

The Beliefs and Practices Related to Continuous Professional Development of Teachers of English in Oman

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Dedication

O Allah! All praise and gratitude be to You.

Acknowledgements

Having reached the end of the journey of my research, I would like to thank all those who have helped me in completing this piece of academic work.

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

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Abstract

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the stated beliefs and the reported practices related to continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers of English in the context of a large-scale top-down education reform. Within this broad perspective, the study aimed to identify the CPD activities which teachers of English in Oman say they engage in and explore their stated beliefs about CPD. It also aimed to investigate policy makers' plans and views with regard to CPD and compare them with the perspectives held by teachers. The ultimate aim of these investigations is to develop a better understanding of the implications the findings may have for our general understandings of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' practices in CPD.

The study took place in two main stages. Stage 1 followed a quantitative approach in which a questionnaire was designed and implemented with the aim of investigating teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD. A total number of 324 teachers responded to the questionnaire representing 70% of the target population. In stage 2, a qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews mainly for the purpose of in-depth investigation of issues arising from stage 1. A total of 12 teachers and seven Ministry officials were involved in this stage.

This study highlights the interaction between a range of inter-related factors which collectively shape teachers' beliefs about continuing professional development. It also provides evidence of the importance of considering teachers' beliefs in an era of reform. It highlights the impact of the deeply held beliefs of teachers on their interpretation of the reform principles and eventually on their practices.

The study reveals a level of mismatch between the CPD system on the one hand and teachers' beliefs and practices on the other. The study also points out the potential consequences of such lack of congruence which may result in frustration and lack of confidence amongst teachers.

The study illustrates the importance of the clarity of the system in the form of policy dissemination of CPD reform through outlining the relevant hoped-for and intended principles/guidelines to the concerned people at various levels.

Table of contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of contents	iv
List of tables	x
List of figures	xi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Setting the scene	2
1.3 The pre-reform context (1970-1995)	3
1.3.1 An overview of the GE system	3
1.3.2 Achievements of the GE system	4
1.3.3 English language teaching in the GE system	5
1.3.4 Professional development for teachers of English	5
1.4 The education reform	9
1.4.1 Curriculum and teaching methods	11
1.4.2 Assessment strategies	12
1.4.3 The supervision system	12
1.5 Developments related to English language teaching	12
1.5.1 The teaching of English	12
1.5.2 Professional development for teachers of English	13
1.5.3 Upgrading the qualifications of Omani teachers of English	20
1.5.4 Other teachers of English	21
1.6 The implementation of the reform	22

1.7	Rationale for the study	23
1.8	Thesis outline	25
2	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	27
2.1	Introduction.....	27
2.2	Understanding educational reform.....	27
2.2.1	Factors driving educational reform	29
2.2.2	Factors influencing the implementation of educational reform.....	31
2.3	Professional development for teachers.....	32
2.3.1	Teaching as a profession	33
2.3.2	INSET as a source of professional development	36
2.3.3	Towards a definition and conceptualisation of CPD.....	39
2.4	Teacher beliefs	43
2.4.1	Conceptualising and defining teacher beliefs	45
2.4.2	Studying teacher beliefs: challenges and approaches	48
2.4.3	Teacher beliefs, education reform and CPD	50
2.5	Investigating teachers' beliefs about CPD	52
2.6	Investigating CPD in the Omani context	58
2.7	Conclusion and implications for the study.....	64
3	METHODOLOGY.....	66
3.1	Introduction.....	66
3.2	Aims of the research.....	66
3.3	Research questions	67
3.4	Participants.....	67
3.4.1	Teachers of English.....	67
3.4.2	Ministry officials (CPD coordinators)	69
3.5	Research Paradigm.....	69

3.6	Research methods.....	71
3.6.1	Advantages and limitations of questionnaires.....	72
3.6.2	Advantages and limitations of interviews	74
3.7	Design of research instruments	75
3.7.1	Language of data collection	75
3.7.2	The questionnaire	76
3.7.3	The interviews.....	77
3.8	Piloting the questionnaire.....	79
3.8.1	Participants.....	79
3.8.2	Procedures.....	80
3.8.3	Observations, difficulties and implications.....	80
3.9	Piloting the interviews	82
3.10	Data collection process	83
3.10.1	Stage one (the questionnaire).....	84
3.10.2	Stage two (the interviews).....	85
3.10.3	Constraints on data collection	88
3.11	Data organisation, processing and analysis.....	89
3.11.1	Organisation and analysis of data from questionnaires.....	90
3.11.2	Organisation and analysis of data from interviews	91
3.11.3	Presentation of the findings.....	93
3.12	Quality issues	93
3.12.1	The quality of questionnaires	93
3.12.2	The quality of interviews	94
3.12.3	Generalisability	94
3.12.4	Reliability.....	94
3.12.5	Validity.....	95

3.12.6	Role of the researcher.....	96
3.13	Ethical considerations	97
3.13.1	Access and acceptance	97
3.13.2	Informed consent.....	97
3.13.3	Anonymity of participants	98
3.13.4	Confidentiality	98
3.13.5	Avoidance of harm.....	98
3.14	Summary	99
4	DATA ANALYSIS I: TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CPD	100
4.1	Introduction.....	100
4.2	Background information about participants.....	100
4.3	Teachers' beliefs and CPD.....	103
4.3.1	Conceptualising CPD	103
4.3.2	The importance of CPD	107
4.3.3	Beliefs about different types of CPD activities.....	109
4.3.4	Beliefs about benefits of CPD.....	123
4.3.5	Beliefs about involvement in decision-making.....	128
4.4	Summary	132
5	DATA ANALYSIS II: TEACHERS' REPORTED CPD PRACTICES	134
5.1	Introduction.....	134
5.2	CPD experiences	134
5.2.1	CPD prior to the reform	134
5.2.2	CPD after the introduction of the reform.....	136
5.3	Reported practices related to different types of CPD activities	137
5.3.1	The state of classroom observation.....	139
5.3.2	The absence of language improvement opportunities.....	141

5.3.3	The status of formal courses	143
5.3.4	Other CPD activities	148
5.3.5	Additional CPD activities	150
5.4	Benefits achieved from CPD.....	152
5.5	Involvement in decision-making.....	156
5.6	Obstacles/challenges to CPD	159
5.6.1	Lack of time	159
5.6.2	Lack of coordination	160
5.6.3	Workload.....	160
5.6.4	Lack of materials and facilities	161
5.6.5	Administrative problems.....	161
5.7	Summary	162
6	DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	163
6.1	Introduction.....	163
6.2	Ambiguity of the CPD	165
6.3	Tensions between teachers' stated beliefs and the CPD system.....	170
6.3.1	Attitudes towards formal CPD.....	173
6.3.2	Attitudes towards the status of language improvement in CPD	175
6.3.3	Attitudes towards teachers' involvement in decision-making on CPD ..	180
6.4	Contextual factors influencing beliefs and practices related to CPD.....	183
6.4.1	Interaction with colleagues	183
6.4.2	Support within the school context.....	186
6.5	Summary	189
7	CONCLUSION.....	192
7.1	Introduction.....	192
7.2	Summary of the main findings.....	192

7.3	Contribution and implications (revisiting the general research question)	195
7.3.1	Substantive contribution	195
7.3.2	Methodological contribution.....	196
7.3.3	Educational contribution and implications.....	197
7.4	Limitations of the research.....	199
7.5	Suggested areas for further work	200
7.6	Reflections on the personal development of the researcher.....	201
	References.....	203
	Appendices.....	218

List of tables

Table 1-1: Training courses for teachers of English in general education.....	7
Table 1-2: Training courses for teachers of English in basic education	16
Table 1-3: Numbers of English teachers working in the MOE in 2005/2006.....	22
Table 1-4: Professional development before and after the reform.....	23
Table 2-1: Research on CPD in Oman.....	59
Table 3-1: Leeds BA TESOL graduates still working as teachers in 2005/2006.....	68
Table 3-2: Targeted participants from the Ministry and regions	69
Table 3-3: Advantages of questionnaires.....	72
Table 3-4: Advantages of interviews	74
Table 3-5: Details of parts 2 and 3 of the questionnaire	77
Table 3-6: Styles of interviewing.....	78
Table 3-7: Details about the participants of the piloting stage.....	80
Table 3-8: Number of teachers willing to be involved in interviews.....	86
Table 3-9: Teachers' interviews by region and gender	87
Table 4-1: Distribution of respondents by region	101
Table 4-2: Distribution of participants by school type.....	102
Table 4-3: Distribution of participants by experience in teaching English.....	102
Table 4-4: Frequency of develop, improve and change t teachers responses	104
Table 4-5: Teachers' views about the importance of CPD	108
Table 4-6: Teachers' beliefs about the importance of different types CPD activities	110
Table 4-7: Teachers' beliefs about benefits of CPD	124
Table 4-8: Teachers' beliefs about who should make decision related to CPD.....	128
Table 5-1: Teachers' practices related to CPD activities	138
Table 5-2: Involvement in decision-making about the content of the courses.....	146
Table 5-3: Benefits achieved from CPD	153
Table 5-4: people made decisions related to CPD	156

List of figures

Figure 1-1: Professional development for teachers of English in general education.....	8
Figure 1-2: Professional development for teachers of English in basic education	14
Figure 4-1: Teachers' beliefs about involvement of regional officers in decision-making	130
Figure 4-2: Teachers' beliefs about involvement of Ministry officials in decision-making.....	131

APPENDICES

Appendix one: The questionnaire	218
Appendix two: Questions for interviews.....	223
Appendix three: Basic information about interviews.....	225
Appendix four: Tables of frequency	226
Appendix five: Bar charts	232
Appendix six: Organisation of qualitative data from questionnaires.....	235
Appendix seven: Organisation of qualitative data from interviews.....	238
Appendix Eight: T-Tests	242

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The context of this study is a large-scale education reform, with particular attention here to the professional development of teachers of English. In the context of this reform, professional development plays a dual role; it aims to support the implementation of reform principles while at the same time seeking to promote teachers' independent professional growth. These two orientations to professional development reflect what Leung (2009) calls sponsored professionalism (supporting the institutional reform) and independent professionalism (encouraging individual teachers' own professional growth).

More specifically, the study examines teachers' beliefs regarding professional development. This focus reflects the view that insights into such beliefs can inform understandings of the sense teachers are making of the broader educational reform and in particular of those aspects of it which aim to support teacher professionalism. The interactive relationships among the three key areas noted here - education reform, professional development and teacher beliefs - shall be highlighted in various places throughout this study.

In light of the above, education reform is seen as the overall area which covers and influences the whole education system in the context of the study. Professional development is regarded as one component of the reform which is vital for its success. In addition, professional development itself is all about growing and developing teacher professionalism. The consideration of teacher beliefs in the study is driven by the fact that they play a crucial role in the implementation of the education reform in general and professional development change in particular. To illustrate the relationship among these three key areas, it is important to understand that success of the implementation of change into professional development is dependent on the consideration of teacher beliefs. Similarly, the implementation of education reform is dependent on the consideration of professional development.

The main aim of this introductory chapter is to set the scene for the study by providing a general background to the development of education in Oman. The chapter also highlights the gradual improvements to the educational system in Oman in the past few decades in relation to the socio-cultural developments of the country with particular emphasis on a recent education reform. More specifically, the chapter outlines some basic facets of the teaching of English in Oman as well as the key features of professional development¹ for teachers of English before and after the reform.

The chapter begins by presenting an overview of the development of the education system in Oman before and after the initiation of the education reform in 1998. It also describes the development of the status of English language as a core subject with regard to the general objectives, curriculum and professional development of teachers. The chapter describes in detail the status of professional development for teachers of English before and after the education reform was initiated. It also presents some details and statistics about the qualifications and numbers of Omani teachers of English. The chapter concludes by providing a justification for focusing on a particular group of Omani teachers of English and stating the rationale of the study.

1.2 Setting the scene

For most of the 20th century, traditional education in mosques in nearly all parts of Oman were the only source of education. Before the year 1970, Oman was an isolated country with unexplored resources. Students studied the Holy Quran and the basic principles of reading, writing and arithmetic through informal teaching in mosques.

Although the beginning of formal modern education in Oman started in 1930 (MOE, 2004b), by the year 1969, there were only around 900 male students studying in three elementary schools in the whole of the Sultanate (MOE, 2002).

Formal education started spreading in Oman in 1970 with the dawn of the Omani Renaissance marked by the accession of His Majesty (HM) Sultan Qaboos who promised dramatic development in different aspects of life including education. The country was divided into 11 administrative regions: Muscat, Batinah North, Batinah

¹ Throughout the thesis, the terms professional development (PD) and continuous professional development (CPD) will be used interchangeably.

South, Dhahira North, Dhahira South, Shaqiya North, Sharqiya South, Musandum, Dakhiliya, Wusta and Dhofar. All types of services were spread across these regions in a systematic way.

The education system in Oman has gone through two major phases. The first phase started in 1970 and ended in mid 1990s. In this phase, the Ministry of Education's (hence forth MOE) main concern was quantity, with the aim of providing education for all citizens around the country (MOE, 2004a). The second phase, however, started with the initiation of the education reform in 1998 and focused on qualitative improvements.

1.3 The pre-reform context (1970-1995)

One of the immediate priorities of HM Sultan Qaboos as he started ruling the Sultanate in 1970 was literacy. This was reflected by HM's famous words in one of his first speeches: "We will teach our children even under the shade of a tree" (MOI, 2002). The new government's aim in this respect was to provide education to all citizens. Therefore, from the very beginning, it was realised that the development of the country cannot be achieved without education.

At the beginning, classes were held in rented houses, tents or under the trees. Teachers for all subjects were recruited from different countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and India. There were few Omanis who could be appointed as teachers due to the fact that most Omanis had not been through a formal modern education system.

The education system in this phase is referred to as general education (hence forth GE). It consists of three levels: the primary level (6 years), the preparatory level (3 years) and the secondary level (3 years).

1.3.1 An overview of the GE system

Al-Hammami (1999) states that the education in Oman is based on a philosophy derived from the principles of Sharia and Islamic law. This philosophy is inspired by national, social and political trends. The philosophy stresses the responsibility of the government to provide education to all citizens so that they can develop their abilities to learn and adapt to changes around them.

Based on these principles, education was offered according to the available resources and manpower. The education system started developing in a society with mostly illiterate people and a lack of infrastructure and basic services.

This period could be regarded as a period of challenge and sacrifice. It was a challenge as there was nothing available which could be used to start with, not even qualified people to lead the MOE. Also, it was a sacrifice as the quality of buildings, resources and personnel at all levels were not considered at the beginning. The only aim was for education to be provided to all citizens.

During this period, the GE system witnessed different stages of improvements reflecting the social, national and international changes in different aspects of life (Al-Dhahab, 1987; H. Al-Ghafri, 2002). These developments reflected the government vision which was based on a five-year plan. This implies that decisions were not made haphazardly. Rather, they were made according to the progress in the development of the political, economical, social and cultural aspects of the society. Going in depth into these developments is beyond the scope of the study. However, it is worth presenting the major achievements of the MOE during this period.

1.3.2 Achievements of the GE system

Generally speaking, although the GE system had its own limitations, it succeeded in establishing an education system that was able to provide education to the whole country within a fairly limited period of time. The most important achievements of the system during this period were: building up a philosophy of education for the country and qualifying Omanis to take the lead in the managing the education system.

Above all, it could be generally said that one of the most important achievements of the MOE during this phase was provision of education to all citizens. This is because arriving at this stage made the MOE able to start thinking about the key issue of quality of education through initiating the education reform.

As this study is concerned with teachers of English, I will present some idea about the status of English as a subject and the in-service training of teachers of English in this phase in order to provide a base for a later discussion of those two issues after the education reform was introduced.

1.3.3 English language teaching in the GE system

In Oman, English has been viewed as an international language which is essential in a number of key areas such as science, technology and communications. Thus, from the beginning of the modern educational system in Oman, English was part of the curriculum in the government schools in Oman.

In the GE system, the teaching of English lasted from grade four until grade twelve. Different types of textbooks were used. The early course books were written by well-known ELT publishers such as Longman. However, the year 1992 witnessed the introduction of the first English course book written and produced locally with the title *Our World Through English* (MOE, 1997).

Due to the educational and social background of the society, the aim of teaching English in Oman was providing learners with a fairly limited knowledge of the language so as to enable them to carry on studying English after leaving school. The philosophy document of the English curriculum of the GE system stated that the general purpose of teaching English was to raise the consciousness of pupils as language learners. This is because English was recognised as a resource for national development through which Omani nationals should be able to communicate with private and governmental bodies inside and outside Oman (MOE, 1987).

In order to appoint Omani teachers, pre-service teacher training institutes were established in the academic year 1975/1976. The intake of these institutes was from grade nine graduates. Student teachers studied for two years in these institutes to qualify them to teach at the primary level in the GE system. These institutes were replaced in the academic year 1984/85 by colleges which took students from grade twelve for a two year diploma (MOE, 2002).

1.3.4 Professional development for teachers of English

During the GE system phase, the MOE recognized that there was a need to support the Omani teachers of English through the provision of professional development opportunities. To achieve this aim, two main sources of professional development were provided, namely in-service training and the inspection system. The next sections provide more details about both of these sources of professional development.

1.3.4.1 In-service training courses

In the GE system, in--service training courses were mainly provided to Omani but not expatriate teachers of English. The philosophy document of the curriculum provides a justification for this:

The entry of trained Omani nationals into the teaching force will have a considerable impact on the system. Such teachers are likely to be more committed than contract expatriate teachers, and better able to develop a productive rapport with the students. This will be especially the case where such teachers return to their own villages, towns or regions.

(MOE, 1987:4)

Therefore, training courses were provided to Omani teachers of English in designated premises in different regions. These premises were stocked and equipped with the necessary items to conduct the courses which were delivered by qualified teacher trainers to ensure provision of high quality level of training. Each region, except remote regions of Wusta and Musandam, had at least one teacher trainer. The courses aimed mainly at improving the English language competence of the Omani teachers and had a fairly limited focus on methodology. The design of the courses was based on the language level of Omani teachers and the elements of in-service training prescribed by the philosophy document of the curriculum (MOE, 1997; West, 2004a). Table 1.1 below shows a detailed description of these courses (adopted from West, 2004a) :

Table 1-1: Training courses for teachers of English in general education

RELIC was the Regional English Language Improvement Course. It started in 1991 and was designed to raise the level of language competence of serving teachers who had received two years of training in a Teacher Training College prior to commencing teaching. It was a day release course, extending over two years, with a minimum of 300 contact hours. It was intended to raise teachers' language competence from post-Beginner to Intermediate level. Teachers were assessed by a Preliminary English Test (PET) type examination compiled in co-operation with University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES).

PLC was the Preparatory Language Course. This course replaced the RELIC course. It was intended to improve language skills of the teachers who had not attended the RELIC. Teachers were assessed by the UCLES PET examination.

SICs were the Summer Intensive Courses. Teachers from the two most remote regions (Wusta and Musandam) without a teacher trainer were brought to the capital for Summer Intensive language courses, varying in length from three to four working weeks, to raise their language level.

HOTDC was the Higher Omani Teacher Development Course. It was designed to enhance the methodological skills of serving teachers. Thus, it was based on the English curriculum used in schools. This was offered to the teachers who had a language competence equivalent to IELTS band 5.5. It was first started in 1992.

PICOT was the Professional Course for Omani English Teachers. It replaced the HOTDC course. It started in 1993 and was last delivered in 1997. It was a day release course extending over one year with 100 contact hours. Teachers were assessed on assignments, with one final assignment focusing on a study of a child.

These courses were planned, delivered and monitored centrally at the Ministry. MOE was very keen to train teachers no matter how much this would cost. Therefore, in order to encourage teachers to attend, they were usually released for one day a week for the whole year. This meant that teachers attended courses during working hours. Furthermore, if teachers failed in any of the courses, they were offered places on the next ones. Again, this was done centrally. Teachers were not given the opportunity to make decisions about the courses that they might wish to attend. Yet, if a teacher decided not to attend a certain course for some reason, the Ministry would exempt this teacher provided that the reason was accepted by the ministry.

1.3.4.2 The inspection system

Along with the in-service training courses, Omani and expatriate teachers of English used to get direct support from their inspectors who were supposed to coordinate with the teacher trainers. In every region, there were a number of inspectors who reported to the English Department at the MOE.

The support provided by inspectors was mainly achieved through inspection visits to schools and observations of lessons. Teachers used to get direct feedback on their performance from their inspectors.

Figure 1.1 below represents the relationship between the English Department at the MOE, the inspectors and the teachers of English.

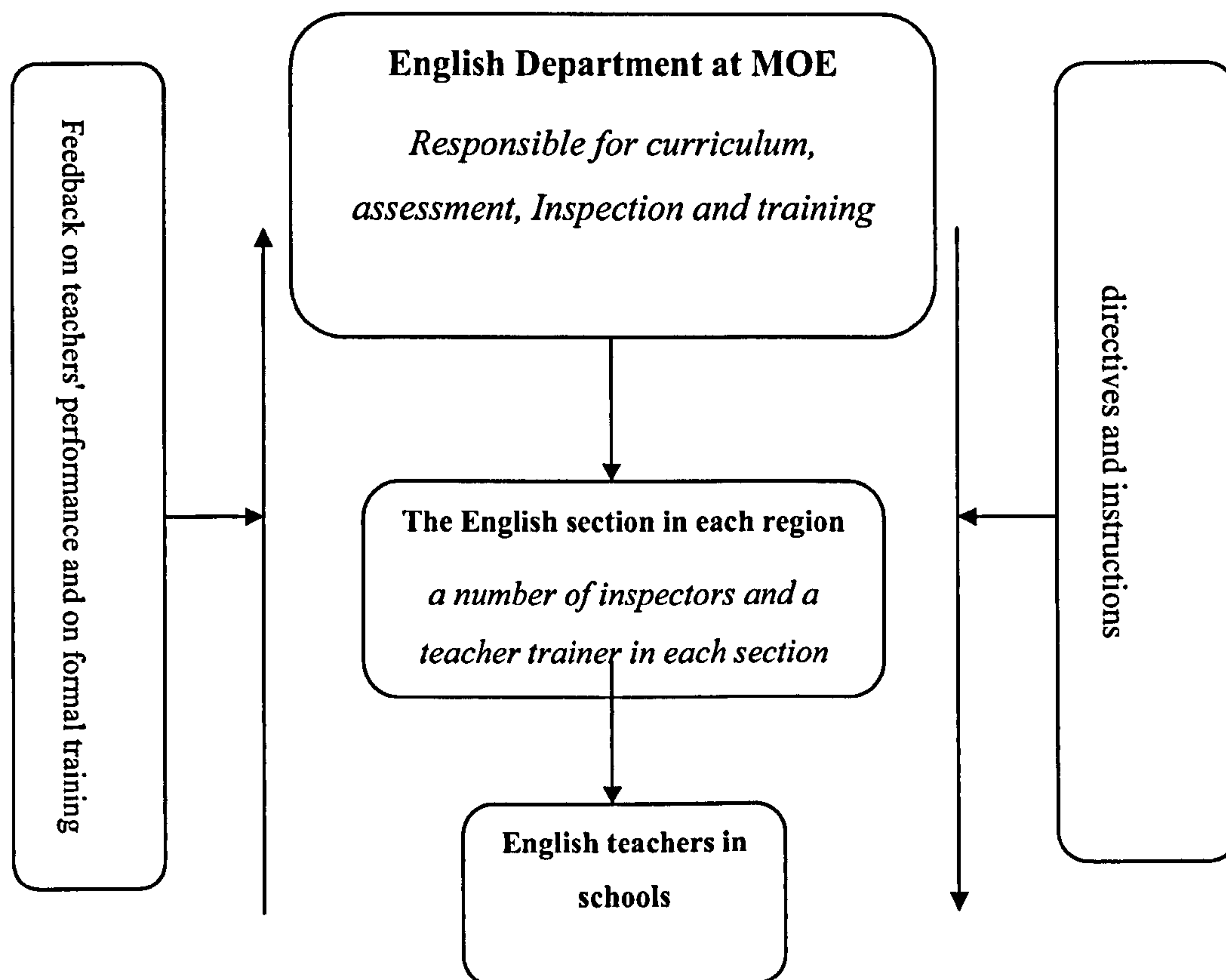


Figure 1-1: Professional development for teachers of English in general education

Within the GE system, as Figure 1.1 shows, professional development for teachers of English was based on a top-down policy in which teachers were offered formal training and direct professional support from the English department at the MOE. English

teachers' role was basically to wait for instructions to arrive from the Ministry to guide them on how to teach. Inspectors' main role was to inspect whether teachers followed what had been prescribed to them by the Ministry. If teachers faced any difficulty, even if it was to do with arranging their timetables in schools, they would usually consult their inspectors for a solution.

