammed	Tahir	Venice	Julia	Amina	Muller	Alia
Response	Clear guidelines provided	Moderation is done effectively in the college	The partner University provides clear guidelines	Students are assessed fairly.	Sometimes the feedback from moderators is unclear	Good mechanism in place for moderation of assignments and exams	Assignments are designed in the local college and sent to external partner for moderation	Moderation process is too bureaucratic	Effective assessment procedures in place
Participant	Suad	Tuba	Maha						
Response	There is need for improvement especially the moderation process	Sometimes the external partner is too slow with feedback on assignments	We have clear guidelines and procedures to follow.						

372

College 2

Participant	Kerry	Naila	Masood	Zana	Iva	Jones	Maria	Rolla	Sonia
Response	We have clear guidelines in place, designed collaboratively.	We communicate well with partner universities when it comes to assessment issues	Moderation can be tedious	We have guidelines and clear policies for assessment in place	The college is strict with assessment procedures	Poor feedback from partners especially on assignments	More can be done to improve communication with external partners	We have same guidelines with partner universities	Effective assessment is a top priority in our college and this is achieved through use of clearly designed policies.
Participant	Leon	Ruby	Morgan	Roman	Rose	Mohan			
Response		Assessment processes need improvement							

373