As Figure 1.1 illustrates, the English department at the MOE used to get feedback about the teachers' levels and effectiveness of the training. This first aspect of the feedback was provided through the reports inspectors used to write on a regular basis about the performance of each individual teacher. The second type of feedback used to be provided through the views of the participants about the training courses. Based on this feedback, the English Department at the MOE made decisions about the different areas related to the teaching of English such as curriculum, examinations and training courses.

This situation reflects the MOE's vision of education before the education reform was introduced. In the case of teachers of English, I have conducted informal meetings with some of them during occasional regional visits in the past few years when I worked as a deputy director of the English department in the Ministry. These meetings revealed that they were satisfied with their role during that period. They attributed this satisfaction to two factors. First, English teachers' command of the language was inadequate to enable them to depend on themselves as most of their study at the college was in their first language with few modules on English. Second, they stated that they were instructed to cover the course book so their students would be able to pass the final exam. So, there was no opportunity, or rather need, for them to be creative or depend on themselves. They were provided with all the materials including a very detailed teacher's guide which they had to follow to please their inspectors who were instructed to evaluate them, particularly the new ones, on the basis of whether they fully followed the guidelines in the teachers' book.

1.4 The education reform

During the 1990s, a general feeling developed at the Ministry that the education system was ready to be reformed. The fairly limited literature about the education reform in Oman contains similar discussions about the factors that led to the initiation of the

education reform in the Sultanate (H. Al-Ghafri, 2002; Al-Hammami, 1999; A. Al-Hinai, 2003). Whatever the direct or the indirect factors that influenced the decision, it is a fact that at the end, according to Al-Hammami (1999), the MOE felt that time for introducing major changes to the educational system had come. The old system had achieved its aims and served the country for a quite long period of time. It seems that this belief was triggered by the fact that GE system had undergone a number of evaluations during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Al-Hammami, 1999). These evaluations identified the shortcomings of the GE system and consequently they suggested recommendations for improvement.

Another indirect reason which contributed to the initiation of the reform is that the 1990s could be regarded as milestone in the development of Oman. The country witnessed major changes in different areas and at different levels. For example, the introduction of computers, satellite TVs and mobile phones in the country not only affected how people live, but more importantly how they think. People started to get more understanding of what is going on in the other parts of the world. Debates and argumentative discussions started to take place in the daily life of people. Parents became educated people who wished to have a high level of education for their children.

Therefore, the government recognized the need to cope with the challenges and requirements of today's life and people's aspirations for the future. This recognition was influenced by the realisation that Oman is part of a global world. Al-Hammami (1999) claims that it is not only the national demands that forced the education reform to take place but also that "the proposed education reform was partly a response to the demands and needs implied by international recommendations" (Al-Hammami, 1999:139).

Following these demands, the focus of the MOE shifted towards introducing significant qualitative improvements to the education system. Organizational and procedural changes were proposed within a framework of a large-scale education reform (MOE, 2004a) which was launched in the academic year 1998/1999.

Education has changed dramatically since then. The reform covered different aspects of education such as national education goals, curricula, teaching methods, administrative structures, supervision and assessment of students' performance. Modern school buildings equipped with computers, laboratories and other facilities spread throughout

the whole of the Sultanate. Some of the key structural elements of this reform which are related to the professional development of teachers of English are as follows (F. Al-Farsi, 2002; Al-Hammami, 1999):

- introduction of English Language at grade one
- provision of in-service training opportunities for all employees
- upgrading qualifications, knowledge and skills of teachers

As part of the of the education reform, the basic education (hence forth BE) system was introduced. It has been defined as:

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

(MOE, 2001:7)

BE consists of two cycles. The first cycle covers grades one to four and the second cycle covers grades five to ten. This is followed by a two-year secondary education level. I now discuss some major features of the education reform principles which are relevant to the professional development of teachers of English as described in MOE (2001).

1.4.1 Curriculum and teaching methods

The concept of curriculum is no longer confined to the content of a textbook. The new reform views curriculum as encompassing all learners' experiences related to the subject areas whether practised inside or outside school. Unlike the previous curriculum which was based on memorizing information, concepts of interpreting and applying elements of the curriculum were introduced. The curriculum is based on a student-centred approach considering the individual differences among the students.

1.4.2 Assessment strategies

Assessment, in the new system, is an integral part of the learning and teaching process. It has been designed on the basis that all students are able to learn. Variations in students' learning are reflected in the formative element of the assessment system. Based on this, the assessment procedures have been mainly based on the continuous assessment of students' performance and achievements. However, paper-and-pencil tests still exist but they reflect the activities practised in class.

1.4.3 The supervision system

The supervision system has also moved towards encouraging teachers to be reflective practitioners. It has changed from being a central inspection system monitored by the Ministry to a more school-based collaborative and reflective one. A new department of Educational Supervision has been established. The job titles of the inspectors have been changed to supervisors and new job descriptions for supervisors have been produced. A new post of Senior English teacher was introduced in each school with at least four teachers of English. The supervisors' role has shifted from inspecting teachers' work to mainly guiding and supporting Senior English teachers. Further details about the new supervision system will follow later in this chapter when I discuss the role of the supervision department in the professional development of teachers of English.

1.5 Developments related to English language teaching

The reform brought about special consideration for improving the status of English language teaching in the new system. Such attention was reflected in a number of the new features of the reform stated earlier (Section 1.4). The following sections present further details about the status of English language teaching and professional development of English language teachers during the reform.

1.5.1 The teaching of English

The education reform considers English to be crucial to the successful development of Oman in the twenty-first century. It has been recognised that the Sultanate is facing the challenge of preparing students for life and work in the conditions created by the modern global economy. These conditions require a high degree of adaptability and

strong backgrounds in English in order to deal with rapidly changing technologies and developing international business opportunities.

The Ministry aimed at providing the highest quality teaching and learning of English in Omani government schools. In order to achieve this, English as a subject was introduced from grade one. It was allocated a total of 1200 hours instead of a maximum of 600 hours in the old system (Al-Hammami, 1999).

A new curriculum was designed for BE schools which is supported by a rich set of resources such as visual aids, posters, activity cards, readers, CDs, video and audio tapes. Reflecting the principles of the education reform in general, the new English Language curriculum was designed to provide pupils with the skills, knowledge and attitudes that young Omanis will need to succeed in this rapidly changing society (MOE, 1999b).

The new English language curriculum framework states that the new curriculum aims to reflect the ongoing and planned changes across the social and educational spectrum which will have a positive impact on language teaching. Along this line, the new curriculum reflects the different changes in the educational spectrum such as the changes in educational philosophy, the changes in the role of English in society and the changes in pupils' and parents' expectations.

It is apparent that these elements, as illustrated earlier, could be regarded as the essence of the education reform. The fact that these elements were stated clearly in a curriculum document is further evidence the different components of the reform are being linked towards and guided by the philosophy and general aims of the reform.

1.5.2 Professional development for teachers of English

In-service training of all Ministry personnel, including teachers, is considered to be one of the major aspects of the reform. This is due to the MOE's belief that "human development is the single factor contributing to the success of any organisation ... and without creating a structure that provides continuous learning opportunities for human resources at various levels in the Ministry, local authorities and schools, educational change is not likely to occur" (MOE, 2004a:10).

Unlike the situation before the reform, teachers of English are supposed to receive professional development opportunities from two departments, namely the supervision department and the curriculum department. At the time of this study, each of these departments was assigned different types of professional development activities which were designed to complement each other.

Figure 1.2 shows the relationship between the two departments at the Ministry's level and supervisors, senior teachers and teachers at regional level.

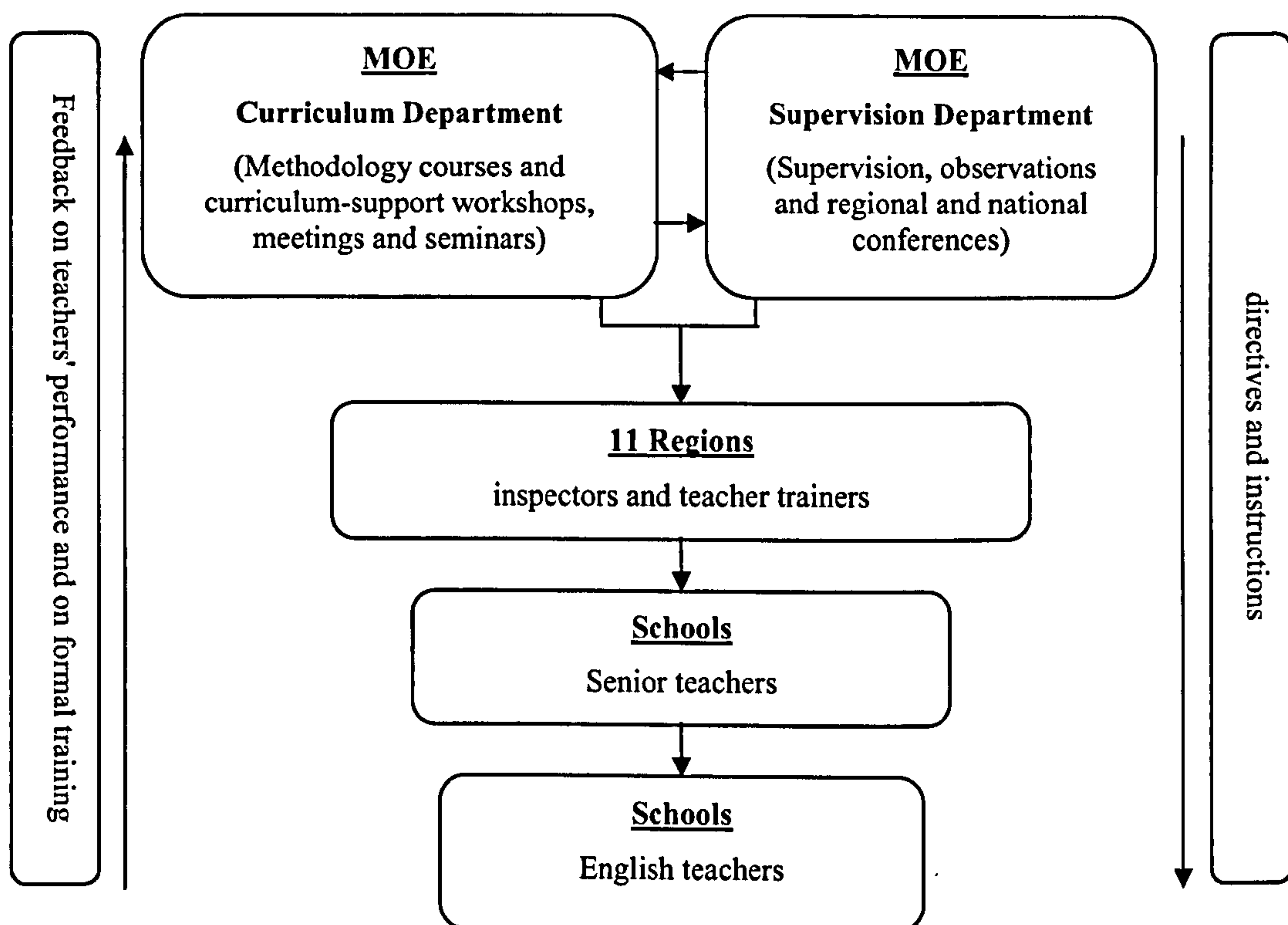


Figure 1-2: Professional development for teachers of English in basic education

Figure 1.2 also shows that senior teachers, as heads of English sections in their schools, have an important role in the professional development of teachers. They are regarded as resident supervisors with the role of monitoring and developing the performance of teachers of English inside and outside the classroom. Supervisors are now responsible for monitoring and developing the performance of senior teachers as professionals and as leaders of a team (Harrison & West, 2001). This was meant to change supervision of teachers to a more school-based model in which the senior teacher works closely with the teachers of English in the school.

Despite these changes, professional development activities, particularly the formal ones, are still being planned and monitored at the Ministry's level through the work of the curriculum department and the supervision department. Therefore, the supervision and training model could still be regarded as a top-down model reflecting the policy of the MOE. Similar observations were also made by Al-Hinai (2003), reflecting the top-down approach of the education reform as whole.

As Figure 1.2 shows, the bottom-up communication is limited to the feedback the Ministry gets indirectly from teachers. This feedback could be classified into three types. The first type is the feedback on teachers' performance based on classroom observations conducted by senior teachers. This type of feedback provides the supervision department with information about teachers' standards and competence. The second type of feedback is related to teachers' perceptions about the formal training they attend. This feedback is collected from participants who attend various meetings, workshops and training courses. An additional type of feedback "is also obtained through follow-up visits to schools and work with teachers in basic education schools. Relevant points arising from such visits generally feedback instantly into training programmes" (West, 2005:3). So, feedback from teachers is used mainly to monitor teachers' standards and for improvement of the formal courses.

So, teacher' involvement in the professional development is still very limited to the way which existed prior to the reform. This involvement relates only to the feedback the Ministry gets from teachers in a passive way which does not allow teachers to participate actively in the decision-making process with regard to the content of the formal courses nor about their participation on various CPD activities.

1.5.2.1 Professional development from the curriculum department

With the aim of supporting the new curriculum in BE schools, the curriculum department provides a set of methodology-related training courses for teachers. These courses are usually delivered for teachers in all regions before they start teaching in BE.

West (2004b) provides a detailed description of those training courses for teachers of English in basic education. Table 1.2 below presents a summary of these courses (adopted from West, 2004b):

Table 1-2: Training courses for teachers of English in basic education

Primary Teachers' Methodology Course Cycle One (1-4) of the Reform [PRIT]

This is a methodology course for teachers who are expected to teach English to children in grades one to four. The course has a minimum of 100 contact hours. The course aims to equip teachers with the skills and strategies to understand and implement the new English Curriculum in the Basic Education schools.

Lower Secondary Methodology Course for Cycle Two Teachers (5-7) [LSCT]

Although English teachers are familiar with teaching this age range, children coming from Basic Education schools Grades 1 - 4 will be at an entirely different level to those following the General Education curriculum and will bring different learning strategies to the classroom. So, the aims of this course are to familiarise teachers with Cycle one curriculum and equip them with the skills and strategies to understand and implement the new curriculum used in Basic Education. The course has a minimum of 100 contact hours.

In-service induction workshop for Grades 8-9 for Cycle Two of the Reform

This is a 2-day induction course for teachers who are already familiar with Cycle 2 curriculum. The workshop aims to familiarise teachers with key aspects of the Grade 8-9 English for Me course materials.

Senior English Teachers' Orientation [SET].

This course is intended as a brief introduction to the role of Senior English Teacher (SET) in Basic Education schools. It is run by supervisors, teacher trainers and experienced senior teachers. It has a minimum of 25 hours.

Senior English Teacher and Supervisors Meetings [SETSM]

Senior English Teachers and Supervisors in Basic Education meet periodically throughout the year with the trainers to discuss issues pertaining to their role in supporting teaching and learning in their schools.

Seminars and workshops

Curriculum support seminars and workshops, as well as orientation seminars, are delivered in the regions under the direction of the English Supervisors.

It should be noted that these courses have replaced the language courses which were available before the reform took place¹. This suggests that it has been recognised that the training on methodology is a prerequisite to delivery of the curriculum. Thus, all efforts are being targeted towards this aim.

Within the education reform, the in-service training courses still constitute a major component of the professional development of teachers of English. These training courses are methodology-based aiming at supporting the new curriculum.

1.5.2.2 Professional development from the supervision department

Two changes have characterized teachers' supervision in the education reform system. These are the change of the job title of inspectors to supervisors and the introduction of the senior teacher's post which, according to Harrison and West (2001), aimed at decentralizing teacher supervision.

These two changes have resulted in changes in practice. My own experience provides evidence for this. Before the education reform, inspection used to aim at providing instruction, problem finding and weakness noting (Harrison & West, 2001). I worked as a teacher of English for four years. During those four years, inspectors used to visit schools for the purpose of evaluating teachers mainly through classroom observation followed by a post-lesson discussion. Inspectors used to visit schools without prior notice and inform the teachers who were going to be observed, in most cases, just before the lesson started. Inspectors used to write their reports based on the observed lessons. These reports contained no more than a brief description of the lesson and a couple of recommendation for teachers to follow. Based on my own experience, examples of such recommendation are not to change the sequence of the tasks in the lesson from the way they appear in the course book, to finish teaching the book before the semester finishes and not to deviate from the instructions in the teachers' guide.

¹ Despite this major change, there have been some attempts in recent years to run language courses for some teachers in cooperation with some private language institutes. These courses were organised mainly by the Ministry. Some regions have also started doing some short language courses delivered by regional teacher trainers. Yet, the methodology courses remain dominant in the MOE's agenda.

After the beginning of the reform, I became a supervisor working with teachers and senior teachers of English. Supervision became a process of self-enquiry and reflection of one's own learning. Observation of lessons has become a task performed by the senior teacher who works as a colleague arranging with other teachers who to observe, when to observe and sometimes what to observe. The main purpose of observation has become encouraging and advising teachers to reflect upon their own teaching and suggest ways for improvement. Senior teachers are provided with the following questions to guide them to encourage teachers to reflect on their own teaching:

What evidence is there of reflection since the last time you observed the teacher? Can/does the teacher use what happened in a lesson/a series of lessons when planning the next lesson/future lessons? What evidence is there of this? Can/does the teacher reflect upon the whole unit and can the teacher use this reflection when planning the next unit (or the same unit when this is next taught)? What evidence is there of this? What action needs to be taken by the teacher?

(MOE, 1998:1)

I investigated part of the job of senior teachers through a study based on an analysis of the supervisory feedback reports written by some of them. Although this study showed that senior teachers were facing some difficulties in the way they write these reports, it revealed some evidence of changes of practice in supervision as senior teachers started to take on their roles of supervising their colleagues in schools (Al-Lamki, 2002).

However, lesson observation is not the only task for senior teachers. Examples of other tasks are conducting regular professional development meetings within the school, organising peer-observation and peer-teaching and taking responsibility for the administrative work of the English section in the school. Harrison and West (2001) also state that the professional development opportunities in the new system aim at developing a culture of reflection and helping teachers become responsible for their own learning and professional development. They continue that this could be achieved through the following:

- Helping teachers prepare semester and monthly plans
- Joint preparation of lessons

- Joint teaching & discussion of lessons
- Peer observation
- Informal & formal observation of teachers in their classes/ appraisal of teacher performance inside and outside the classroom/development of action plans
- Professional meetings on problems and solutions
- Professional workshops (one school or a number of schools)

(Harrison & West, 2001:2)

1.5.2.3 Other forms of Professional development activities

The training courses and the supervisory support are by no means the only professional development activities available for teachers of English. The MOE provides other professional development activities, some of which are provided every year while others are organised in an ad hoc manner. The following are some examples of these professional development activities:

- **Follow-up support in basic education schools**

An integral part of the training programme for teachers entering BE schools has been the follow-up training they are given. Once teachers have commenced teaching in the BE schools they are given on-going practical support and training. This takes the form of discussions, joint observations, team teaching, workshops and meetings to solve problems. This is carried out by the regional teacher trainers in co-operation with the English supervisors and senior teachers. Observations made by senior teachers, teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers feed back into the training programmes and the curriculum.

- **Conference of English Teachers and Supervisors (CETS):** This is an annual national conference where English specialists from the MOE and a large number teachers and supervisors of English from all regions in the Sultanate participate through presentations, discussion, workshops and displays. Some guest speakers from outside Oman are also invited. It usually lasts for three days. It could be regarded as one of the best forums where English teachers and supervisors share experiences and discuss relevant issues.

- **Regional Conferences of English Teachers and Supervisors RCETS:** These are similar to the CETS but they are organised in each region at different times throughout the year. They provide another opportunity for teachers to meet, share experiences and more importantly present papers.
- **Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Annual English Language Teaching Conference:** SQU is the only government university in Oman. The language centre, which offers language courses to all SQU students, organise this annual ELT Conference in which current issues, theories and practices of ELT related to the Omani context are discussed. Some ELT professionals, including English teachers, participate in this conference (SQU, 2009).
- **TESOL Arabia conferences:** This is an annual TESOL conference organised in a neighbouring country, the UAE. The MOE sponsors around 15 teachers and supervisors every year to attend and this conference. Some teachers and supervisors seize this opportunity to present papers. This conference provides an opportunity for teachers to develop professionally as it usually discusses issues related to teaching in an EFL context. It is also convenient as it is held in a neighbouring country which makes it easy for teachers to attend.

In addition, there are various professional development activities which are offered from time to time by private organisations from inside or outside the country such as the British Council. Although most of these opportunities are offered to a small number of teachers each time, there have been some occasions on when such organisations provided professional development workshops to a large number of teachers in various regions.

Having described the major changes in the professional development system for teachers of English, I now discuss another major component of the reform related to upgrading the qualifications of teachers.

1.5.3 Upgrading the qualifications of Omani teachers of English

Within the framework of the education reform, the MOE started upgrading the qualifications of the diploma holding teachers who studied at the teacher training colleges mentioned earlier (in Section 1.3.3). One of the major projects in this respect

was the BA TESOL project organised by MOE and the University of Leeds in the UK to upgrade the qualifications of diploma holding English teachers. The project aimed at qualifying nearly a thousand Omani teachers of English who constituted the majority of the Omani English language teachers serving at the MOE at the beginning of the education reform (MOE, 1999a). Teachers participating in this project were put into six cohorts studying a three year in-service programme. The first cohort of teachers started the programme in 1999 and the last one finished in 2009.

Participants were put into groups of roughly 15 teachers studying in training centres in their regions. Each of these training centres had a library containing books, journals and reading files. Participants were taught by regional tutors who also provided individual tutorials and conducted group seminars. The tutors were qualified native speakers of English appointed jointly by the MOE and the University of Leeds. In addition, they visited participants in their schools to help them relate the concepts they studied on the BA to their own experiences in the classroom. Participants attended intensive summer and winter schools in Leeds and Oman where they were also taught by staff from the University of Leeds (MOE, 2005b).

1.5.4 Other teachers of English

The above mentioned teachers of English are not the only Omani teachers of English in the system. There are others who have graduated either from Sultan Qaboos University in Oman or other universities outside Oman. These graduates are different from the Leeds BA graduates as they have studied the degree course immediately after finishing third secondary and before being appointed as teachers of English.

The number of Omani teachers of English has been increasing every year. However, when this study took place, the total number of the Omani English teachers was still lower than the number of expatriates. As mentioned earlier, MOE recognised the importance of in-service training to support the reform. So, BE training courses have been offered to all Omani and expatriate English teachers. This has resulted in some loss of training investment as the expatriates do not remain for long in the system. Unfortunately, there was no choice other than this for the Ministry if the reform of the English teaching was not to be hindered by non-trained teachers. Table 1.3 shows the numbers of Omani and expatriate teachers working in the academic year 2005/2006:

Table 1-3: Numbers of English teachers working in the MOE in 2005/2006

Region	Omanis		Non-Omanis		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Muscat	82	391	220	61	302	452
Batinah North	164	300	224	258	388	558
Batinah South	73	123	169	232	242	355
Dakhiliya	121	167	144	212	265	379
Dhahira North	18	67	25	8	43	75
Dhahira South	80	143	65	66	145	209
Dhofar	27	77	234	175	261	252
Sharqiya North	46	66	103	152	149	218
Sharqiya South	57	137	105	103	162	240
Musandum	6	14	24	22	30	36
Wusta	-	-	52	12	52	12
Total	674	1485	1365	1375	2039	2786

The above discussion and statistics reveal that there are three groups of teachers of English in Oman: the expatriate teachers, the Omani graduates from various universities inside and outside Oman and the Omani Leeds BA TESOL graduates (previously known as diploma holders). This study will be concerned with the last group of teachers (i.e the Leeds BA graduates). These teachers have been in the system longer than any other group. They have a wide range of professional development experiences before and after the education reform. Further details and statistics about this group of teachers will follow in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.1).

1.6 The implementation of the reform

Like most large-scale reforms, the education reform in Oman followed a top-down process in its planning and implementation. The reform was spread gradually throughout the country. The gradual implementation was meant to help in conducting on-going revisions of different aspects of the reform. Evidence of the reform taking

place can be seen in the new structural changes in the Ministry such as those shown in Figure 1.2 earlier. In addition, new and well-equipped school buildings were built. Diploma teachers were enrolled on in-service BA programmes. The textbooks were replaced by new locally produced curriculum materials accompanied by different types of learning resources. All of this refers to the visible and structural aspects of change. Yet, reform is also about changes in the beliefs and consequently behaviour of the people involved in the implementation process particularly teachers. This is the key focus of this study.

1.7 Rationale for the study

This chapter has described developments in the education system and presented in detail the reform of professional development for teachers of English in Oman. Table 1.4 presents a comparison between the main aims of teaching English and the major features of professional development before and after the reform.

Table 1-4: Professional development before and after the reform

The pre-reform period	The reform period
Learning English to raise consciousness of pupils as language learners and recognise the importance of English as a world language	Learning English to be able to communicate in order to deal with changes in life and manage international business opportunities
Professional development planned and delivered centrally by the English department at the Ministry	Professional development managed centrally by two departments: The Curriculum department and the supervision department at the Ministry
Two main sources of professional development: formal courses and inspectors' visits	Teachers are expected to engage in a variety of professional development activities
Formal courses focus mainly on language improvement of teachers	Formal courses focus mainly on methodology training for teachers
Inspectors expected to observe teachers in class and provide immediate guidance and support on how to teach	Supervisors and senior teachers are expected to encourage teachers to reflect on their performances and suggest areas for improvement.
Teachers get support from Inspectors	Teachers get support from supervisors and senior teachers

To the best of my knowledge, previous research investigating the education reform in general and the professional development of teachers of English in particular in Oman has not been systematically organised. There are mainly two places where attempts to organise and publicise ELT research are found in Oman: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education.

In SQU, the language centre at SQU started issuing the *Language Centre Forum* journal in the spring of 1999. At the Ministry of Education, there were mainly two journals. The first of these is the *BA (TESOL) Newsletter* which aimed mainly at presenting the studies conducted by teachers as part of the in-service BA TESOL course (details about this course were presented in Section 1.5.3). The second journal is the *ELT in Oman* which was first published in December 2005 initially on an annual basis. This journal:

targets all those involved in the teaching of English language in the Sultanate. The articles are written by educators and for educators in Oman. We know that a lot of you (educators) do research especially action research; It has come as a forum for you to share and discuss ideas with your colleagues all over the Sultanate.

(Noorani, 2005)

In addition to the above, a recent ministry initiative aimed at publishing the research done in ELT. To date, two research collections have been published (S. Borg, 2006b, 2008). These collections contain the studies done by teachers doing the in- service BA course.

With regard to investigating professional development in Oman, a few studies have been identified. Generally speaking, these studies have been very limited in terms of scope and depth. Most of them cover one aspect of professional development and are usually limited to a few teachers in a single region. A critique of the studies which I have been able to identify will be presented in detail in Chapter 2.

There is no evidence so far which shows the extent to which the proposed changes on professional development presented in this chapter (and summarised in Table 1.4 above) have been reflected on the ground. Nor has there been an investigation of whether teachers are taking more responsibility for their own professional development.

The education literature shows a general sentiment amongst educators and researchers that educational reform principles and policies are not necessarily implemented as initially planned or hoped for; and that there are a number of factors which may interactively influence the process of implementation (Fullan, 2008; Andy Hargreaves, 1998; Nicholls, 1983; Rondinelli, Middleton, & Verspoor, 1990; Wedell, 2009).

Therefore, there is a need to investigate the extent to which the proposed reform of professional development for teachers of English in Oman is being reflected in practice. There are many perspectives through which professional development can be studied, one of which is through investigating teachers' beliefs and practices related to professional development. The significance of beliefs and their relation to practice will be discussed further in the next chapter.

This investigation will hopefully help to understand the relationships among educational reform, professional development and teacher' beliefs; and identify some of the factors that interactively influence these relationships. In practical terms, the investigation will ultimately provide the Ministry of Education with information regarding how teachers perceive one major component of the education reform (i.e: professional development for teachers of English), how they practise it, and what factors influence their practices.

1.8 Thesis outline

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework for this work. I first define educational reform and illustrate the various factors associated with the initiation and implementation of educational reforms. After that, I highlight the key terms related to CPD. A brief historical account of the development of CPD in education will then be described. I then present different issues related to the area of CPD including its definition and characteristics. After that, I describe and define teacher beliefs, and highlight the challenges and the approaches related to studying teacher beliefs. I also review and critique the studies on teachers' beliefs and practices about CPD conducted in various contexts. After that, I end the chapter by providing a detailed account of the previous studies conducted in the Omani context.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the design of the study. First, I present the aims and the research questions. I then describe the research participants and the

rationale for their involvement. I also provide a detailed overview of the research paradigm, research methods and the design of instruments. A detailed account of the process of piloting the research instruments will then be presented. I also describe the data collection process and the data analysis procedures. I conclude the chapter by commenting on the issues related to the quality of the research and the ethical considerations.

Chapters 4 and 5 lay out the findings of the study. In Chapter 4, I focus on teachers' beliefs about professional development and in Chapter 5 I cover teachers' reported professional development practices. In both chapters, the analysis will be guided by the research questions this study is addressing. I will highlight the key issues arising and illustrate them with evidence from the data as appropriate. Quantitative data from questionnaires will be supported with qualitative data deriving from the open questions in the questionnaires, interviews with teachers and interviews with Ministry officials.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the main findings of the study in relation to the research questions, literature and the context of the study. The discussion aims at showing the interaction and relationship between policy and practices related to CPD. It highlights the importance of beliefs in educational reform and illustrates the inter-related factors which influence teachers' beliefs and ultimately their CPD practices.

In Chapter 7, I provide a summary of the findings. I also talk about the limitations of the study, recommendations, implications and suggestions for further research. I end the study by reflecting on what I have gained from the research process.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I discussed the context for this study – a large-scale educational reform in Oman characterized by a new system of Basic Education and the phasing out of the older system of General Education. A key feature of the reform has been the implementation of a wider range of professional development opportunities for teachers than had previously been the case. It is these activities which provide the precise focus for this study; in particular, my aim here is to examine teachers' beliefs about the professional development opportunities available to them and to obtain some insight into the extent to which teachers say they are engaging in particular activities.

In this chapter I will discuss the literature which provides a theoretical background to the examination of such issues. I first examine key factors which influence the implementation of educational reform, before considering in particular the role that professional development plays in this process. I will also discuss the role that teachers' beliefs play in teachers' actions and argue for the importance of examining teachers' beliefs as a way of understanding their practices (in this study, in relation to professional development). Overall, my purpose here is to highlight relationships among educational reform, professional development and teachers' beliefs, and in doing so to establish a rationale for this study.

2.2 Understanding educational reform

Following the first large-scale reform initiatives in the 1960s (Fullan, 2000), the past few decades have witnessed the introduction of educational reforms in many countries around the world. In basic terms, reform "is merely something introduced which is new and different" (Morrish, 1976).

In terms of a working definition for the purpose of the current study, I adopt the following definition of education reform given by Morrison (1998):

a dynamic and continuous process of development and growth that involves a reorganisation in response to 'felt needs'. It is a

process of transformation, a flow from one state to another, either initiated by internal factors or external forces, involving individuals, groups or institutions, leading to realignment of existing values, practices and outcomes.

(Morrison, 1998:13)

Three aspects in this definition are worth highlighting. First, educational reform is a result of recognized needs which may be internal (local), external (international) or both. Second, education reform involves a process of change from a current state to a new hoped-for one. This process is usually referred to as the implementation process of the reform. Rondinelli et al. (1990) stresses the need for giving attention to this process:

Projects promoting educational change must be concerned not only with the substance of innovation – new curricula, new ways of teaching, new methods of service delivery – but also with the complex process of introducing and institutionalizing change.

(Rondinelli, et al., 1990:12-13)

The third aspect which is worth noticing in the definition is that real change in education reform is not confined to the rhetoric and proposed plans which appear on documents and papers but goes beyond that to involve change in the values of the individuals and consequently in their practices. As Rondinelli et al. (1990) argues “education requires change in the behaviours of many people in the education system: students, parents, teachers, inspectors, supervisors, administrators, and specialists” (Rondinelli, et al., 1990:13).

Hence, education reform is ultimately concerned with change of the behaviour and practices of the concerned people. Yet, any change in practice is likely to be complex. Before discussing the factors which influence and shape behaviour of people involved in/affected by the implementation of the reform, I discuss the factors leading to the introduction of education reforms.

2.2.1 Factors driving educational reform

Education reforms, in general, are driven by a range of factors such as national demands, international pressures, political situations, socio-economic aspirations and developments on technology. The factors that most influence a reform in any given context at a particular point in time will vary.

The diversity of the factors driving for education reforms can be seen, for example, in Cookson et al. (1992) which contained reviews of education reforms in a total of 27 countries around the globe. These reviews illustrate examples of how education reforms were rooted and influenced not only by the economic situations of those countries but also by the historical accounts of education in each of them. This link between education reform and historical educational backgrounds reinforces the fact that that education reform is, as described in Morrison's (1998) definition of education reform mentioned earlier, a continuous process rather than a one-off activity.

Wedell (2009) suggests four possible reasons for initiating large-scale educational reform:

1. to enable the national education system to better prepare its learners for a changing national and international reality.
2. to make the education system more clearly accountable for the funding that that it receives.
3. to increase equality of opportunity within society as a whole.
4. to use the announcement of educational changes for some kind of short term political advantage.

(Wedell, 2009:15-16)

As shown in Chapter 1, reason 1 and reason 3 above apply to the context under study here.

Reflecting on the Asian experience of education reform, Maclean (2001: 190) asserts that education reform in the Asian countries has become vital in order to “achieve eradication of poverty, sustainable human development, justice and equity in all respects”. Maclean (2001: 190) adds that “education is very much regarded as the

engine of development, and so countries are exploring ways in which they can most effectively reform their education systems to foster economic, social and political improvement”.

In Chapter 1, I discussed in detail the various factors which directly or indirectly led to the initiation of the education reform in Oman. These factors echo, to a certain extent, several factors mentioned above. The following factors were considered to have provided convincing arguments for the initiation and implementation of the education reform in Oman. They are summarised from MOE (2005a:97-98):

- The deficiencies of the existing pre-reform educational school system in Oman, as highlighted by a World Bank study in the mid-1990s.
- The recommendations emerging from the United Nation’s international conference on education, held in Jomtien in Thailand in 1990, which emphasised the need to improve the quality of education systems in different countries.
- The Omani government’s increasingly strongly felt need, during the 1990s, for highly skilled and trained Omani nationals who would be able to help the country become an active participant in the world economy.
- The evaluations of the education system carried by various international and educational organizations in the period between 1995 and 1998, which recommended ways in which it could be improved.

The reform in Oman, therefore, was a result of a combination of internally recognised and externally recommended factors.

Due in part at least to the diversity of factors, education reform, in general, has always been described as being complex in terms of the relationship between policy and practice (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, & McKinney, 2007; J. W. Little, 1993; J. C. Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001). This complexity often fails to be acknowledged by many people including policy makers, researchers and teacher educators, leading to the simplistic belief that change will occur once teachers are called to a brief training workshop or once the written policy guidelines and instructions are sent off to schools (Hoban, 2002).

While devising and suggesting policies for change and writing change policy documents may appear simple, planning for the implementation of those policies becomes difficult and complex. Various factors that may interactively impact on the implementation of education reform have been discussed in the literature. Below, I highlight some of these factors which are relevant to this study.

2.2.2 Factors influencing the implementation of educational reform

There is no shortage of literature illustrating the unsuccessful outcomes of many education reform initiatives and the fact that the proposed changes are rarely implemented as initially intended or planned. Nicholls (1983:3), for example, stresses that “it is the implementation rather than the creation which presents certain difficulties and problems”. Hargreaves (1998:282) also states that “too many change efforts remain disappointing and ineffective”. Similar reflections were echoed recently by Fullan (2008:84) who admits that “a great majority of policies and innovations over the past 35 years did not get implemented even when implementation was desired”.

The educational literature highlights several factors which may influence the implementation of the education reforms, either positively or negatively. One common factor which may contribute to the success (or failure) of a hoped-for change is the extent to which the proposed reform is communicated clearly to the people concerned. Fullan (2008) and Wedell (2009) argue that change is unlikely to be implemented as intended unless the meaning of the reform is shared among the people most directly affected. In the same vein, Hargreaves (1998: 281) warns that one of the reasons which makes education reform difficult is when its purpose is not demonstrated clearly, thus making people fear change.

In addition, Fullan (1993) focuses on two factors which may cause the failure of education reforms:

One is that the problems are complex and intractable. Workable, powerful solutions are hard to conceive and harder to put in practice. The other reason is that the strategies that are used do not focus on the things that will really make a difference. They fail to address the fundamental instructional reform and

associated development of new collaborative cultures among educators.

(Fullan, 1993:46)

In fact, the two reasons suggested by Fullan above seem interrelated, with each one influencing the other. Both of them, indeed, relate to the gap between theory (policy) and practice (reality). This gap may be largely attributed to the fact that, in many reform projects, new policies and ideas come either from outside experts or from policy makers without consultation with and/or necessarily considering the views and/or needs of the practitioners (particularly teachers) who are supposed to be the core implementers of the reform. In addition, reform ideas may also be imported unadapted from other contexts, despite increasing awareness that what works in a certain context may not necessarily fit others (D. Fink & Stoll, 1998).

Within the field of ELT, Wedell (2009) also regards the existence of the gap between policy makers plans and their own cultural realities and contextual conditions as one of the main reasons behind the failure of reform initiatives. In Wedell's (2009:44) own words: "I find it difficult to understand how so many policy makers and their educational experts can remain so blind to their own educational cultures".

Having recognised the complexity of the implementation of education reform in general and some of the factors which contribute to shape teachers' practices in particular, there are two additional influential factors in educational reform which are centrally relevant to the focus of this study: professional development and teachers' beliefs. I now address these two factors in the following sections and illustrate their relevance to education reform.

2.3 Professional development for teachers

Professional development has long been widely recognised as an important component of any education reform process (Bradley, Conner, Southworth, & University of Cambridge. Institute of Education., 1994; Eraut, 1972; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Richardson, 1994b; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wedell, 2009). Generally speaking, the major aim of CPD, in reform times, is the promotion of the suggested/introduced policies, principles and practices among practitioners. In practical

terms, the significance of professional development in education reform comes from the crucial role it plays in updating and developing teachers' skills in a way which makes them able to reflect on their practice (Newton & Tarrant, 1992). It also serves to inspire and persuade teachers about reform goals and strategies. It can be used to increase collaboration and build a professional community (Judith Warren Little, 2001). Ultimately, professional development aims to support and enhance student' learning and achievements (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

In this section, I identify the key terms and issues related to continuing professional development and relate these to the context of the current study.

2.3.1 Teaching as a profession

Dean (1991) states that the most widely accepted definition of the term *profession* is “an occupation which requires long training, involves theory as a background to practice, has its own code of behaviour and has a high degree of autonomy” (Dean, 1991:5).

Within the field of education, Craft (2000) states that with shift of responsibility of curriculum and professional development from the government to the school or the individual as a general trend in education, the definition of a professional has changed. She continues that “being a professional means taking responsibility for identifying and attempting to meet the professional development needs of oneself and one's institution” (Craft, 2000:7). In this sense, the term “professional” suggests an enhanced level of autonomy and responsibility.

Hargreaves (2000) links the term “professional” with having a status and standing in other people's eyes. If we consider the profession of teaching, some countries have made teaching an *all graduate* profession and raised teachers' salaries. Such actions may give power and status to teachers in some societies as they are compared with other professions according to these elements.

Hargreaves (2000) also states that the development of teachers' professionalism varied in different parts of the world. He concluded that it could be said generally that it has gone through four historical phases. However, he notes that these phases are not universal and they might have different order in some countries. He describes the four stages as follows:

The pre-professional age

In this phase, teachers taught a prescribed syllabus to a fairly large number of students through the trial-and-error process in which teachers learned from their mistakes. Teachers had to cover the syllabus which was dependent on textbooks and resources. The syllabus was unquestioned and there was no feedback on performance from others. Teachers learn how to teach through teaching practice and how others, including their own teachers, had taught them.

The age of the autonomous professional

This phase started after different countries introduced educational innovations and curriculum reforms. There was an improvement in teacher's status and salaries. Teachers had opportunities to choose the methods which they thought were suitable for their students. More attention was given to pre-service education and in-service education. However, in-service training was based on experts presenting their ideas to individual teachers without necessarily linking them to practice.

The age of collegial professional

With the expansion of knowledge and rapid change of life, the last few decades have witnessed a move towards school based professional development in the form of collaboration among colleagues. Teachers started learning from each other in a collegial way. For example, ideas on joint lesson planning and team teaching started to appear in some contexts.

The post-professional or post-modern professional:

This phase has been influenced by two major factors: economics and communication. With the globalisation of economy, educational policies in different countries have become more competitive. Also, the digital revolution has led to compressed space and time. This age has been characterised by the possibility of using many methods or approaches in education. Also, social groups, such as parents, are trying to exert more influence on educational change. This social movement is adding other pressures on teachers.

Although these stages of teacher professionalism cannot be generalised to all contexts precisely as they are presented, it could be said that they provide a useful framework for looking at the developments of professional development of teachers. It has to be noted here, though, that these phases may overlap in terms of such models. For example, formal in-service training which is a characteristic of the second age is still found and considered to be essential in some current educational systems as it has its own strengths. Further details in this regard will follow later in this chapter.

If the above mentioned issues are to be considered in the context of the current study, two observations can be made. First, teaching in Oman has gone through a number of phases in this respect. In the early 1970s, people who had a certain level of proficiency in reading and writing were appointed as teachers. Then in the late 1970s and early 1980s students who finished grade 9 were enrolled into a three year teacher preparation institute in order to qualify them to teach at primary level. After, in most of 1980s and early 1990s, students who finished grade 12 were enrolled into a two year intermediate college after which they became elementary teachers. The way teachers were prepared changed dramatically during the mid 1990s with the introduction of the large-scale education reform. The two year intermediate colleges were replaced by four year teacher preparation colleges in different specialisations which provided the educational system with teachers having higher qualifications. Besides this, different programmes were offered to the teachers who had been in the system to upgrade their qualifications.

The second observation is that both teaching experience and competence have started to be considered as elements required for promotion and participation in different roles related to the profession. For example, the new system allowed for the most experienced and competent teachers to become senior teachers in their schools taking the responsibility of managing groups of teachers. Also, some outstanding teachers have been given different roles and responsibilities such as participating in curriculum design and curriculum review.

The above shows that teaching in Oman has gone through a number of phases in which it has developed as a profession. As I have illustrated in the previous chapter, the professional development of teachers of English has also been influenced by these more general developments.

In the following section, I will present and discuss in-service education and training (henceforth INSET) as the most dominant form of professional development. The purpose of this discussion about INSET is to highlight the characteristics of INSET and illustrate how educators and researchers have identified its shortcomings; and how this had led to the search for alternatives. The relevance of the discussion about INSET to the current study comes from the fact that it has been always been a basic component of professional development in Oman before and after the introduction of the reform. As shown in the previous chapter, the focus and the status of INSET provided to teachers of English in Oman have changed over time.

2.3.2 INSET as a source of professional development

In most cases, INSET is used to refer to the formal training courses which are usually provided/managed by an outside expert or professional. The distinction between INSET and professional development can also be broadly seen on the basis of giving greater focus on institutional and organisational demands on the first; and more focus on individual needs on the later (Craft, 2000). Also, professional development is used in a broader sense to cover various types of formal and informal learning experiences and activities including the formal courses.

INSET has been a dominant model of professional development in different educational settings for a long time (Craft, 2000; Goodall, Day, Lindsay, Muijs, & Harris, 2005). These training courses are usually planned through a top-down process in which the policy makers are the main planners. They are short or long, on-site or off-site and are usually delivered by outsider experts. Generally speaking, the main purpose for INSET has been raising the quality of educational provision (Hayes, 1997).

Needless to say, INSET is important in the career of any teacher and it remains an important source of professional development in different contexts. It is useful for teachers in many ways. It provides valuable support for new teachers. Also, it is essential and necessary for communicating new policies and principles to teachers. INSET can be regarded to be suitable in contexts where teachers might not have the sufficient skills required for implementing teacher independent professional development. INSET can also be relatively cost-effective as it can target a large number of people in one place.

The dominance of the INSET was noted by Lee (1997) who traced the development of INSET by analysing the content of the articles published in the *British Journal of In-service Education* since 1974 when the journal was first published. He classified the articles published in 22 volumes into 32 broad categories. Some elements of his analysis which are directly related to our discussion here are worth mentioning. First, the early volumes contained articles on teachers' centres which were considered to be important providers of INSET. Second, every volume has been influenced by what he calls policy issues. The papers in these volumes revealed a piecemeal approach to providing INSET. Third, evaluation of INSET has been a feature of all the volumes. These evaluations covered perceptions, assumptions and intentions of the course providers and reactions of course participants during and after the courses. However, Lee (1997) added that these evaluations dealt with the short term rather than the long-term effects of professional development. The above observations by Lee (1997) reflect the dominance of INSET not only as a main source of professional development but also as the centre of attention of the evaluations of professional development.

Despite the dominance and the advantages of INSET, the rapid changes in education demanded changes in forms of professional development, including INSET. Early on, the limitations of INSET were recognised. It:

...seemed to be concerned with the transmission of solutions rather than with the study of problems... the emphasis has been on extending the teachers' knowledge rather than on helping him to apply the knowledge he already possesses or could easily obtain for himself to the problems which confront him ... ignores the fact that the participants are often experienced teachers with as much to contribute as to receive.

(Eraut, 1972:3)

Similarly, Fullan & Stiegelbauer (1991) state that "nothing has promised so much and has been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in the practice when teachers returned to their classrooms" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991:315). Dadds (1997) regarded these delivery models as

dangerous as they assume that those who are outside schools should make decisions about the thinking of those who work closely with children (Dadds, 1997:32).

Along this vein, these “short burst” training courses, as Day (1999) calls them, do not seem enough to contribute to the professional development required by teachers. Day (1999:133) adds that although these INSET courses have some strengths, they also have their own limitations as teachers have “less opportunity for extending learning, less choice over what they learn, less support for study unless they belong to a targeted group”. Riding (2001:283) described the “traditional in-service training” as being “too fragmented, unproductive, inefficient, unrelated to practice, and lacking in intensity and follow up”. Craft (2000) provides a list of weaknesses of the INSET or as she called it “the course-led model of professional development”:

- Domination of off-site courses, geared to individuals rather than to groups of staff.
- No linkage to the needs of departments or schools.
- Courses are undertaken on a voluntary basis and, therefore, not necessarily undertaken by those with the greatest need.
- Courses are random in terms of participation and content in relation to the needs of individual schools.
- It has limited impact on practice with little or no dissemination or follow-up.
- Courses are often undertaken during the school day and therefore disrupt the teaching timetable.
- It attempts to cater for people at different starting points and, therefore, is unable to satisfy all participants equally well.

(Craft, 2000:8)

As the shortcomings of all types of traditional in-service training have been recognised (J. W. Little, 1993), calls for more effective form of professional development have been made (Dadds, 1997; Riding, 2001). Harris (2000) argued for teacher involvement in making decisions about their professional development. Dadds (1997) called for a

model of continuing professional development in which the teacher no longer remains as an uncritical implementer of top-down policy. She argued that the 'Delivery Model' has to be replaced by a model in which the teacher is viewed as a professional who is able to use his knowledge and capabilities for the benefit of the students.

In response to criticisms of INSET, attention started to be given to a more school-based and autonomous professional development. This has appeared along with some other educational innovations related to improving teachers' performance such as reflective teaching and decentralisation of teacher supervision. Also, as learners have been increasingly encouraged to be autonomous, teachers have been invited to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Teachers also have to accept, as Dean (1991) said, that schools are no longer the only source of knowledge. Information can be accessed through a touch of a key using computer. These changes, along with the changes in models of teaching to a more student-centred learning, directed teacher education towards more self-initiated continuous professional development.

Although this school-based professional development has been described using various labels and frameworks in different contexts, most of the literature refers to it as continuous professional development (henceforth CPD). This term became popular partly as it did not differentiate between INSET and on-the-job learning (Gray, 2005).

In the next section, I highlight the main characteristics of CPD which are of relevance to the current study. The aim of the section is to provide a working definition of CPD.

2.3.3 Towards a definition and conceptualisation of CPD

Within the field of education, a number of definitions were given to CPD. Villegas-Reimers (2003:12) defines CPD as "a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession". Day (1999) defines CPD as:

Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the

process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives

(C. Day, 1999:4)

Another definition was adopted in the report 'learning and Teaching: A Strategy for Professional Development' (DfEE, 2001) which defines CPD as:

activities that increase the skills, knowledge and understanding of teachers, and their effectiveness in schools and also promotes continuous reflection and re-examination of professional learning. This includes, but goes well beyond, training courses and a wide variety of other on and off-the-job activities.

(DfEE, 2001:71)

Elements from the aforementioned definitions are used collectively to inform the present study. CPD in this sense is distinguishable from "staff development" which entail considering, predominantly, the demands of the institution ; and from "lifelong learning" which can take any types of learning (Goodall, et al., 2005).

The above shows that CPD is broad and comprehensive. A number of elements from the above discussion are worth pointed out. First, CPD consists of various activities and experiences which are practised individually or collaboratively. Second, CPD aims to increase knowledge and understanding of teachers and it also promotes teachers' performance and reflection. Third, CPD learning experiences are not limited to one particular place such as the classroom or the school setting. Rather, they go beyond that as some may be practised for example in the school, at the training centre, on the net or even at home.

A major element of CPD is that, as the term suggests, teachers' professional development is viewed as a continuous process. This element of continuity helps teachers develop through accumulation of knowledge and skills related to their own

field through formal and informal experiences and activities. Another element of CPD is that the teachers become responsible for their own learning. It is not enough to wait for courses to be offered by the institution. Teachers have to become responsible for identifying and addressing their own professional development needs. A third element is that the professional development of a teacher does not depend on one activity such as the formal training course offered by the institution. Instead, various activities of professional development could be engaged in by the teacher. A fourth element is that CPD is flexible in two ways: the number of different activities that a teacher engages in and the frequency of those activities. Riding (2001) adds that CPD should also be:

On-going, include opportunity for individual reflection and group enquiry into practice, be based and embedded in teacher work, be collaborative and allow teachers to interact with peers, be rooted in the knowledge base of teaching, be accessible and inclusive.

(Riding, 2001:283)

In Oman, the term CPD has started becoming more accepted recently along with the term professional development as shown in a number of documents, projects and local conferences organised by MOE. For this reason, both terms will be used interchangeably in this study. Also, Training and INSET are used in Oman to refer to the formal professional development activities such as workshops, courses and conferences. Similarly, this usage will be also adopted in this study.

Friedman & Phillips (2004) found that there is confusion regarding the definition and purpose of CPD:

Professionals have a limited view of CPD – seeing it as training, a means of keeping up-to-date, or a way to build up a career. However, professional associations claim that CPD is: part of lifelong learning; a means of gaining career security; a means of personal development; a means of assuring the public that individual professionals are up-to-date; a method whereby professional associations can verify competence; and a way of providing employees with a competent and a adaptable workforce.

(Friedman & Phillips, 2004:361)

This confusion highlights two issues. First, some teachers may conceptualise CPD simply as a way to update one's knowledge. This limits those teachers' vision of CPD to a lower level of career development which does not help them become ambitious about their professional development. Second, educators, researchers and policy makers aim, in some cases, for ambitious plans for CPD without considering practical issues such as teachers' understanding of CPD and the applicability of various CPD activities. This may result in policy makers envisaging a highly structured CPD which is applied in a very limited way by practitioners.

It seems that this confusion or misunderstanding is a result of the gap between theory and practice shown in Friedman & Phillips' (2004) study mentioned above on the one hand and policy makers' views and teachers' ambitions on the other. This suggests that there is a need for more involvement and commitment from the professionals themselves in the planning and implementing of CPD. This has also been expressed by Gray (2005) as he argues that this terminology, CPD, shifts the emphasis from the provider or the employer to the teacher. This implies that CPD requires the practitioners to take some responsibility of their own professional development. However, using the term CPD is not enough in order to shift the responsibilities. The practice of CPD has to allow for that shift. For example, using the title *Continuing Professional Development or Continuing Policy Dominance*, Purdon (2003) examined the processes and procedures used to develop a CPD framework in Scotland. Interestingly, he concluded that the approach used allowed for more government control of CPD.

Having identified the above basic characteristics and features of CPD, I also find the elements which constitute CPD systems suggested by Villegas-Reimers (2003) to be important and useful:

- The goals, objectives and purposes of professional development;
- The context in which professional development is to take place;

- The personal and professional characteristics of the participants of the system;
- The models, techniques, and procedures to be implemented;
- The costs and benefits of professional development;
- A determination of who is to make which decisions;
- A process to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of professional development on different constituencies;
- A determination of infrastructure support for professional development.

(Villegas-Reimers, 2003:16)

It is important to note here that the above elements are suggested taking into account the fact that a CPD system is broader and more general than a CPD model (Ingvarson, 1998; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Models are usually limited to referring to CPD opportunities/activities which are provided/offered to teachers. Hence, if a CPD investigation is to be comprehensive, as it is the intention in this study, it has to take into account looking at the whole CPD system.

The so far discussed issues related to CPD constitute the core/basis of the design of research instruments for this study as will be explained further in Chapter 3. I discuss in the following sections the meaning of teacher beliefs, their relation to practice, and the potential role they play in the education reform process.

2.4 Teacher beliefs

Another factor crucial to the implementation of educational reform is teachers' beliefs. Following mainstream educational research, language education researchers have given considerable attention, particularly in the past two decades, to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (S. Borg, 2006a; El-Okda, 2005; Fang, 1996; Woods, 1996). This attention has generated a significant amount of research.

The literature reflects a growing recognition and understanding among researchers and educators that teachers' ways of thinking play an important role in constructing

teachers' understandings of teaching and learning, filtering taught theories and shaping teachers' practices and experiences. "Research recommendations and theories are no longer believed to be the sole or the main determinant of teacher behaviour in class" (El-Okda, 2005:5). Rather, it has been recognised that language teachers' beliefs play a major role in influencing what they do. Therefore, in order to investigate teachers' CPD practices, which is the core of the current study, it is important to understand teachers' beliefs about CPD. The basic argument behind the importance of teachers' beliefs is that they play a crucial role in determining teachers' perceptions and judgments about various situations and issues in a way which may impact on their practices.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practice has been described as complex ranging from very consistent to very inconsistent (Duffy & Anderson, 1984; Fang, 1996; Phipps & Borg, 2007). On the one hand, there is a vast amount of research which shows that teachers' stated beliefs influence their practice. On the other hand, some other research suggests that teachers' practices do not necessarily reflect their espoused beliefs. Duffy & Anderson (1984) attributed the inconsistency in conceptualising the relationship between beliefs and practice to the constraints and pressures which influence teachers' cognition and the existence of the restrictions imposed by the contextual realities. This inconsistency may also be explained on the basis of the difference between what is being said (espoused beliefs) and what is being done (theory-in-action). In addition, beliefs are not the sole determinant of behaviour for it can be influenced by different factors.

While the ultimate aim of considering teacher beliefs is to understand their relationship to the outcomes of the teaching-learning process (i.e student achievements), the focus of the current study will be mainly concerned with relationship between teacher beliefs and the implementation of the CPD reform. Indeed, successful implementation of the reform principles is vital for working towards the potentially desired improvements in students achievements.

Pajares (1992) argue that *belief* is a construct term which requires researchers to consider defining it and the way to investigate it carefully and thoughtfully. On the basis of this argument, I now move to provide a conceptualisation of *beliefs* which suits the purpose of this study; and discuss possible approaches to investigating beliefs.

2.4.1 Conceptualising and defining teacher beliefs

The vast amount of research on teacher cognition in general and beliefs in particular shows not only different labels used to describe them, but also a wide range of different definitions (S. Borg, 2003; El-Okda, 2005; Pajares, 1992). Borg (2003:81) defines teacher cognition as an “unobservable cognitive dimension – what teachers know, believe and think”. In his review of research on teacher cognition, Borg (2003) identified 16 terms used to refer to the term such as pedagogical principles, personal practical knowledge and theoretical beliefs. A recent attempt to provide a more comprehensive list of definitions and labels can be found in Borg (2006a:36-39) which involves over 40 different definitions and labels. This list illustrates clearly the broad variety of the terms and definitions that are encountered in the literature to refer to teacher cognition. A similar diversity also appears on the definitions of teacher beliefs. I focus here on teacher beliefs as one aspect of the teacher cognition as a broader term.

The above diversity merits some elaboration here. Clandinin & Connelly (1987) attributed the diversity of the terms used by researchers to the different principles which they are based on. A similar explanation was reiterated by El-Okda (2005) who attributed this diversity to two main reasons: the theoretical basis of the conceptualisation of researchers and the aspect of beliefs they investigate.

The diversity may, at least partially, be also attributed to the complex nature of beliefs and the wide range of possible ways of describing and explaining them. To illustrate this complexity, I consider two issues which are of relevance here.

The first issue is related to the pattern of the teacher-change process which is viewed in three different ways. The first pattern suggests that change of practice proceeds change of beliefs. Guskey (1986), for example, argues that in order for change in beliefs to occur, it has to be preceded firstly by change in practice and secondly changes in the students outcomes. The second pattern proposes that teachers change their practice after they change their beliefs. Golombek (1998), supporting this view, emphasizes that teachers’ personal practical knowledge filters teachers’ experiences and shapes their practice. The third pattern suggests that the process of change involves interaction between beliefs and practice. Richardson (1994a) claims that the process of change may either begin with beliefs or with practice depending on the type of change. While the

third pattern may seem more appealing and realistic, all of the three patterns of the nature of change agree to the importance of change of beliefs.

The second important and common issue that is crucial for conceptualising beliefs is the debate about the distinction between *beliefs* and *knowledge* (for detailed discussion of the debate see for example: Bartels, 2006; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1994a; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001; Woods, 1996). In some cases the terms *beliefs* and *knowledge* are used interchangeably while in some others they are regarded to be different and having various connotations. This distinction seems to be based on philosophical and psychological assumptions rather than on empirical research (Bartels, 2006). Pajares (1992) explains the diversity on the basis of the way people try to operationalise the two terms. Also, these two terms are usually discussed in the literature in relation to other related terms such as assumptions, attitudes, values and cognition.

I now consider how various writers view these two terms. Woods, for example, (1996:195) tries to distinguish between knowledge (conventionally accepted facts), assumptions (temporary acceptance of facts) and beliefs (acceptance of a proposition for which there is no conventional knowledge) but admitted that it is difficult to distinguish between whether teachers talk about their beliefs or knowledge. Likewise, Pajares (1992) demonstrates the difficulty of separating beliefs from knowledge. Keys (2007) considers teacher knowledge to involve both their beliefs and practices while Richardson (1994a) describes the difference between the two terms :

A proposition is knowledge if there is rigorous evidence for the premise, and the procedures for developing the argument as well as the conclusions are agreed on by a community of scholars, scientists, or other professionals. By contrast, when a proposition is held, psychologically, by an individual, and drives his or her actions, it is belief. Beliefs do not require a truth condition.

(Richardson, 1994a:92-93)

The element of truth suggested by Richardson (1994a) here was also echoed by Borg (2001:186) who stated that “knowledge is true in some external sense”. Knowledge is,

therefore, true (justified) and external (outside the individual) while belief is personal (held by the individual) and is not necessarily true. I agree to this later distinction between knowledge and beliefs. I also support the view which considers *what teachers know* to be seen as being broader than *what they believe*.

I consider the above discussion to form the basis of conceptualising beliefs for the purpose of the current study. In addition to this conceptualisation, I also consider using terms such as perceptions, views, beliefs and attitudes in their common meaning, to refer to teachers' mental processes, without getting into the fine distinctions between them presented in various places in the literature. As such, these terms will be used interchangeably. Having considered the above, I now move towards providing a working definition for teacher beliefs.

A detailed definition is provided by Borg (2001) who defines a belief as:

... a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.

(M. Borg, 2001:186)

This definition highlights the features which differentiate *beliefs* from *knowledge* described earlier. Similar features appear in Richardson (1994a:91) who defines beliefs as "an individual's understandings of the world and the way it works or should work, may be consciously or subconsciously held, and guide one's actions". Both of these two definitions will be adopted in this study.

The definitions above seem to have different focus but they also share similar features which can be seen to complement each other to shape together the overall picture of the meaning of beliefs. The features from these definitions go hand in hand with the discussion presented up to now in relation to the nature of teacher beliefs; and hence they will be used collectively to inform this study.

There is yet another important consideration for conceptualising teachers' beliefs. In his discussion about how beliefs can be defined and conceptualised, Pajares (1992) makes an important distinction between teachers' educational beliefs (e.g: learning, teaching

and students) and teachers' general beliefs (beliefs about issues beyond their profession). Pajares (1992) also adds that *educational beliefs* is a broad concept which can encompass other more specific beliefs such as beliefs about the nature of knowledge, beliefs about confidence to perform specific tasks and beliefs about specific subjects (e.g: reading and language).

The above distinction by Pajares (1992) does not mean that each specific set of beliefs work in isolation of other beliefs. In fact, they may interact together and share common features. The importance of the above distinction, in the study, lies partly in the guidance which it affords in deciding on the beliefs which are of relevance to educational reform in general and CPD reform in particular.

2.4.2 Studying teacher beliefs: challenges and approaches

Teacher beliefs have been described as hidden (Freeman, 2002), unobservable (S. Borg, 2003) and subconscious (Donaghue, 2003). Thus, they can not be observed or measured directly but can only be inferred from what people reveal (Pajares, 1992). Having recognised this complex nature of beliefs, one may realise the challenge that can occur when attempting to uncover such a construct.

Pajares (1992:308) describes the challenge of investigating beliefs by stating that “belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation. Many see it so steeped in mystery that it can never be clearly defined or made a useful subject of research”. A more detailed description of this challenge is provided by Donaghue (2003):

The difficulty in eliciting beliefs lies in the fact that personal theories may be subconscious; teachers may be unable to articulate them. Also, related to this in the issue of self-image; subconsciously or consciously, teachers may wish to promote a particular image of themselves.

(Donaghue, 2003:355)

Kagan (1990) also mentions a number of difficulties in investigating beliefs which included the ambiguity of the term and the fact that beliefs cannot be directly inferred. Instead, they can be elicited through performing some tasks such as extended interviews and stimulated recalls.

The literature shows a wide range of methods used/suggested to investigate teacher beliefs. Generally speaking, studies of teacher beliefs use mainly qualitative research methods. This could be attributed to the abstract nature of the beliefs system. However, Likert-scale questionnaires have also been used by researchers to investigate beliefs (El-Okda, 2005) which suggests that beliefs can also be studied using a quantitative approach.

Principally, the methods used to investigate beliefs look for data on mental processes and use direct probes of teachers' thoughts (Fang, 1996; Shavelson, Webb, & Burstein, 1986). Comprehensive descriptions of methods and approaches used in investigating beliefs can be found, for example, in Borg (2006a), Clark & Peterson (1986), El-Okda (2005), Fang (1996), Shavelson & Stern (1981), and Shavelson et al. (1986). In some cases, the methods were borrowed from the field of psychology mainly in laboratory settings. The following represent brief description of some of these methods:

- *Think aloud*: the teacher verbalises his/her thoughts while performing a task.
- *Retrospective interviews*: the teacher describes his/her thoughts immediately after finishing the task.
- *Stimulated recall*: the teacher reports his/her thoughts while replaying a videotape or an audiotape of a recorded lesson or part of it.
- *Journal keeping*: the teacher keeps written records of what he does or thinks when performing the task. The protocols are then analysed.
- *Policy capturing/vignette-based instruments*: the teacher is presented with descriptions or vignettes of teaching situations or students; and they are then asked to make judgements or decisions which will then represent the policy of the teacher.
- *The repertory grid technique*: cards containing scenarios or statements are presented to the participants. They are asked to indicate similar or different cards and justify their answer. Their results are considered as constructs which are then compared against a bipolar rating scale to show relationships.

In his review of the ways to study beliefs, Borg (2006a) classified the methods used for investigating beliefs under four headings each aiming at getting different type of data. These were the self-report (e.g questionnaires), verbal commentaries (e.g: interviews), observation (e.g structured observation) and reflective writing (journal writing).

Each of the above methods has its own strengths and potential weaknesses and difficulties. Also, some of these methods require researcher training (El-Okda, 2005) which suggests that they can be expensive and time-consuming. They also seem to require careful design and thoughtful implementation. In addition, each one may have different aims and generate different type of data. Deciding on which method to employ depends on various factors such as the obtainable budget, available time, accessible resources and number, characteristics and education level of the research participants in addition to the contextual, cultural and practical considerations.

2.4.3 Teacher beliefs, education reform and CPD

Reflecting the crucial role they play in determining the visible success of any educational reform, much attention is given to teachers in the educational reform literature. The failure of many top-down education reforms projects is attributed to the lack of congruence between teachers' practices and the intentions of the reform planners (van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001). More specifically, teachers' beliefs about and understanding of any reform are recognised as playing an important role in influencing whether reforms happen as intended and promote long-lasting change (Brown, 1990; C. Burns, 2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 2008; Hung, 2003; J. C. Richards, et al., 2001).

Teachers' beliefs guide their practice and they also play an important role in accepting new approaches and proposed changes (Donaghue, 2003). Change in teacher beliefs has been recognised as an essential prerequisite to any change in teachers' practice. Therefore, such beliefs need to be uncovered for development and change to occur.

A substantial amount of empirical studies provide evidence that if change of attitudes and beliefs is not considered when introducing pedagogical innovations, teachers may resist, re-interpret, mis-interpret, revise, refine and/or alter the new principles using their own theories (see for example: Cheong, 2005; Edmonds & Lee, 2002; Handal &

Herrington, 2003; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Lamb, 1995; Orafi & Borg, 2009; van Driel, et al., 2001).

In the same vein, Richards *et al.* (2001:41) stressed that teachers' beliefs play a central role in teacher change. They mentioned three assumptions related to teacher professional development:

- teachers' beliefs play a central role in the process of teacher development;
- changes in teachers' practices are the result of change in teachers' beliefs;
- the notion of teacher change is a multidimensional and is triggered both by personal factors as well as by the professional contexts in which teachers work.

A number of studies in various contexts and disciplines pointed out the consequences of lack of consideration of teachers beliefs when introducing innovations. In Indonesia, a study by Lamb (1995), which aimed at investigating INSET participants' reactions to the course one year after it was conducted, described the consequences of not considering teachers' beliefs:

A great deal of our original "input" had simply been lost, and what was taken up was reinterpreted by teachers to fit their own beliefs and their own concerns about what was important to them and their students.

(Lamb, 1995:78-79)

Also, in the USA, Fetters et al (2002) investigated science teachers' beliefs and the challenges they faced as they started implementing a new curriculum. They concluded that teachers' beliefs play major role in making sense of, interpreting and implementing the new curriculum. They concluded that teachers' beliefs need to be considered by professional development programmes through the process of reflection.

In an article which discussed the relation between mathematics teachers' beliefs and curriculum reform, Handal & Herrington (2003:65) concluded that "successful curriculum change is more likely to occur when the curricular reform goals relating to teachers' practice take into account teachers' beliefs".

Very recently, Orafi & Borg (2009) examined the implementation of a new English curriculum in Libya by investigating the beliefs and practices of three teachers using classroom observation and subsequent interviews. The study showed that there is a gap between the principles of the curriculum and the teachers' practices. It also provided evidence that teachers' practices were influenced by teachers' own understandings and beliefs about themselves and their students in addition to the contextual realities and the demands of the system.

Up to this point, I have illustrated the key issues and aspects which constitute the main elements of the current study in relation to the areas of educational reform, CPD and teacher beliefs. I have also defined the relevant key terms and highlighted the main arguments. Moreover, I have pointed out the crucial role teachers play in the success of educational reform and the significance of the consideration of identifying, challenging and changing their beliefs when introducing educational reform in general and CPD reform in particular.

In the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate the shortcomings of the research on CPD and review some of the studies which investigated teachers' beliefs about CPD with particular reference to the studies conducted in Oman.

2.5 Investigating teachers' beliefs about CPD

In this section, I highlight the major criticism levelled against the research on CPD. I also present examples of some studies which investigated teachers' beliefs about CPD in different contexts. The aim of the section is to help situate this study within the current body of research on CPD and inform the design of the study.

Before proceeding into the critique of the current status of CPD evaluations, I emphasize here on the importance of considering the key issues and arguments presented throughout this chapter as a basis for looking at CPD evaluations, particularly in relation to the relationships between educational reform, CPD and teachers' beliefs. In addition to these issues and arguments, I also find the following set of "procedural guidelines" to be useful to consider for CPD evaluations. These guidelines, which come from Guskey (1994) and were reiterated (with slight modifications) in Guskey (1995),

were prepared on the basis of a review of research on professional development in particular and reform in general:

- **Consider change as both an individual (teacher) and organisational process:** CPD should address the needs and concerns of teachers and consider the organisational structures and system politics.
- **Think big, but start small:** change in CPD cannot be expected to happen at once. Successful CPD should follow a gradual process of implementation.
- **Work in teams to maintain support:** successful CPD provides opportunities for the individuals involved to have their say in the process to help focus on shared purposes.
- **Include procedures for feedback on results:** seek feedback on the new efforts to reinforce successful actions. Feedback may be sought in various ways including through the results of students' learning.
- **Provide continuing follow-up, support and pressure:** it is important to provide support and follow-up at early stages in order to overcome any problems until the new practice becomes habitual. Pressure may also be needed to overcome recalcitrance or resistance.
- **Integrate programs with existing initiatives:** innovations need to be introduced as part of a framework of improvement which considers the existing programmes.

In addition to the above factors, another important consideration when evaluating CPD is the fact that it is context-specific and there is no "one" or "ideal" approach to professional development. Hence, any evaluation of CPD needs to consider the context bearing in mind teachers' experiences of professional development as well as the needs of the organisation (Christopher Day, 1991; Goodall, et al., 2005; Guskey, 1994, 1995).

The shortcomings of the previous research on CPD have been recognised in the general education research literature. Generally speaking, the literature shows that evaluations of CPD in many cases tend to be limited to considering the perceptions of teachers while neglecting the policy makers' views. Another limitation to the most CPD

evaluations is also that they do not take on board the purposes, outcomes and forms of CPD (Muijs, Day, Harris, & Lindsay, 2004). Also, Guskey (2000:8-10) mentions three main limitations of the research on CPD. First, most evaluation aims at summarising the activities being taken with no consideration to the effectiveness of the CPD. Second, those evaluations investigate participants' satisfaction of the experience with little focus on what participants gain from CPD. Third, evaluations tend to be brief while change usually takes a relatively long period of time.

Along the same line, Edmonds & Lee (2002) also stated that they have found that CPD evaluations depended solely on feedback sheets given to teachers. These feedback sheets tend to cover issues such as delivery and content without considering the impact of CPD on teachers. In terms of the research participants, another limitation of some of the previous studies on CPD is that they limit themselves to studying only those who receive/participate in the CPD (Muijs & Lindsay, 2008) without considering other people involved in the planning and delivery of the CPD process.

Having recognised the above limitations, I now present examples of some studies which have investigated teachers' perceptions about CPD in different contexts. Before presenting these studies, it should be noted that the literature shows a vast amount of research on CPD. The selection of these studies was based on the fact that they share some of the aspects being considered by the current study. They also come from varied places and this shows that CPD evaluation is of concern to various contexts around the world. In practical terms, these studies provide a useful insight into how CPD evaluation may be approached.

In a study about the decentralisation of CPD, Kelly & McDiarmid (2002) examined the CPD activities of the Kentucky Education reform Act. In this reform each school was asked to form a professional development committee. These committees were responsible for devising a comprehensive professional development plan that includes the teacher's professional development needs, school goals, descriptions of professional development activities and ways of evaluating these activities.

They tried to investigate if teachers were involved in making decisions about their professional development, what the formats of the planned professional development activities are and whether they differ across school levels and district sizes.

The findings showed that Kentucky teachers had more chance to participate in making decisions about their professional development planning than in the past. This implies that they were given some responsibility in making decisions about their professional development which is one of the basic elements of CPD as stated earlier. This participation was organised mainly through direct input from teachers.

Also, the study analysed 972 professional development activities which were then grouped into 39 foci, 54% of which were curricular, 42% were non-curricular and 4% non-classifiable. These activities were then classified by the researchers into three main categories: training, learning community and innovative. The training activities were those professional development activities delivered by experts. The learning community activities were those practised inside the school through the collaboration of teachers. The innovative activities were those non-traditional professional development activities such as action research. The data revealed dominance of the first paradigm leaving around a quarter of the activities (24.79%) to the other two types.

The findings also showed that the training paradigm's dominance decreases as the school level increases. In other words, there was less formal training in the upper levels. Also, the innovative activities increase with higher levels. The data also showed that small districts depended more than medium and large districts on external resources of professional development such as attending conferences. They depended less on the schools being a learning community. The researchers attributed this to the limitation of the internal capacity of schools in the small district which usually have fewer resources and facilities.

In their study about teachers' perceptions of CPD with over 2500 teachers in 22 schools in England using a questionnaire survey and a case study phase, Hustler et al. (2003) found that most teachers had traditional notions of CPD such as courses, conferences and INSET days. However, there were a few teachers who took part in other forms of CPD such as research, secondments and international visits which they regarded as very valuable. This study aimed to investigate the CPD strategy 'Learning and Teaching: A Strategy for Professional Development' which was launched in 2001. CPD in this strategy focused on teaching skills and subject knowledge and was led by school staff.

Some teachers, in this study, felt the school development needs and national priorities were given more attention than their individual needs.

In a context of a curriculum reform in a secondary school in Hong Kong, Hung (2003) investigated teacher' perceptions of their CPD needs in relation to their changing roles and the demands of the new curriculum. The participants of the study were nine teachers from one school. These teachers occupied varied positions in different subject areas. Three types of data collection methods were used: interviews, observations and document analysis. The study revealed that teachers welcomed the change despite the fact that it was planned in a top-down approach and it demanded them to perform new roles. Teachers expressed a poor sense of ownership of the reform due to lack of involvement in the decision making. They also regarded the CPD policy as being incoherent, insufficient and consisting of fragmented and unrelated activities. A more genuine and reflective type of CPD which is embedded in the regular working day was recommended

Another study was conducted by Burns (2005) who examined teachers' views about CPD in a rural cluster of primary schools in England. Using structured questionnaires for data collection and semi-structured interviews for more in-depth exploration, Burns identified several findings, two of which are worth mentioning here. The first is that there is a mismatch between what CPD is and how teachers think it should be. The questionnaire included six purposes for CPD which are: personal professional development, school development, teaching specific subjects, key stage teachers' development, national strategy implementation and Governors' professional development. The analysis showed that teachers would have liked more concern given to personal professional development than was actually the case. Personal professional development refers to what teachers feel about their needs for professional development as opposed to school needs. The second interesting finding is that there is a conflict between the individual needs and the requirements of the system. Teachers felt that they had little control over the management of their CPD. School managements exert more control on the direction and funding of CPD followed by subject coordinators who became the second most influential people.

In Greece, John & Gravani (2005) evaluated a university-provided in-service training programme for secondary-school teachers. The study involved 22 teachers and 12 university tutors. It aimed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of both teachers and university tutors using audio-recorded semi-structured interviews over a period of two months. The study focused on two main issues: reaction evaluation (overall perceptions towards the programme) and learning evaluation (the principles, curriculum and practices that formed the content of the programme). With regard to reaction evaluation, the study found that the programme helped higher education tutors and secondary school teachers to come together and it also provided a chance for teachers to escape from the routine and refresh themselves. However, the study revealed that there was a gap between theory and practice as well as a lack of proper organisation of the programme. In addition, teachers felt that the programme involved an unfriendly atmosphere as there was a lack of teachers' involvement in planning, absence of provision of a range of subjects to choose from, lack of respectful dialogues and meaningful collaboration with others. In terms of learning evaluation, the programme was described by teachers to have provided a very limited opportunity for learning. Only a few teachers stated that they had gained new knowledge from the programme related to the theoretical underpinnings of the new teaching methodologies.

In Hong Kong, Cheong (2005) investigated teachers' perceptions of a newly introduced policy document on continuing professional development. The findings of the study were based on questionnaires with 50 teachers in addition to 5 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that teachers were not involved during the policy-making process. It also showed that teachers were frustrated with the provider-and-policy-led model of CPD which had resulted in a gap between teachers' needs and the new CPD policy.

The argument proposed in the current study advocates a comprehensive view of CPD evaluation in which some key concepts and issues related to educational reform and teachers' beliefs are being considered. On the basis of this view, the aforementioned studies seem to be limited in terms of the scope of investigation. These studies did not consider investigating CPD in a comprehensive manner taking into account the overall

background of the educational system, the various components of the CPD system and the factors which may possibly influence the implementation of CPD.

Despite the limitations, these studies are worthwhile in providing various ways and aspects which can possibly be considered for investigating CPD. Examples of the aspects investigated in these studies are teachers' level of involvement in making decisions about their CPD and the balance between the national requirements and the personal needs. Collectively, these studies contributed to the current study as some of the aspects investigated were incorporated into the design of research as will be illustrated in Chapter 3. The following section focuses on examining the studies on CPD which have been conducted in the Omani context.

2.6 Investigating CPD in the Omani context

I mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.7) that the CPD reform for teachers of English in Oman has not undergone systematic and extensive evaluation. In fact, researching ELT in general and the CPD of teachers of English in particular started mostly after the education reform was introduced in 1998. I now examine the previous studies which investigated teachers' beliefs about CPD in Oman.

For the purpose of the current study, I searched for the studies which have investigated the beliefs and practices of teachers of English in the Omani context. By and large, investigating the beliefs of teachers of English seems to be increasingly popular in the past few years in Oman (see for example: Al-Balooshi, 2007; A. Al-Belushi, 2004; k. Al-Belushi, 2002; Al-Busaidi, 1998; Al-Handhali, 2007; M. Al-Hinai, 2006; Al-Hosni, 2006; Al-Kalbani, 2004; Al-Kindi, 2006; Al-Naddabi, 2003; Al-Salimi, 2003; Al-Shabibi, 2004; Al-Toubi, 2002). Despite the fact that these studies investigated teachers' beliefs about varied aspects of ELT in Oman without focusing specifically on professional development, they helped in providing an insight for the current study in relation to the possible ways of investigating beliefs in the Omani context. They also provided a background on the status of the current ELT research, particularly in relation to beliefs, in the Sultanate. More specifically, I identified 17 studies which investigated teachers' beliefs about professional development in Oman. Table 2.1 provides details of these studies in terms of title, research methods, participants and main results.

Table 2-1: Research on CPD in Oman

Researcher	Title	Methods	Participants	Results
(Al-Bedwawy, 2002)	Promoting Teachers' Professional Development: New roles and Challenges for the Senior Teachers in Oman	- Survey: The majority of the questions in this questionnaire are open-questions. - There are also fixed alternative response questions and Yes/No questions	19 senior teachers of English from Batinah North (8 males and 11 females) (10 Omanis and 9 non-Omanis)	The study points out the difficulties senior teachers have in practising their new roles in terms of availability of time as well as the skills, knowledge and training required.
(M. Al-Ghafri, 2002)	Teachers' Attitudes about Classroom Observation in Oman	- Questionnaire - Focused interview	More than 50 teachers from one region (Dhahira south) were involved (males and females, omanis and expatriates)	The study showed that teachers value classroom observation as a source of professional development. It also showed that inspectors need more training and teachers want to be involved in talking about and analysing their lessons.
(Al-Masqari, 2002)	Investigating the reflective practices among Elementary school teachers in Oman	Questionnaire	- 15 male and 15 female teachers with a range of experience between eight years to eleven years of teaching. - Teachers teach at the elementary level. The attended many in-service courses that are given by the Ministry of education and the British Council. These teachers graduated from the Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges.	The study shows that teachers are influenced by their colleagues more than by supervisors. It also shows that teachers practice post-lesson reflection and it highlights the importance of in-service training in improving teachers' reflective practice.
(Al-Lamki, 2002)	Analysis of Supervision Feedback Reports of Senior English Teachers in Basic Education Schools	Mainly document analysis using two: functional analysis and thematic analysis This was then followed by interviews for the purpose of in-depth investigation of some issues	Population: 45 senior English teachers who started practising their job in 1998 Sample: 17 senior teachers from four regions were selected to form the sample of the study	The study shows that senior English teachers need a great deal of assistance and training to overcome some of the difficulties they face in writing supervisory feedback reports. It also shows that a directive model of supervision (instead of a reflective one) seems to be followed by senior when conducting observations and writing reports.
(Al-Habsi, 2004)	Peer Observation in ELT in Oman: how it is carried out and teachers' attitudes towards it	Questionnaires and interviews	65 teachers from 15 schools in the Sharqiya North region	The study shows that teachers agree to the usefulness of peer observation. They have a say in the peer observation process in terms of who to observe and when to observe. Teachers feel they want to have a clearer idea about peer observation and they also need training.
(Al-Zedjali, 2004)	Fostering professional development in post lesson discussions: perceptions of teachers and supervisors	- Questionnaires for teachers - Interviews with supervisors through computer mediated communication using the messenger (hotmail& yahoo) in writing	- Questionnaires: targeted teachers 45, questionnaires back 27 - A total of 4 interviews	The study points out that the concepts of reflection and teacher autonomy are encouraged in theory, but they are absent in practice. It also shows that supervisors find it difficult to support teachers regularly in schools due to lack of time.

Table 2.1		<i>continued</i>		
Researcher	Title	Methods	Participants	Results
(Alyafae, 2004)	An Investigation into the Attitudes of Omani Teachers to INSET Courses	Questionnaire: close and open-ended questions	50 teachers (25 males and 25 females) from different regions in Oman	The study shows that the majority of teachers indicated an interest in making decisions on training courses, particularly on aims and content but they reported a very low experience on that. However, a minority were not interested in involvement due to valuing the role of experts and claiming the lack of knowledge.
(Al-Kharbushi, 2005)	Senior English Teachers' feedback skills during post lesson discussions in the Omani schools	- Audio recordings of Post lesson discussions - Interviews	8 participants participated in this study: 3 teachers, 3 senior English teachers and 2 regional supervisors from Muscat region	The study shows that senior English teachers seem to possess some effective feedback skills such as active listening and using supportive and comprehensible language.
(Al-Shizawi, 2005)	English teachers' Attitudes Towards the Post-lesson Discussion in Oman	Questionnaire	100 teachers of English (50 males and 50 females) from Batinah north which has a total of 936 teachers of English	The study reveals a lack of sufficient interpersonal supervisory skills and a deficiency in the supervisors' professional knowledge as well as unawareness of the value of the post lesson discussions among some teachers.
(Al-Bahri, 2006)	First-year Omani teachers of English: Expectations, development and support	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	Four first-year Omani teachers of English	The study shows that the teachers came into teaching with expectations which were greatly informed by their schooling experiences. Their development and understanding were supported to a great extent by senior teachers and colleagues.
(Al-Sawafi, 2006)	Teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of effective supervisory visits: Moving towards cooperative supervision	Questionnaire	42 male and 40 female teachers drawn from a total of 367 (2005/2006) teachers of English in Al-Dhahirah South region. The sample represents 30.94% of the teachers available in the region 19 Regional Supervisors of English from three regions: 7 from Al-Dhahirah South, 4 from Al-Dhahirah North, and 8 from Dakhiliya.	The study shows agreements in the perceptions of teachers and supervisors of the important features of effective supervisory visits. The majority of teachers and supervisors supported the need for collaborative, teacher-centered, non-directive supervisory visits based on a sharing relationship with the teacher where both teacher and supervisor negotiate decisions about teaching. A framework to guide supervisory visits in the Omani context was developed.
(B. Al-Farsi, 2006)	Omani Teachers' Attitudes Toward Classroom Research	- Survey: (closed-ended statements and open-ended questions) - interviews	- Survey: 30 males and 30 females teachers from 12 different high schools involved as follows: - interviews: 5 males and 5 females	The study shows that Omani teachers strongly value classroom research and believe it has a positive impact on the development of teachers, students and schools. The study showed Omani teachers' strong desire for the results of classroom research to be implemented in their schools. Main obstacles that distract teachers from conducting research were: heavy school duties, lack of time and lack of courage.

Table 2.1		<i>continued</i>		
Researcher	Title	Methods	Participants	
(Al-Ghatrifi, 2006)	An Investigation into the English Teachers' Perceptions of the PRIT Course in the Sultanate of Oman	Questionnaire: close and open-ended questions	35 teachers from Muscat region (27 females, 7 males) (23 Omanis and 12 expatriates)	The study shows that there was an overall satisfaction about the PRIT course among teachers. They think that the course helped them to overcome some problems and gave them the opportunity to share experiences with others. They also thought that their needs and beliefs were considered at the beginning of the course.
(Al-Sinani, 2007)	Promoting Reflection through Post-Observation discussions	- Audio recording of post-observation discussions - Interviews	Three senior English teachers and three teachers (all Omanis)	The study provides some evidence that some Omani senior English teachers support teachers to reflect upon their lessons through the use of appropriate language in post-lesson discussions.
(Al-Rasbiah, 2007)	In-service Training Needs of EFL Teachers in Oman	Questionnaire	Participants from 8 regions : - 338 grades 5-12 EFL teachers (males and females, Omanis and non-Omanis) - 80 Supervisors - 17 teacher trainers	The study shows that teachers' most important needs are in the area of teaching writing. Omani teachers particularly diploma holders and new teachers expressed great need for in-service training.
(Bani-Orabah, 2008)	Teachers' Beliefs about Peer Observation	Questionnaires and interviews	110 teachers from 12 schools in Sharqiya North of the Sultanate of Oman. The participants represent 30% of the teachers in the region	The study shows that peer observation is not carried out as expected by the Ministry. Examples of the problems with peer observation were: teachers not aware of the purpose, observers' dominance of the activity, absence of pre-lesson discussion, existence of the evaluative aspect as well as practical difficulties related to workload, teachers' anxiety and reluctance.
(Al-Balushi, 2008)	Impact of an INSET Course on Teachers' Views and their Reported Practices in Teaching Stories to Young Learners	Semi-structured interview with teachers through 'CMC' (Computer Mediated Communication) at the beginning of the course. The six teachers were interviewed via 'CMC' again at the end of the course. Semi-structured Interview with the teacher trainer of the above using a via CMC. Classroom observations of sessions which focus on teaching stories to young learners.	six teachers and a teacher trainer	The study shows that the PRIT course did seem to have an impact on teachers' views regarding teaching stories to young learners due to teachers' strongly held beliefs and the fact that the teacher trainer seemed to ignore participants' prior experiences.

The significance of this summary lies in the fact that it represents, to my best knowledge, the first attempt to review these studies in one place. Moreover, the information gathered in this table constitutes a useful base of knowledge with regard to the studies on professional development in Oman not only for the current study but also for any further investigation of CPD in Oman.

A number of issues are worth noting in the table. In terms of topics, the majority of the studies focused mainly on (a) the roles of supervisors and senior teacher and (b) various aspects related to classroom observation such as peer observation, post-observation discussions, reflection and writing of reports on observation. A few studies dealt with the following issues (one study per issue): INSET course, first-year teachers' expectations, classroom research, PRIT course and training needs.

With regard to participants, almost all studies targeted teachers and/or senior teachers in schools as the main participants. In addition to teachers, three studies involved supervisors and two studies involved teacher trainers.

The table also shows that questionnaires are the most commonly used method of data collection. A considerable number of studies, however, used interviews as either the primary or secondary data collection method. Two studies audio-recorded post-lesson discussions while two other studies used computer mediated communication (CMC) for interviews. One study used document analysis followed by interviews and another study used classroom observation.

On the whole, the results of the studies reveal a gap between theory and practice in terms of what the Ministry plans and how those plans are being implemented on the ground. The studies also point out that teachers, senior teachers and supervisors lack the skills, knowledge and training they need in order to be able to implement the change suggested by the Ministry in the area of professional development. In addition, the studies also show teachers' desire to play an active role in their professional development and for their needs to be considered by the Ministry when planning training courses.

The studies also illustrate the various factors that may contribute in shaping teachers' views about the professional development activities and those factors which influence

the practices related to professional development. Examples of the factors that can influence teachers' views are lack of appropriate training, required skills and sufficient knowledge as well as teachers' past experiences related to professional development. However, the factors which seem to influence teachers' practices are mostly practical such as workloads, lack of time, lack of courage, teachers' anxiety and reluctance, lack of encouragement and lack of clarity of the guidelines. All these factors may interact with one another.

The findings of these studies, indeed, provide useful insight into the state of the professional development activities investigated in the Omani education system. However, most of these studies focus on issues related only to one type of professional development which is classroom observation. In addition, most of them involved participants from one region only, most probably the researchers' region. Although such limited level of involvement may entail that the results may, most likely, apply to that particular region being investigated, the findings remain useful as they provide a focused insight into the situations on the regions being studied.

It was also notable that each study has been conducted in isolation of the previous studies in Oman. The research results lack any sense of continuity with previous work. Such observation may be due to the lack of a system whereby teachers can get access to the previous studies done in Oman. It is worth mentioning here that most of the studies presented in this section were obtained through personal communication with the researchers.

In addition to the above described studies, there are also two more studies which I have identified as being relevant to the current study. The first of these studies was conducted by Al-Hinai (2003), who investigated the overall professional development system within the Ministry of Education. Al-Hinai (2003) found that the Omani teachers in general value INSET in their professional development. The study attributed this to the unavailability of better alternatives in the teachers' workplace. As justified in Chapter, I also think that teachers of English valued INSET before the education reform took place because they were lacking the abilities and skills to take responsibility for their own professional development. Al-Hinai's (2003) study concluded by suggesting the

implementation of a new professional development model which provides wider opportunities and a variety of enquiries and dimensions of professional development.

The second study was a small-scale one in which Atkins et al. (2005) investigated the impact of the Leeds BA (TESOL) programme on the perceptions of Dakhiliya Cohort 2 graduates about the value of the BA for their professional development. They found that participants felt that the programme had a positive impact on their perceptions of professional development although changes in perceptions do not necessarily mean actual improvements in practice. Participants also felt that there was a lack of continuing professional development opportunities for them.

As Atkins *et al.* (2005) focused on a fairly limited number of BA graduates, I think that there is a need to investigate in depth the area of continuing professional development of English teachers in Oman in order to arrive at a clear picture of the current state of professional development.

This section has shown that in Oman research into the professional development of teachers of English has increased since the introduction of the education reform. It also highlighted the need for a more comprehensive study of the CPD of teachers of English in Oman. This section and the previous one provided insight that informs the overall design of the current study in terms of the issues to be investigated (e.g: CPD activities, aims), possible research methods to be implemented and the participants to be involved (teachers and Ministry officials). Further details in this regard shall follow in the next chapter.

2.7 Conclusion and implications for the study

The previous chapter and this one have a number of implications for this study. Chapter 1 argued that CPD of teachers of English in Oman has developed with the introduction of the education reform. It also showed that the training and supervision suggest various types of CPD activities. However, the extent to which those activities are reflected in practice requires thorough investigation. This investigation should not aim only at examining the extent to which teachers conceptualise and practise professional development activities but rather it should also seek Ministry officials' views on teachers' CPD.

This chapter provided a theoretical basis for the study in relation to the factors influencing the implementation of educational reform with particular focus on the roles of professional development and considerations related to teacher beliefs during the phase of implementation.

The chapter showed that there is a growing tradition of research related to CPD in various countries and contexts. Similar research has also started to take place in Oman in recent years following the introduction of the educational reform. The limitations and shortcomings of the current research on teachers' beliefs about CPD were presented and discussed.

The arguments, factors and issues presented throughout this chapter as well as the identified limitations of some of the research on CPD underpin the rationale for this study and inform its methodology. The latter is the focus of the next chapter.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the developments of the CPD system for teachers of English in Oman. It was claimed that the area of professional development of teachers of English in Oman has not undergone systematic and in-depth investigation. In Chapter 2, I argued for the need to investigate the current beliefs and practices related to the CPD of teachers of English. Both the description of the proposed CPD system in Chapter 1 and the literature review discussions and arguments in Chapter 2 were used to inform the design of the study presented in this chapter.

The current chapter will start by presenting the aims and the research questions of this study. Then it will describe the research participants and the rationale for their selection. A detailed overview of the research paradigm, research methods and the design of instruments will then be presented. This will be followed by an account of the process of piloting the research instruments. The data collection process and data analysis procedures will then be described. The chapter concludes by commenting on the issues related to the quality of the research and ethical considerations.

3.2 Aims of the research

The study aims to:

- explore teachers' stated beliefs related to CPD with regards to the following: its meaning, significance, aims, possible activities and teacher's involvement in the CPD process.
- identify the CPD activities which teachers of English in Oman say they engage in.
- investigate teachers' experiences of CPD in terms of the benefits gained and their level of involvement in decision making.
- investigate the perceptions of Ministry officials about CPD and their views on teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD.
- Compare the perspectives on CPD held by teachers and Ministry officials.

3.3 Research questions

Based on the description of the context of the study as well as the discussion in the literature review chapter, this study will be guided by the following general research question:

- In the context of a top-down large-scale education reform, to what extent are the beliefs and practices related to CPD held by teachers of English congruent with the official CPD policy, and what implications does this level of congruence have for our general understandings of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' practices in CPD?

Hence, the study will aim to answer the following specific research questions:

- What are teachers' beliefs about CPD, its role and different types of professional development activities?
- What are the professional development activities that teachers of English say they are engaged in?
- What are the benefits that teachers think they have gained from CPD?
- What are teachers' perceptions with regard to the people who should be involved in making decisions about their CPD?
- What do teachers think about who actually participates in making decisions about their CPD?
- What are Ministry officials' views regarding CPD (its definition, purposes, types of activities and how it is provided)?
- To what extent are the perspectives on CPD held by teachers congruent with the perspectives of Ministry officials?

3.4 Participants

The main participants in this study were teachers of English in Oman. Ministry officials also contributed to the study. I discuss these two groups in turn below.

3.4.1 Teachers of English

This group is the core of the study. Chapter 1 contained a detailed account of the different groups of teachers of English in Oman. This study is concerned with the most experienced Omani teachers of English in terms of years of teaching. These were the diploma holders who have done the Leeds BA TESOL programme described in Chapter

1. Table 3.1 below provides information about the distribution of these teachers across the regions of Oman. It was my goal to involve this entire population of BA TESOL graduates in this study.

Table 3-1: Leeds BA TESOL graduates still working as teachers in 2005/2006¹

Region	No of BA graduate teachers
Muscat	87
Batinah North	95
Dhahira South	66
Dakhiliya	77
Batinah South	36
Sharqiya South	32
Dhofar	19
Sharqiya North	26
Dhahira North	18
Mussendum	3
Total	459

I decided to work with these teachers for several reasons. First, they may be regarded as homogeneous as they have similar background experience and qualifications. They finished their two-year diploma on teaching, had a fairly long teaching experience, attended a wide range of CPD activities (as described in Chapter 1) and then got their degrees through the in-service BA TESOL programme. Second, this group of teachers experienced professional development before and after the education reform. This will allow them to compare between different types of professional development activities and provide feedback on their benefits. Third, first-hand experience, through visits to regions and meetings with the BA graduates, leads me to believe that amongst these graduates there is significant interest in continuing professional development.

¹ The numbers in the table come from cohorts 1 to 4 which graduated before the start of the data collection of this study. There were two more cohorts of graduates who finished afterwards but they were not involved in this study.

3.4.2 Ministry officials (CPD coordinators)¹

The second group of participants were the Ministry officials who are responsible for the planning and implementation of CPD activities. This included those who are responsible for the supervision of teachers and for curriculum training both at Ministry level and in the regions. These Ministry officials represent the link between MOE and the teachers of English in schools.

At the Ministry level, two people were considered to be involved in the study: the chief English supervisor and the teacher trainer advisor. At the regional level, senior supervisors and teacher trainers are considered the ones who are mainly responsible for CPD of teachers of English. In each of the 11 regions, there is usually one senior supervisor while there are two or three teacher trainers depending on the size of the region. Table 3.2 below shows the Ministry officials targeted in the study:

Table 3-2: Targeted participants from the Ministry and regions

Officials from the Ministry	→	Teacher trainer advisor	Chief supervisor
Officials from the regions	→	Teacher trainers	Senior supervisors

The involvement of the Ministry officials in the study aimed to provide a broader view of the CPD system by answering questions related to, for example, how CPD policies and plans are made, how CPD activities are decided upon, how they are offered to teachers and how teachers' feedback is considered. In addition, it was expected that meetings with this group would be of great value and importance in providing commentary on various issues raised by teachers.

3.5 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm may be defined as “a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, how results should be interpreted and so on” (Bryman, 1988:4). If we consider the research setting, the research paradigm comes at the top of the hierarchy in the research process. The paradigm can work as the umbrella, according to Bryman (2004), for the practice of the research. Thus, the paradigm guides different aspects of

¹ Throughout this study, the terms “Ministry officials” and “CPD coordinators” are used interchangeably to refer to this group of participants.

the research such as the principles of the research, the data collection methods, data analysis and sampling designs.

Most research textbooks differentiate between two major paradigms, namely the scientific and the interpretive research paradigms. Scientific research is based on positivism which holds an objective view of the world and looks for the true nature of the reality. Researchers, according to this school of thought, remain detached from the social context. Interpretive research, on the other hand, is based on a constructivist point of view in which the researcher cannot be detached from the context and the subjective knower is the only source of information. Therefore, several constructions and results from the same inquiry are possible because they are always the result of an interaction between the inquirer and the individual or the social situation (Bryman, 2008; Guba, Phi Delta Kappa International., & Indiana University. School of Education., 1990; Nunan, 1992).

Scientific research is based mainly on quantitative research that focuses on “deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, centralised data collection and statistical analysis” while the interpretive or qualitative research focuses on “induction, discovery, exploration, theory/ hypothesis generation, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and qualitative analysis” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:18).

Despite the above stated distinction between the qualitative and the quantitative research, areas of connections between them have also been recognised and hence combining both approaches is regarded to be possible (Bryman, 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) and even desirable.

Having considered the above, this study followed a pragmatic approach which mixes quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed method approach uses “a method and philosophy that attempts to fit together the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative research” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:16). Pragmatists consider research questions more than the worldview or methods of investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Therefore, they do not restrict themselves to certain methods. Rather, they use any method that is able to provide an insight to answering the research questions. The use of a mixed method approach helps different types of methods (quantitative or qualitative) complement each other.

A useful consideration when following a mixed method approach is suggested by Hammersley (1996: 167-168) who presents three possible reasons to the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches:

- *Triangulation: the findings from both approaches are used to check each other.*
- *Facilitation: one approach is used to support or aid the other. The results from the first approach may therefore serve as the basis for the other.*
- *Complementarity: one approach is used to complement the other. Each approach focuses on different aspects of the investigation.*

Another useful consideration in the mixed method approach is related to the way the combination of quantitative and qualitative work is being approached. Two criteria are proposed in this regard. These are the *priority decision* (which one is primary) and the *sequence decision* (which one comes first) (Morgan, 1998; Morse, 1991).

These observations on research paradigms served as the overall principles of the research design. They will be unpacked in the following sections.

3.6 Research methods

As stated earlier, the study aimed at investigating teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD. The choice of research instruments was informed largely by the discussion of research paradigm described in the previous section of the chapter. Two types of research instruments were used in the study: questionnaires and interviews. These are considered to be the most common types of survey instruments in most areas of social inquiry in general (Blaxter, Tight, & Hughes, 2001; Nunan, 1992) and in the evaluation of professional development in particular (Craft, 2000). Surveys have been defined as "information collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences, and behaviour" (A. Fink, 2006:1). In his review of the different research methods used in language teacher cognition research, Borg (2006a) also regarded questionnaires and interviews among the most common methods for eliciting teachers' beliefs and attitudes. Each of these research methods has its advantages and limitations as I describe in the next sections.

3.6.1 Advantages and limitations of questionnaires

Questionnaires are widely used to collect mainly numeric information from participants in geographically spread areas and can be conducted without necessarily having the researcher present (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Due to the fact that the number of the main participants of this study (459 teachers) is relatively large, questionnaires seemed to be the most suitable research instrument to be used with this group of participants. There is also evidence in the research literature that questionnaires are a suitable tool for investigating teachers' beliefs generally and in relation to CPD (see, for example, Hustler, et al., 2003; Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Zacharias, 2005).

Table 3.3 shows the advantages of using questionnaires. These advantages also provide a rationale for choosing this research instrument.

Table 3-3: Advantages of questionnaires

- Questionnaires are efficient in terms of time, effort and cost as they can be used to get a huge amount from a large number of people over a relatively short period of time (Dörnyei, 2003; Fowler, 2001).
- The use of questionnaires helps in avoiding direct contact between the researcher and the participants and as such avoids the influence of the personal appearance, mode or conduct of the researcher (R. B. Burns, 2000).
- Using questionnaires entail the absence of the researcher and therefore ensures anonymity of respondents which makes them more likely to respond more directly and openly (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000).

However, questionnaires have their own limitations. Some of these limitations are related to the type of data they generate. For example, In order for questionnaires to be clear to respondents, they tend to be made simple and straightforward. This, in effect, may limit the depth of the investigation (Dörnyei, 2003). Also, using questionnaires does not provide an opportunity for probing or clarifying answers (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). The use of interviews, as will be shown in the next section, helps to complement these limitations.

Other limitations are related to the process of the design of the questionnaire. For example, long questionnaires may make respondents tired or bored which may influence their responses (Dörnyei, 2003). Therefore, the questionnaire for this study was made at a reasonable length. Another limitation is related to the fact that questionnaires depend highly on the understanding of the respondents which may differ from one person to another. Also, respondents may have difficulty in understanding the vocabulary used in the questionnaire. The researcher, in this case, might not necessarily be available to clarify or explain. In this study, therefore, special attention was given to the wording of the questionnaire statements. These were revised several times. The questionnaire was also sent to a Ministry official, who is familiar with the teachers in the context of the study, to check that the language and vocabulary of the questionnaire does not pose any difficulty to teachers and that it matches their language level. Also, the pilot stage, as shall be shown later on, aimed to check teachers' overall understanding of the questionnaire and see whether there were any potential difficulties in comprehending different statements. These measures were taken into consideration in order to enhance the quality of the questionnaire data (See Section 3.12.1 later in this chapter for related details).

Other limitations to the use of questionnaires concern the actual questionnaire administration process. Generally speaking, questionnaires tend to have low response rates (Bryman, 2008; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Also, the researcher has no control over the conditions under which respondents fill in the questionnaires (Neuman, 2003) nor over who actually answers the questionnaire (Bryman, 2008). The latter limitation is of crucial relevance to the current study as questionnaires are sent to schools which have different groups of teachers of English, most of which are not targeted by the study. Also, in these situations, it is likely that some respondents may leave some parts of the questionnaire unfilled. The coordinators¹ of the questionnaire administration in the regions were made aware of such limitations and were requested, as far as possible, to take them into consideration and encourage participants to fill in all parts of the questionnaire.

¹ Details about these coordinators shall follow in later sections.

3.6.2 Advantages and limitations of interviews

Interviews are useful in providing deeper knowledge and for purposes of follow up (Craft, 2000). They were used in this study for the purpose of in-depth investigation of some issues arising from the questionnaires and for collecting data from Ministry officials. The use of interviews in research has a number of advantages. Table 3.4 shows some of these advantages which support the claim for using interviews in this study.

Table 3-4: Advantages of interviews

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews are useful tools for exploring thoughts, feelings, perceptions, understandings and actions (Arksey & Knight, 1999).• Interviews allow for issues to be explored in depth by using probes and prompts to encourage respondents to clarify and provide examples (Craft, 2000).• The presence of the interviewer helps in answering respondents' questions about items which might not be clear enough (Fowler, 2001).• The interviewer exercises a certain level of control of the interview (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000) which helps in guiding the interview to achieve its purpose.

Yet, there are some limitations to the use of interviews. Some of these limitations are unavoidable. For example, interviewing, transcribing and analyzing are time consuming (Bryman, 2008). Also, interviews are costly as they involve travel costs and purchase of recording equipment. These limitations were taken into consideration during the planning of the design of the study. In addition, using interviews involve lack of anonymity which might prevent the interviewees from saying what they really think. This would affect the quality of the information provided by the respondents. There is the risk of the interview's bias. The interviewer might direct or lead, consciously or subconsciously, the interviewee to provide certain answers (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Having recognised these limitations, I considered them during the data collection process in order to minimize their influence on the data being gathered.

3.7 Design of research instruments

As stated earlier, there were two groups involved in the study, namely teachers and Ministry officials. Teachers were the main focus of the study. Two research instruments were used to get information from them: questionnaires and interviews. The data collection was divided into two stages: the questionnaire stage and the interview stage. Ministry officials were involved at the interview stage. Further details about both stages of data collection will follow in Section 3.10.

3.7.1 Language of data collection

An important decision in the design of the study in general and the design of the research instruments in particular is the language used for data collection. Such decision has a number of implications in all phases of research, from planning to data analysis.

Using the native language (in this case Arabic) in the design of the research instruments has a number of advantages. As far as the research participants are concerned, for example, the use of Arabic may prevent them from facing any potential difficulties in understanding questions and statements and may also allow them to express themselves freely with no fear of making mistakes in the language.

Having realised these advantages, I thought that using English in the current study, which proved to be feasible, also had a number of advantages such as saving time required for translation, avoiding misinterpretation or mistranslation and providing original quotes articulated by interviewees themselves to support my arguments. The argument may become particularly apparent when considering the difficulty of getting a translation that reflects the exact meaning of the text in cross-language research (Esposito, 2001).

Therefore, the questionnaire was written in English and all interviews were conducted in English as well. It was my personal feeling from my experience with teachers that using English will encourage teachers to express their views, especially the negative ones, more openly than if they use Arabic for cultural reasons. I thought that using English would make it easier for teachers to be critical as it may detach them from their context. This decision was also welcomed by coordinators in the regions who stated that teachers' language level should be sufficient to make them able to express their views in English. In addition to this, the piloting of the questionnaire and the interviews (details

will follow later) proved that participants were happy with the use of the use of English and they did not seem to have any apparent difficulties.

I now provide a detailed description of the design of the individual research instruments used in each of the two stages of data collection process.

3.7.2 The questionnaire

Questionnaires may take various forms. However, some formats are more common than others. Anderson & Arsenault (1998) mention six types of research questions which they regarded as the basic questionnaire formats. These are: *Fill-in-the-blank*, *Multiple choice*, *Comment-on*, *List*, *Likert scales* and *Rank*. I will be depending on *the Comment-on* and *Likert scale* formats in the design of the questionnaire of this study. More details concerning this will follow when talking about the design of the questionnaire later in this chapter.

In this study, the questionnaire aimed to collect quantitative and qualitative data about teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD. It was divided into four main parts according to the issues being investigated. At the end of each section, participants were asked to add, if they wanted to, any other additional comments or views.

The statements contained in the questionnaire came mainly from two sources. The main source was the description of CPD in Oman presented in Chapter 1, in particular Section 1.5.2, which presents the CPD activities introduced as part of the education reform. The second source was the review of literature in Chapter 2, particularly Section 2.3.3 which discussed the elements, characteristics and parameters of CPD systems.

The design of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) followed mostly a Likert rating scale format which was regarded as an "excellent means of gathering opinions and attitudes" (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:175). Participants were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements presented.

Although the Likert scale may have different response points, the five-point scale is "most practical, most common, easy to respond to, straightforward to analyze and sufficient for most needs" (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:174). A five-point Likert scale was therefore used in most sections. Yet, a four-point Likert scale was used for one of the sections as it was more suitable due to the nature of the question being asked.

The first part of the questionnaire sought personal information regarding gender, school type, region, and years of experience in teaching English. The second part was concerned with teachers' beliefs about professional development. It consisted of three sections: CPD activities, CPD aims and people who should be involved in making decisions about CPD. The third part dealt with professional development in practice. Similarly, it consisted of three sections: CPD activities, benefits from CPD and the extent to which various people participated in making decisions regarding teachers' CPD. Table 3.5 below gives details of parts two and three of the questionnaire.

Table 3-5: Details of parts 2 and 3 of the questionnaire

Parts	sections	scale	No of statements	ranking
	Section A	five-point	18	Very important / not important at all
Part two	Section B	five-point	12	Very important / not important at all
	Sections C	five-point	8	Strongly agree / strongly disagree
	Section A	four-point	17	Often / never
Part three	Section B	five-point	12	Strongly agree / strongly disagree
	Sections C	five-point	8	Always / never

The fourth part of the questionnaire contained open-ended questions about teachers' understanding of CPD, how they assessed/rated its value and whether they were involved in making decisions about the content of training courses offered to them and whether they were happy with the situation.

The end of the questionnaire contained a section in which participants were asked whether they would be willing to participate in the interview stage. They were asked to provide their contact details if they were interested in talking to me.

3.7.3 The interviews

Follow-up interviews were used to get information from both teachers and Ministry officials. The interviews with teachers aimed to seek clarifications about the issues arising from the questionnaires as well as giving teachers a chance to talk about their experiences in CPD. The interviews with Ministry officials were used for the purpose of seeking information about the planning and delivery of the CPD activities as well as

commenting on teachers' responses. I also asked them to react to the teachers' views on CPD as shown in the questionnaires.

A common typology of interviews, which is based on the degree of structure, classifies interviews into three types: Structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Robson, 2002; Wellington, 2000). The following table from Wellington (2000: 75) compares these three types:

Table 3-6: Styles of interviewing

Unstructured	Semi-structured	Structured
Some "control" on both sides	More control by interviewer	Most control by interviewer
Very flexible	Flexible	Less flexible
Guided by the interviewee	Not completely pre-determined	Guided by the researcher's pre-determined agenda
Direction unpredictable		More predictable
May be difficult to analyse		May provide easier framework for analysis

Semi-structured interviews, which are considered to be the most common type of interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Flick, 2006; Neil & Morgan, 2003), were used in this study for a number of reasons. First, semi-unstructured interviews are flexible in terms of order of questions and clarifications of terms (R. B. Burns, 2000; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000) . The researcher may change the style of interview delivery in a way that suits each interviewee. Second, There is also flexibility on the side of the respondent when answering the questions (R. B. Burns, 2000). The respondent could ask for clarification and go back to add to an earlier answer. Third, semi-structured interviews balance the degree of control between the interviewer and the interviewee. Therefore, the researcher, or the interviewer, practises a certain amount of control which may help in preventing the interview to deviate from the topic being researched. Fourth, it gives interviewees the opportunity to express themselves and add their own comments and ideas which usually enriches the interview.

The initial lists of interview questions for various targeted groups were prepared on the basis of the research questions and the description of the context in Chapter 1. These

lists were then modified and developed following the issues which emerged from the analysis of the questionnaires. For example, a question about why some CPD activities are more important than others (as shown from the questionnaire results) was added. The list of questions was then presented to a professional development specialist at the Ministry who provided some useful feedback. For example, with regard to the question about previous CPD experiences, it was suggested to ask about the CPD experiences before and after the education reform separately in order to get teachers more focused on each period. Another suggestion related to the question about whether teachers were happy about the Ministry CPD policy. The Ministry official suggested modifying it slightly by saying “clear and happy”. The list of the interview questions is given in Appendix 2.

3.8 Piloting the questionnaire

The questionnaires were piloted with a group of teacher. Piloting was important because “questionnaires do not emerge fully-fledged; they have to be created and adapted, fashioned and developed to maturity after many abortive test flights. In fact, every aspect of a survey has to be tried out beforehand to make sure that it works as intended” (Oppenheim, 2003: 47). Cohen et al. (2007) mention two types of piloting, one which deals with the format and coverage of the questionnaire and another which is concerned with the type of data gained from the questionnaire. Both of these types were considered in the piloting stage of this study.

The piloting stage was carried out in July 2006 in Oman. The main aim of the piloting was to refine the questionnaire. Another aim of the piloting stage was to investigate any possible communication or distribution difficulties in sending questionnaires to various regions in Oman. The following sections provide a detailed description of the piloting stage.

3.8.1 Participants

It has been stated earlier that the study participants were a group of Omani teachers of English who had graduated from the BA TESOL programme organised between the MOE and the University of Leeds in the UK. As all graduates were going to be involved in this study, I preferred not involve any of them in the piloting stage. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed to the teachers who were still studying on the programme.

This group could be regarded as representative of the targeted group although they still had not finished their course of study when the piloting stage took place.

3.8.2 Procedures

I travelled to Oman to do the piloting. Some of the teachers were doing their course at the University of Leeds while some of them were in Oman. I contacted senior supervisors of English in different regions in Oman as well as the coordinator of the Leeds group of teachers to explain to them about the questionnaire. I then emailed them a copy of the questionnaire. After one week, I got back a total of 24 questionnaires as follows. Table 3.7 shows details about the participants.

Table 3-7: Details about the participants of the piloting stage

Gender	Male 12		Female 12		
School type	General Education 6	Basic Education (Cycle1)12		Basic Education (Cycle2) 6	
Regions	Batinah South 6	Sharqiya South 2	Dhahira South 4	Muscat 2	Dakhiliya 2
	Batinah North 2	Sharqiya North 2	Dhahira North 2	Dhofar 2	-
Experience	0-4 years: 1	5-9 years: 3	10-14 years: 16	15-19 years: 4	

3.8.3 Observations, difficulties and implications

The piloting stage was useful in many ways. I succeeded in getting questionnaires sent off to various regions and to Leeds and then returned within one week. It should be noted here that all teachers and supervisors were on leave during the piloting stage and I anticipated facing some difficulties to approach participants. However, due to the well-established communication links between the Ministry and the regions on the one hand and the good relationships which I have with regional officers on the other, there were no real difficulties. There were some observations and implications which could be classified into two categories as follows:

3.8.3.1 The piloting process

- Senior supervisors and teachers were cooperative and willing to provide assistance even if they were on leave.
- Assigning regional senior supervisors as coordinators to take care of the distribution of the questionnaires proved to be successful. They usually have

details of all teachers in their regions and they know how to contact each teacher when required.

- Using the email to send questionnaires could be considered as an option when sending questionnaires to a small group in a region. However, sending hard copies remained preferable to ensure that each questionnaire is complete and to give less work to coordinators in the regions.
- The first two days of the piloting stage were announced as an unexpected national holiday. This needed to be considered when conducting the study as it is common in this context to announce unplanned holidays and extend them further for some days.
- Some teachers preferred to reply electronically. This worked well and questionnaires were clear and complete. Filling an electronic copy of the questionnaire was considered as an option for those teachers in remote areas, those who were away and those who preferred to complete an electronic version of the questionnaire.

3.8.3.2 The questionnaire design and content

- The data gathered from the questionnaires revealed that teachers had filled in almost all the statements. Overall, teachers did not report any difficulty in understanding the different statements.
- There was a repeated item on the second page of the questionnaire. This was removed from the final version of the questionnaire.
- After looking at teachers' responses to the open-ended question about the importance of professional development on the last page of the questionnaire, it was decided that an additional question was required related to teachers' understanding of professional development. This question was then added in the final version of the questionnaire.
- There were a few instances in which teachers missed out a statement or put two ticks for one statement although the instructions in the questionnaires require teachers to answer all statements with only one tick. Therefore, coordinators in the regions were asked to explain this further to the teachers before they filled in the questionnaires.
- All teachers filled in all the personal details in Part One of the questionnaire. Those details were useful and necessary in getting an overall picture of the details of the participants.

- Very few respondents added any comments in the open-ended questions at the end of each section. However, I decided to keep those open-ended questions in the questionnaire as some teachers might like to add ideas which could be missing in the questionnaire.
- Eight teachers (six males and two females), representing 33.3% of the respondents involved, expressed their willingness to be involved in further interviews. Although the study might not require a large number of teachers to be interviewed, this percentage gave an indicator that a considerable number of teachers could be available for interviewing.

3.9 Piloting the interviews

Piloting interviews is useful in finding whether the questions generate the data required for the research. Ambiguous and confusing questions can then be avoided (Nunan, 1992). Two teachers were invited for pilot interviews. They were given copies of their questionnaires. After looking at their responses, they were then interviewed. The aims of this pilot were to refine the interview questions, get experience of interviewing, test the recording device, practice transcribing and examine the use of English language in interviews.

These two teachers, one male and one female, are BA TESOL graduates and as such they belonged to the same group of the research participants. Thus, they had similar background and qualification to the participants of the study. Although they belonged to the same group of teachers, they were not involved in the study as they were currently doing their MAs in Leeds when the research took place in Oman.

Both participants agreed to be involved in the piloting. The interviews were conducted in April 2007. Both participants were asked whether they would prefer the interview to be conducted in English or in Arabic. Both agreed to use English.

The pilot interviews provided a rich experience on how to conduct interviews. Observations and implications from this experience can be summarised as follows:

- Both participants were happy to be interviewed in English. I noticed that they were able to express themselves clearly which provided a further rationale for carrying out the actual teachers' interviews in English.

- The first interview lasted for 41 minutes and the second one for 36 minutes. Thus, I decided that a maximum of 45 minutes would suffice for the interviews of the study.
- The sound quality of the first interview was fairly poor and I faced difficulty in hearing the interview when transcribing. As a result, I used a more advanced voice recorder in the second interview, and the recording was of high quality. I used a similar one for the actual interviews.
- I conducted the interviews in two different rooms; a big one and small one. I found the smaller one more conformable. The quality of the recording was also clearer. I considered this during the interviews.
- I also found it is better to lessen the gap between conducting interviews and transcribing them. The gap was shorter in the second interview which helped me recognise the recording more easily compared to the first interview.
- After hearing the first interview, I noticed that there were some points where I could have used probing strategies to ask for more explanations and examples. I considered this in the second pilot interview and the actual interviews.
- After transcribing the interviews, I realised that, for a few questions, teachers deviated from answering my question to talking about their situations in schools. I learned to consider this during the interviews by paying attention to it and directing participants to focus on answering the questions.

3.10 Data collection process

The data collection process was carried out in two stages, namely the questionnaire stage and the interview stage. The decision about the order of these two stages was made on the basis of the *priority decision* and the *sequence decision* mentioned in relation to the discussion about the research paradigm described earlier in this chapter.

The questionnaire was sent to Oman via email and it was then distributed by some Ministry and regional coordinators to all teachers targeted in the study. After initial analysis was made on the questionnaire data, interviews took place in a subsequent stage. The following represents a detailed description of both stages of data collection.

3.10.1 Stage one (the questionnaire)

The process of questionnaire administration took place between mid-November 2006 and mid-February 2007. The overall administration of the questionnaires was facilitated on the ground in Oman by a Ministry official. Senior English Supervisors took the role of co-ordinating the process of questionnaire administration in their regions. Arrangements with those coordinators at the Ministry and in the regions were initially made during the piloting stage. Afterwards, I explained to them in detail about their roles in the questionnaire administration process.

Questionnaires were photocopied along with lists of teachers of English who were going to be involved in the study. They were then sent to coordinators in the regions. I spoke over the phone with coordinators separately to explain to them about different sections in the questionnaire to ensure that they were clear about what was required from teachers. I gave particular focus on the differences between Part 2 and Part 3 in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which look similar, but the first focuses on the beliefs and the second on the practices. I also offered them to contact me in case they have any queries about the content of the questionnaire.

Coordinators were allowed to decide how best to distribute the questionnaires. This is because I was aware that in this context teachers can be called for a meeting to fill in the questionnaire in small regions while sending the questionnaires through school mail is more feasible and convenient in large regions.

The process of administering the questionnaire was different from one region to another. Some regions, such as Muscat for example, sent questionnaires through school mail and got most of the questionnaires back in less than three weeks. However, in some other regions such as Dhahira, coordinators preferred to wait for teachers to come to a pre-planned meeting or for exam marking so they could distribute the questionnaires to all teachers at the same time. I spoke with the coordinators several times during the questionnaire administration period to ensure that things were going as planned.

The only major difficulty which coordinators faced was that teaching stopped around mid-December 2007 which made it difficult to follow up questionnaires in most schools as teachers were engaged in different activities and events such as exam invigilation or marking. Mid-February 2007 was set as a deadline for receiving questionnaires.

Teachers were due to resume work in schools at the beginning of February 2007 which meant that coordinators needed to do their best to get as many questionnaires as possible from teachers before the deadline.

I received questionnaires in batches which helped me enter the data of some questionnaires while I was waiting for the rest to arrive. I started receiving questionnaires back in mid-December. The last batch of questionnaires was received in mid-February.

3.10.2 Stage two (the interviews)

The second stage of the data collection process involved interviews with teachers followed by interviews with Ministry officials. Interviews were scheduled for the summer of 2007 and this allowed a period of four months from the end of the questionnaire phase during which these interviews could be planned. Communications and arrangements with the Ministry were made to get the approval for conducting the interviews. An interview schedule was prepared and agreed upon with the coordinators in the regions based on teachers' availability in the summer. The schedule was then approved by the Ministry in March 2007.

I mentioned earlier (in Section 3.7.3) that the purpose of the interviews in this study was to get further descriptions and clarifications about the issues arising from the questionnaires. I decided, therefore, to start interviewing teachers first so I can get clarifications, justifications and more in-depth information about those issues. Such issues could then be brought up during the interviews with officials to see their views on them.

Participants were informed at the beginning of each interview that participation was voluntary. They were also made aware that they had the right to withdraw at any stage if they wanted to. They were assured that all interview data were confidential and would be used for research purposes only. Participants' permission was sought and gained to tape-record their interviews. I also explained to them that I was doing this research as part of my PhD and it had no connection with my previous post at the ministry. More details about ethical considerations in this study will follow later in Section 3.13 in this chapter.

Interviews with teachers were carried out during the months of June and July 2007. A total of 68 respondents (21%) agreed to be interviewed, 46 of whom were males and 22 were females. They provided their contact details as requested. Table 3.8 shows the distribution of male and female volunteers across different regions.

Table 3-8: Number of teachers willing to be involved in interviews

Region	M	F	Total
Muscat	9	12	21
Batinah North	7	0	7
Dhahira South	6	0	6
Dakhiliya	8	0	8
Batinah South	5	5	10
Sharqiya South	5	0	5
Dhofar	2	2	4
Sharqiya North	2	2	4
Dhahira North	2	1	4
Musandum	0	0	0
Total	46	22	68

Two points are worth noting here. First, the majority of the volunteers were from the large regions. Second, most of the female volunteers came from Muscat region. The low number of female volunteers from other regions could be attributed to cultural and social factors as women are not expected to talk privately to a man outside their families.

There were a number of issues which affected my decision on which interview volunteers to select. The first issue relates to the sample size of interview participants. While a decision about the sample size is not a straightforward one in research, considerations related to time and cost have been considered to be relevant in this regard (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, after considering the type of data required and the amount of time available for conducting the interviews, I decided that a total number of 12 interviewees would be appropriate. The second issue was that due to the fact that male

volunteers outnumbered the females by two to one, I decided to consider this proportion in the selection process by involving more male volunteers.

I also selected individuals based on teachers' availability and closeness to my residence. Ministry and regional administrators provided support to identify the candidates who met these conditions. A reserve list was also made in case needed.

It should be noted here that the interviews were held during summer holidays. This means that these teachers devoted their own time to come to the interview which indicates a good sign of willingness to share their experiences out of their own interest. Also, a few of them had to travel long distances to come to the interviews which reflects a high level of cooperation.

Table 3.9 describes, by region and gender, the teachers who participated at the interview stage:

Table 3-9: Teachers' interviews by region and gender

Region	M	F	Total
Muscat	1	2	3
Batinah North	2	0	2
Dakhiliya	2	0	2
Batinah South	3	2	5
Total	8	4	12

Interview venues varied from a meeting room at the ministry to a library or a small office in schools. All interviews went without interruptions and in a quiet atmosphere as there was no teaching going on at that time.

For all interviews, I started with a general question for teachers to describe their experience with regard to professional development. This was meant to help "break the ice" and encourage teachers to talk about their views more explicitly afterwards. The final list of questions (see Appendix 2) was used as a basis for the interviews. As the interviews were designed to be semi-structured (refer to Section 3.7.3 in this chapter for further details), probes and prompts were also used to facilitate the flow of interviews and elicit as much information as possible from teachers. Teachers were also encouraged to expand and justify their responses to the questionnaire. At the end of each interview, teachers were offered the opportunity to add any relevant information

they would like to share or express. Teachers' interviews lasted between 34 to 55 minutes. Detailed information about teachers' interviews, including length of each interview, is available in Appendix 3.

Interviews with Ministry officials were carried out after the teachers' interviews. As described in detail in Section 3.4.2 in this chapter, the teacher trainer advisor and the chief English supervisor are the key Ministry personnel who supervise CPD of teachers of English. At regional level, there are the senior supervisors and teacher trainers who deal with CPD of teachers. In order to provide varied perspectives, the regional interviews involved two senior supervisors, Two Omani teacher trainers and two non-Omani teacher trainers. These individuals were chosen on the basis of their experience.

With regard to the Ministry personnel, it was possible to make one interview with the Teacher Trainer Advisor only but not the chief English supervisor who had just retired and left the country before the interviews took place. This was very unfortunate but Ministry officials advised that the long experience of the teacher trainer advisor who used to work closely with chief English supervisor should make up for this loss.

All Ministry officials' interviews took place at a meeting room in the Ministry in the months of July and August 2007. Interview participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and were provided in advance with copies of the questionnaire sent to teachers in order to give them a full idea about the issues being investigated. These interviews lasted between 30 minutes up to more than one hour. Further details about these interviews such as dates and lengths are provided in Appendix 3.

3.10.3 Constraints on data collection

Despite the early arrangements, there were some unforeseen constraints throughout the data collection process. Below I present these constraints along with the actions taken to deal with each of them.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, there was an interruption period of a round a month and a half to the questionnaire administration due to exam and mid-term holiday. Coordinators in regions contacted teachers immediately after they came back to work.

Secondly, there was an inevitable gap of a few months between the two stages of the data collection process. While the questionnaire administration stage ended in February

2007, the interview stage did not start until June 2007. This was mainly due to the fact I was not able to travel to Oman to conduct the interviews until summer holiday for my children in the UK. Teachers who were involved in the interviews were provided with copies of their own questionnaires before the start of the interviews. They were given ample time to go through the questionnaire as some of the interview questions were based on their questionnaire responses. This gap between the two stages of data collection, however, was useful as it gave me a chance to analyse the questionnaires, identify the issues to cover in the interviews and prepare well for the interview stage.

Thirdly, there was one instance where the teacher did not show up at the interview venue for family reasons. Due to time constraints, I had to arrange to interview another teacher from the reserve list

Fourthly, at certain points during teachers' interviews, I noticed that some teachers deviated from talking about their views on professional development to focus on teaching related issues, school situations, or their day-to-day work. Such issues seem to be, unsurprisingly, of immediate concern to teachers. In such cases, I had to intervene and encourage teachers to keep focusing on answering my questions related to their professional development.

Finally, despite my encouragement to teachers to express themselves and my assurance that the data will be dealt with for research purposes only, one teacher asked me to stop the recording device at one point before talking about an incident which illustrates some difficulties faced when proposing CPD initiatives to the Ministry. I found that particular incident relevant to my research and the teacher agreed that I take note of it without tape-recording.

Having recognised these constraints which may have impinged on the quantity and quality of the data obtained, efforts were made, as illustrated, to minimise their impact on the outcomes.

3.11 Data organisation, processing and analysis

The questionnaires and the interviews generated two types of data: qualitative and quantitative. For each data type, a number of steps were followed in order to organise the data for the data analysis process.

3.11.1 Organisation and analysis of data from questionnaires

A total number of 324 questionnaires were received. Questionnaires were organised by region for easy reference. Each respondent was given a unique identification number from 1 to 324.

Responses to the closed statements were entered into SPSS. Each statement was given a code which shows the section and the statement number. For example, the first statement in Section A was coded as A1. Each of the five or four answers to the statements was given a score of 1-5 where 5 corresponds to “strongly agree” and 1 to “strongly disagree”, 5 corresponds to “very important” and 1 to “not important at all” and 4 corresponds to “always” and 1 to “never”. In the case where no answer was given or more than one answer was ticked, this was regarded as missing value and it was coded as 99.

A total number of 292 (90.1%) respondents contributed to the open-ended questions. Data from open-ended questions were transferred into the computer through word processor. The data was transformed into tabular format where it was displayed by theme for each respondent (see Appendix 6). This way of organising the data was intended to help in understanding the data and cross-referencing across themes and respondents. The qualitative data generated comprised a total of 14,517 words in 55 A4 size pages.

Before getting into the process of analysing the quantitative data, a primary step of checking for errors on the SPSS data file was performed. The reason behind this step was to check accuracy of the data entered. As Pallant (2007: 44) warns that “if sex is coded 1=male, 2=female, scores that fall outside the possible range can distort your statistical analysis”. This step of error-checking was performed by generating tables of frequencies for all statements and revising the values shown in the output tables particularly the maximum and the minimum values.

After that, the first part of the questionnaire (which contains information about gender, region, school type and year of experience) was analysed through SPSS. This was done in order to get a general overview of the participants with regard to these categories.

This was then followed by producing frequency tables which provide “the number of people and the percentage belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question” (Bryman, 2004: 226). The benefit of these frequency tables is that they

provide a detailed overview of the number of responses of the participants across statements. Therefore, they help gain an insight into the overall distribution of responses at the initial stages of the analysis.

Then, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and frequency distributions) were calculated. Figures and percentages in the SPSS outputs were presented in tables (see Appendix 4) and bar charts (see Appendix 5) to help develop an understanding of the patterns of the data.

It is important to note at this stage that the data shown by the questionnaire data represented the core of the data analysis of this study. An initial draft of the analysis of questionnaire data was therefore produced in order to prepare for the interview stage. This initial analysis contained some observations from the tables and figures described above as well as the data shown by the open-ended questions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the initial analysis of the questionnaire data informed, to a certain extent, the design of the interview questions.

3.11.2 Organisation and analysis of data from interviews

Different research methods textbooks suggest varied procedures for approaching qualitative data analysis (see, for example, Cohen, et al., 2007; Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994). While these textbooks show various ways of approaching qualitative data analysis, they share similar purpose of aiming at understanding data in order to make use of it to support the research argument. They also show that approaching qualitative data analysis depends on the nature of the data, the amount of the data and the purpose of the research.

Overall, the handling of the data from interviews in this study (from transcription to organisation and analysis) was guided mainly by the principal aim of using interviews to provide deeper understanding of the issues shown by the data from the questionnaires.

On the basis of the above, all the nineteen interviews with teachers and Ministry officials were transcribed using word processor. The interview data comprised a total of 39,664 words. Detailed information about the total number of words in each interview is provided in Appendix 3. Note-keeping on initial thoughts on the data was done during the transcription process to help in making sense of the data and identify key issues and

themes. Following Wolcott (1994:10), emphasis on the importance of looking at the data as originally recorded to let the data “speak for themselves”, a closer “look” and “re-look” of the interview data was made afterwards in order to develop a thorough understanding of the content.

All interviews were then brought together into one document. At this stage, electronic handling of the data becomes important (Tesch, 1990). In order to handle the data, it was displayed in tables and classified by questions and themes which came originally from the questionnaire and the interview questions. Additional categories and themes were also identified from the interviews. This process of grouping the data into categories is referred to as coding (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) or sorting the data (Tesch, 1990). In this study, it involved putting interviews in tables and aimed at identifying common issues, facilitating comparisons and looking at patterns of the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It also allowed to return to the data easily for further interpretation and analysis (L. Richards, 2005). Codes helped also in bringing focus to all details and quotes that add to the understanding of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A similar process was done for officials’ interviews as they were displayed in one table showing similarities and differences (see Appendix 7).

The tables containing teachers’ interviews and officials’ interview were then printed out separately in two booklets. This step allowed for easy access to the data. Continuous reading of the data was then performed in order to develop more understanding of it. Various points considered relevant to the research questions were highlighted using colour markers.

The actual data analysis was then conducted and incorporated into the analysis of the questionnaire data described earlier. The analysis was guided at large by the aim suggested by Rubin & Rubin (1995:254) who state that the goal of data analysis is “to find themes that both explain the research arena and fit together in a way that a reader can understand”. The analysis did not consider merely description of the findings shown by the data but it also involved interpretation of the results and making connections across various parts (L. Richards, 2005; Wolcott, 1994). Original quotes were used to support the analysis. In brief, as the interviews aimed at in-depth investigation of the issues from the questionnaire, the data generated from them was used to support, expand, interpret, and clarify those issues throughout the analysis process.

The most serious and central difficulty in the organisation and the analysis of the interview data was to make the classification of the data in the tables as rigorous as possible. There were instances in which participants' responses to a certain question contained issues which were relevant to other themes covered by different questions. In these cases, various extracts of the interviews were re-organised in the tables to match the most relevant themes. Additionally, there were places where interview responses were open to different possible interpretations. This is a common challenge faced by qualitative researchers and in such cases I coded data according to what I felt was the most plausible meaning intended by the speaker.

3.11.3 Presentation of the findings

The presentation of the findings (in chapters 4 and 5) was guided mainly by the two main issues investigated in this study, beliefs and practices, each being in a separate chapter. Overall, the organisation of each chapter followed roughly the structure of the questionnaire. Based on the discussion related to the research paradigm mentioned earlier, the findings from the questionnaires were used as the primary data while the findings from the interview data were used to extend the main findings. Statistics, tables and graphs were used as appropriate in order help show the patterns present in the findings. The discussion of the findings in both will then come in Chapter 6.

3.12 Quality issues

In general terms, quality of research relates to the research conduct and it refers to the extent to which one can have confidence on the results. On the basis of this notion, I highlight below some quality-related issues.

3.12.1 The quality of questionnaires

Questionnaires are very suitable for collecting a large amount of data from a large number of people in a widespread area. Careful design, implementation and analysis of questionnaires are required so that effort and time are not wasted. Anderson & Arsenault (1998) summarized the questionnaire design process in six steps: determining the questions, drafting the items, sequencing the items, designing the questionnaire, pilot-testing the questionnaire, developing a strategy for data collection and analysis. They also provide a guidelines sheet which can work as a useful checklist to be used at different stages of the research (see Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:235). Cohen et al.

(2007) also provide useful tips for writing questionnaire items such as avoiding leading questions, avoiding complex questions, avoiding questions that use negatives and avoiding too many open-ended questions. All of the above issues were considered in the design of the questionnaire of the study in order to obtain good quality data. As stated earlier in various sections in this chapter, further actions were taken to enhance the quality of the questionnaire. These actions were producing various drafts of the questionnaire, getting it revised by a Ministry official and piloting the questionnaire with a group of teachers as mentioned in Section 3.8 earlier.

3.12.2 The quality of interviews

Kvale (1996) provides useful guidelines which help in establishing the quality of the interviews. One very important consideration is the interviewer who should be knowledgeable and well-aware of the topic being investigated. The interviewer should also be skillful enough to conduct interviews. The interviewing skills come not only from reading about how to interview but also from practice. Another issue related to quality is avoiding the use of leading questions (Kvale, 1996). A slight rewording of a question may result in getting different answers. Therefore, the questions have to be carefully presented to avoid this. These issues were considered in a number of ways such as writing down the interview questions and doing pilot interviews which helped make improvements to the actual interviews.

3.12.3 Generalisability

Generalisability refers to drawing some conclusion about a whole group on the basis of information collected from a representative sample of that group (Denscombe, 2002). As I involved all available BA TESOL graduates in this study, the research findings can be applied to this particular group. In addition, I argued in various places in this study that this group of teachers is the most experienced and probably the most influential group of teachers in the system. On this basis, the results of this study may also be regarded to have relevance for other ELT teachers in Oman more generally.

3.12.4 Reliability

Reliability refers to precision, consistency and stability. In order to reduce the threats to reliability, certain strategies suggested by various researchers (Cohen, et al., 2007; Silverman, 2005) were incorporated in the design of the study. The issues of clarity of

statements and avoidance of using ambiguous words which might create misunderstanding were considered during the design of the questionnaire. Other strategies that were considered to enhance reliability were the use of more than one method of data collection, the involvement of different groups of participants at various levels, the use of closed statements and open-ended questions, tape-recording of interviews and the use of original quotes to support the research arguments.

The above steps were taken when appropriate in my research design and data collection and analysis. In addition, I adopted a 'precise yet flexible' approach to the way in which I conducted the interviews. While it was important for the questions to be precise, the specific forms of questions asked varied from respondent to respondent because of the personalized nature of each individual interview.

The strategies described above helped to increase and enhance reliability in a number of ways. For example, careful analysis of the data allowed to build up a reliable picture of what participants expressed in both the questionnaire and the interviews. Reliability also came from aggregating of findings from the different data sources which allowed to identify problem areas (like different opinions and experiences being reported on the same topics/issues which I reconciled out afterwards). Additionally, the involvement of different groups was useful in providing a broad picture of the views and opinions particularly in relation to teachers practices on CPD. While the use of the closed statements provided data directly related to the issues/statements suggested by the research instruments, the open-ended questions gave participants an opportunity to express themselves freely and add further issues and ideas that enriched the study.

3.12.5 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which the research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Neuman, 2003). In order to minimize the threat to the validity of the questionnaire, different drafts were discussed with my supervisors. It was also presented to the teacher training advisor at the MOE who provided useful comments. In addition, drawing on the relevant CPD literature presented in Chapter 2 was useful here too.

Bearing in mind the need to get at the "truth" (as seen by the interviewees), a number of steps were followed in order to enhance the validity of the interviews. The interview questions were revised by supervisors and a specialised Ministry official. During the

interviews, validity was also enhanced by the researcher's familiarity with the context which helped in dealing with the research participants and encouraging them to express their perceptions and talk about their experiences. The use of the semi-structured interviews was helpful in this regard as it allowed the researcher to clarify questions and also to direct respondents when they deviated from answering the interview questions.

Another element of validity, which relates to the use of the interview data, is the extent to which the extracts from the interviews presented in the research findings represent all the data and not a chosen set of examples. Silverman (2005: 211) refers to this as the problem of "anecdotalism". In this study, a detailed account of how the interview data was handled, organized, and analyzed was provided (see Section 3.11 earlier). The organization of the interview data in tabular form provided easy access to responses from all participants across various issues. In addition, since the questionnaire represents the main research instrument; and the questionnaire stage involved a large number of participants, data was processed and analyzed mainly on the basis of the overall trends shown by the questionnaire data. The use of the selective extracts from the qualitative data (i.e interviews) was designed to support and expand the issues suggested by the questionnaire data (Cohen, et al., 2007). With qualitative data, the outcome of the analysis is not one definitive truth but a set of plausible interpretations based on the data available.

3.12.6 Role of the researcher

I am currently working in the English curriculum department at MOE which is responsible for managing and supervising the professional development activities of teachers of English. During the course of the study, I was aware that my dual role as a Ministry official and researcher might have had implications for the study. There were a number of steps which I followed in order to minimize the negative impact of my official position on teachers' responses during the study. First of all, I was not present when teachers filled in the questionnaire. The administration of the questionnaire was carried out by the coordinators in different regions. Second, teachers were not required to provide their names when they filled in the questionnaires. This was meant to encourage them to express their views more openly. Third, I dealt with the targeted teachers as a researcher conducting research as part of my study rather than as a Ministry official. I arranged with the coordinators to convey this to teachers by referring

them to the first page of the questionnaire which states that "all information gained from this questionnaire will be used confidentially and for research purposes only". Fourth, I think that the fairly long teaching experience this group of teachers had as well as the BA TESOL course they attended should have made them confident to convey their views and get engaged in argumentative discussions. Fifth, it is my personal awareness that this group of teachers are generally not the kind of teachers who will seek to answer my questions by expressing the official position rather than their own. In recent years, they have practised researching different educational areas as part of their BA courses. I think that this experience has made them aware of the research culture. This awareness should have made them more likely to value research and to give considerable attention when filling in research instruments. Finally, I assured teachers at the beginning of the interviews that the data was going to be used for research purposes only.

3.13 Ethical considerations

The ethical principles are related to the concept of morality through which the rights and interests of research participants are recognized (Denscombe, 2002). The following ethical principles were identified to be relevant to the current study. Each of them was considered at a different stage of the research process.

3.13.1 Access and acceptance

The first principle is access and acceptance to the organization at the initial stage of the research (Cohen, et al., 2007). This permission is usually granted by the gatekeeper (Homan, 2001) which is in the case of the current study the MOE. I contacted the technical office at the MOE, which is responsible for granting this permission, in November 2005 and got permission for conducting the study. Initial approval was provided via email. The technical office asked for more details to be provided about the objectives of the research and the data collection methods in order to issue letters to various bodies at the ministry to allow me as a researcher to collect the information required for the study. This was done before the data collection started. Letters to different Ministry departments and regional offices were provided.

3.13.2 Informed consent

The second ethical principle is the informed consent of the participants which gives them the right to refuse or take part on a voluntary basis (Cohen, et al., 2007). The

research questionnaires was headed with a paragraph that informs the participants (a) about the purpose of the research and (b) they that are volunteering in the research and they have the right to withdraw at any stage. Similar information was also conveyed to participants at the beginning of each interview.

3.13.3 Anonymity of participants

The third ethical principle is anonymity of participants (Cohen, et al., 2007). All the data gathered was dealt with anonymously with no reference to any particular participants. This was clear from the beginning to the MOE and to all participants. No names were required to be provided for the questionnaires. Also, interviewees were assured that the interviews will be dealt with anonymously.

3.13.4 Confidentiality

Another ethical consideration is the issue of confidentiality (Denscombe, 2002). Confidentiality helps reduce respondents' concern about presenting themselves (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986) and consequently encourages more open responses. The current study discusses some issues which are related to how decisions are made at the national level at the MOE. In the context of the study, opinions on such issues are considered too sensitive to be conveyed publicly. This information, however, was considered to be crucial to the research. Therefore, the data gained was kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only.

3.13.5 Avoidance of harm

Harm may take different forms such as physical or psychological or social (Bryman, 2004; Singleton & Straits, 2005). I am currently working at the MOE, in a department managing and supervising the professional development courses. Therefore, participants were assured that their reactions towards the research and the data collected from them would by no means affect their actual jobs or relations with the Ministry people. In some cases, the participants revealed opinions which may seem contradictory to the authorities' views. It was made clear to all participants that the data gathered will be used for research purposes only.

3.14 Summary

This chapter contained a detailed account of the research design. It started by presenting the aims of the study and the research questions. It also provided details related to the study participants. This was followed by a description of the research paradigm, the research methods, and the benefits and limitations of each of the research methods used in the study. It also described the considerations and the procedures followed in the design of the research instruments. The piloting stages of the questionnaire and the interviews were also described in detail. The data collection process was presented along with the guidelines, constraints and limitations. The way the quantitative and qualitative data were organised and analysed was then described. Issues related to the quality and ethics were also presented. The following two chapters present the findings of this study.

4 DATA ANALYSIS I: TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT CPD

4.1 Introduction

This chapter and the following one present the analysis of the questionnaire and the interview data. These data are analysed with reference to the research questions this study is addressing. Key issues arising will be highlighted and illustrated with evidence from the data. Summary tables will be used frequently to help show the patterns of the quantitative data clearly. The quantitative data analysis will also be supported with qualitative data deriving from the open questions in the questionnaires, interviews with teachers and interviews with Ministry officials.

The organisation of both chapters will follow mainly the structure of the questionnaire illustrated in Section 3.7.2 in Chapter 3. Therefore, the presentation of the analysis will be divided into two main parts: first teachers' beliefs and then their reported practices. This chapter will cover teachers' beliefs regarding CPD while the following one will be devoted to teachers' reported CPD practices.

4.2 Background information about participants¹

The first part of the questionnaire (see full questionnaire in Appendix 1) asked participants for basic information about themselves including gender, region, school type and experience in teaching English. A total of 324 (a 70% response rate) teachers responded to the questionnaire, 193 (59.6%) of which were males and 131 (40.4%) females. Table 4.1 shows numbers of participants and response rates for different regions.

¹ The details in this section relates to the participants in the questionnaire stage only. Participants in the interview stage were described in Section 3.10.2 in Chapter 3

Table 4-1: Distribution of respondents by region

Region	Population	No. of questionnaires received			
		M	F	Total	Response rate
Muscat	87	29	46	75	86%
Batinah North	95	40	21	61	64%
Dhahira South	66	37	8	45	68%
Dakhiliya	77	30	12	42	54%
Batinah South	36	17	17	34	94%
Sharqiya South	32	10	9	19	59%
Dhofar	19	9	8	17	89%
Sharqiya North	26	13	2	15	57%
Dhahira North	18	6	7	13	72%
Musandum	3	2	1	3	100%
Total	459	193	131	324	70%

As stated in Section 3.8.3 in Chapter 3, the well-established communication links between the Ministry and the regions helped in achieving a high overall response rate (70%) considering that the questionnaire was sent by email and then distributed through school mail and in teachers' meetings. Additionally, this high response rate reflected well the efforts of my contacts in Oman who administered the questionnaire on my behalf.

In terms of school type, participants were spread across all three types of schools in the educational system in Oman; *basic education cycle one*, *basic education cycle two* and *general education* schools (a description of each school type was presented in Chapter 1). Table 4.2 presents numbers of participants from each school type.

Table 4-2: Distribution of participants by school type*

School type	<i>N</i>	%
Basic Education (1)	91	28.1
Basic Education (2)	132	40.7
General Education	89	27.5
Total	312	96.3

* Throughout the chapter, where totals in tables do not add up to 324 or 100%, this is due to missing data

It should be noted here that the group of teachers involved in this study used to teach only at elementary level before the reform. As part of the reform, they took a BA course which allowed them to teach at other school levels. Being distributed in all the three school types, as Table 4.2 illustrates, suggests that these teachers are no longer confined to a specific school level. This shows that this particular structural aspect of the reform is taking place.

Table 4.3 gives details of participants' experience of teaching English.

Table 4-3: Distribution of participants by experience in teaching English

Experience in years	<i>N</i>	%
5-9	8	2.5
10-14	170	52.5
15-19	121	37.3
20 & above	24	7.4
Total	323	99.7

Table 4.3 shows that the vast majority of the participants (97.5%) had at least 10 years of experience in teaching English. This means that they had experience in teaching English before and after the reform. Such experience is relevant to the current study as it aims at investigating teachers' beliefs related to CPD as well as their reported practices before and after the beginning of the education reform.

The above background information provided basic details about the participants. It is worth-noting here that, during the early stages of the analysis, the questionnaire data were considered to see if there were any significant differences among participants

according to the background factors outlined above. None were found (see Appendix 8 for examples of the data tables produced).

The trends shown by the questionnaire data reflected an overall homogeneity in the responses as suggested by the low standard deviations (further details will be presented in this chapter and the following one). This homogeneity may be attributed to the fact that the education system in Oman provides a unified system of professional development for all teachers regardless of their background and context.

4.3 Teachers' beliefs and CPD

The second part of the questionnaire contained three sub-sections which asked teachers about their beliefs with regard to CPD. In addition, teachers were asked about their general views on the meaning and importance of CPD through open-ended questions in the questionnaire and at the interviews. Similarly, Ministry officials were questioned about their views on CPD. The following represents a description of the general beliefs regarding CPD as reported by teachers and officials.

4.3.1 Conceptualising CPD

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question (Question 1 in Part 4) in which teachers were asked to write down what professional development means to them. This question was answered by 281 (91%) respondents which was the highest response rate among all open-ended questions. In addition, both teachers and officials were asked about their views on the meaning of professional development during the interviews.

The analysis of teachers and officials' responses from questionnaires and interviews highlights some key themes which reflect the way they conceptualise CPD.

4.3.1.1 Formal versus informal CPD

In their definitions of CPD, the majority of the respondents focused on the improvement of teachers' knowledge, skills, abilities, language and teaching performance through a variety of methods. The following represents examples of the methods through which CPD could be achieved as mentioned by teachers:

A set of courses. (4)¹

¹ The numbers refer to the unique ID number assigned to each questionnaire participant in the study

In-service training. (11)

A strategy or a way of getting better in teaching. (28)

The activities the English teacher can do to develop professionally. (63)

An organised training process. (116)

Ways of improvement in teaching. (119)

A method or a technique the teacher does to improve his/her teaching.
(174)

These extracts illustrate the diversity of the ways teachers view CPD as an abstract term. They also reveal that while some teachers confine their perception of CPD to formal training courses, for others it may involve any activity or experience teachers may practise to improve their teaching. Out of the 281 teachers who contributed to the definition of CPD, a minority (17 teachers) described CPD activities as being formal. The vast majority of teachers, therefore, share a wide conception of CPD which involves a variety of formal and informal activities. In addition, Teachers' contributions to this question, as the above extracts show, share a similar conception on the general aim of CPD which relates to the improvement of teaching.

4.3.1.2 Purposes of CPD

Three key terms characterised teachers' description of CPD. These were: *develop*, *improve* and *change*. These terms can be considered as the basic aims behind CPD according to teachers. Table 4.4 shows the frequency of these terms in the questionnaire and interview data.

Table 4-4: Frequency of develop, improve and change t teachers responses¹

Data source	Develop	Improve	Change
Questionnaires	219	172	38
Interviews	40	74	33

¹ The frequencies of these terms and their related forms were calculated using the "find" function in word processor.

Here are examples of extracts in which the terms were used:

To develop my performance inside the class. (139)

To improve teachers' abilities and skills in the profession of teaching. (98)

To change the old methodologies in teaching to new ones. (113)

To develop my skills and knowledge of the language. (54)

To improve teachers' skills and abilities in English. (41)

Teachers' responses show that, as the quotes above suggest, they relate these terms to both teaching and language improvement. We shall see in various sections throughout this chapter that both teaching and language constitute the two main areas that teachers understand CPD to involve. Also, this development/improvement notion of CPD seems to relate to CPD as an on-going process, an issue which I discuss in the following section.

4.3.1.3 CPD as an on-going and continuous process

Another recurrent theme in the majority of the teachers' definitions to CPD was that it was an on-going process. This was explicit in a number of definitions which described CPD as "on-going" and "continuous". However, the notion of continuity was also implied indirectly in descriptions of CPD as a way to "keep teachers up-to-date", "get to know the latest", and "be aware of new developments and changes".

One teacher, for example, wrote that CPD is "an on-going process which aims to enhance teaching" (107); in more detail, another teacher wrote that "it is a continuous/on-going process in which teachers adopt certain activities and programmes for the purpose of developing their teaching approaches, language and communication" (89). Some other teachers provided a justification for continuing learning. For example, one stated that "we have to continue learning as the world is changing all the time" (78). Another teacher was more specific by talking about change within the field of teaching: "We need to have professional development as theories and methods of teaching are changing from time to time" (243). One more teacher provided a concrete example by saying that "since I started teaching, the books have been changed three

times. Of course, I cannot teach the new books using the old methods. I have to keep learning every day” (230).

In addition to the above examples, the notion of continuity of CPD characterises the responses of a noticeable number of teachers to various questions and again appears constantly throughout the data. Many teachers, then, showed an awareness of the continuous nature of CPD as opposed to it being just a one-off activity or programme.

4.3.1.4 CPD as self-development

Teachers' descriptions of CPD also reveal that there is a sentiment that CPD is a self-development process which requires teachers to become active participants. This will become more obvious later on when teachers justify the need to be involved in any decision-making related to CPD (see Section 4.3.5 in this chapter and Sections 5.3.3.3 and 5.5 in the following chapter). In addition, terms related to “self-development” occur constantly in teachers' responses. Here are two examples from the questionnaire data:

As an English teacher, it is important to do self-development to improve yourself, to be able to create and produce new ideas and activities and to break down the routine with some changes. (32)

I also develop myself professionally and learn more strategies and methods of improving myself. (44)

The notion of self-development was also present in teachers' interviews. In the words of one teacher:

Teacher development requires personal awareness of developing your abilities as a teacher. It's a bottom-up process which needs to be initiated by the teacher through self-development. The teacher is not supposed to wait until other people come and offer opportunities because the teacher is in the field and he/she knows what he needs. (T2¹)

Interviews with Ministry officials revealed a similar view. Despite the fact that Ministry officials are responsible for organising formal CPD activities such as courses

¹ Throughout this chapter, whenever there is reference to quotations from the interviews, I will be using (T) to refer to teachers and (O) to refer to Ministry officials.

and workshops, they also think that there is a great deal which teachers should and could do on their own. For example, one Ministry official asserted that the CPD process offers opportunities for teachers to develop themselves: “The courses are not the only sources for development. Teachers have to become active learners. They have to read and observe. They have to reflect. Otherwise they are not going to improve” (O4). Another stated that “one of the areas that we consider is also self-directed learning which encourages teacher’s autonomy” (O5). This official justifies this by saying that “I don’t think we can have learner autonomy without teacher autonomy” (O5).

The above shows that, generally speaking, there is an understanding amongst a considerable number of teachers and Ministry officials that CPD is a process which provides opportunities for teachers to develop themselves. As such, teachers need to take an active role in the process. Further details and examples which reflect teachers' active participation shall follow in Sections 5.2.2 and 5.3.5 in the next chapter.

It is important to notice here that CPD in Oman as described in Section 1.5.2 in Chapter 1, is a process that is planned and delivered in a top-down manner with decisions usually made by the Ministry and regional offices. This suggests some inconsistency between how some teachers and Ministry officials view CPD and how the system actually works. We shall see later (in the next chapter) when talking about the practice of CPD how this is reflected on the ground.

4.3.2 The importance of CPD

Teachers were asked in the questionnaire (Question 2 in Part 4) to state whether they think that professional development is important or not. They were also asked to justify their answers. A total of 278 (85.8%) respondents answered this question, all of whom agreed, unsurprisingly, with the importance of professional development. The justifications they provided to their answers focused on various aspects of CPD. Table 4.5 shows the frequency of each of the justifications.

Table 4-5: Teachers' views about the importance of CPD

Teachers' justifications	<i>N</i>
Helps to improve teaching skills and performance	126
Keeps teachers up-to-date	64
Adds knowledge and understanding on teaching related issues	38
Improves language and particularly communication skills	36
Helps in gaining confidence in using English	32
Helps in solving and dealing with problems in class	6
Provides opportunities to exchange ideas with others	5
Leads to better position or job	5

As Table 4.5 shows, a substantial number of the respondents (N=126) focused on improving teaching skills and performance. In fact, most of the other views illustrated in the table relate in a way or another to the improvement of teaching. A closer look at teachers' responses revealed that teachers talk about improving different aspects of teaching. Most teachers focused on the practical skills related to improving the strategies of teaching. For example, one teacher said that "it will help me to develop the process of teaching strategies and methods" (28). Another teacher also stated that "it helps me a lot in my teaching and I can learn the best ways I should follow to improve teaching" (123). Some other teachers focused on the theoretical aspect: "It gives English teachers a chance to see the latest theory in the field of English teaching" (266). Others were more concerned about the skills, information and knowledge they gain: "It provides me with a variety of skills, knowledge and information that allow me to do my job properly" (286).

Table 4.5 also shows that a noticeable minority of teachers focused on improving language and gaining confidence. With regard to language improvement, it was noticeable that most teachers focused on improving their communication skills. Here is one example: "It provides me as a teacher with a chance to improve my English language and communication skills" (89). When talking about gaining confidence, most teachers linked it with teaching and language improvement. For example, one teacher

said that “it builds up self-confidence either in teaching or in English language skills” (73). Another teacher stated that “it enables me to become more confident in dealing with different classroom situations and in using the language” (221). Teachers’ responses, therefore, revealed that they regard CPD to be important for improving the broad area of teaching performance as well as in relation to two related factors that contribute to this main area: improving language and gaining confidence. They also show that within the broad area of teaching, teachers expressed varying views on the focus of CPD. While the majority stressed the importance of the practical aspects of teaching, there were other who talked about focusing on the theoretical aspects or on the skills, information and knowledge related to teaching of English. A few teachers, though, related CPD to getting a better job.

4.3.3 Beliefs about different types of CPD activities

One sub-section in the questionnaire (sub-section A in Part 2) asked teachers to rate various CPD activities¹ according to their level of importance. Generally speaking, high mean scores, as shown in Table 4.6, suggest that teachers value all the CPD activities listed but to varying degrees. It is also noticeable in Table 4.6 that the standard deviations are low which suggests that the range of responses provided was not wide on a scale of 1-5. This, in effect, suggests agreement among teachers’ views of these activities.

At the interview stage, teachers were requested to comment on these activities in terms of their importance and usefulness. They were also asked to provide some justifications for their responses in the questionnaire.

¹ A description of how this list of activities was compiled was presented in Section 3.7.2 in Chapter 3

Table 4-6: Teachers' beliefs about the importance of different types CPD activities

CPD activities	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Language training courses	320	4.68	.512
Curriculum support workshops and seminars	321	4.42	.603
Observing other teachers lessons	317	4.32	.710
Methodology training courses	322	4.29	.652
Reading professional material	320	4.22	.694
Upgrading degrees and qualifications	318	4.22	.890
Supervisors visits and observation	315	3.99	.818
Joint teaching and discussion of lessons	307	3.99	.812
Travelling to English speaking countries	320	3.96	1.054
Attending national ELT conferences	319	3.94	.759
Professional visits to other schools	317	3.93	.807
Attending regional ELT conferences	322	3.92	.717
Attending international ELT conferences	311	3.91	.870
Senior teachers visits and observation	316	3.90	.839
Giving a presentation or workshop	309	3.90	.870
Informal meetings with other teachers	318	3.79	.818
Teacher trainers visits and observation	320	3.76	.838
Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues	316	3.45	.923

* mean scores are out of 5

The following sub-sections present some observations drawn from Table 4.6 and the interview data.

4.3.3.1 Language courses

Table 4.6 shows that *language training courses* received the highest mean score (4.68). We saw earlier that teachers also referred to language improvement in their definitions of CPD (see Section 4.3.1.2). We shall see throughout the rest of this analysis that respondents regard language improvement as the most important element in their CPD. This view was also shared by a Ministry official:

If the language is good, everything else should be ok. If the teachers' language is weak, they cannot even understand the materials or the

philosophy. Teachers will lack confidence. They will make a lot of mistakes when speaking with students. I would stress and emphasize that teachers need to have a strong language (O1)

In the interviews, teachers justified the importance of language training courses. For example, one teacher said that “as a language teacher I have to be a model in English for my students. Therefore, I have to develop my language through training courses” (T2). Another teacher provided an extended answer by saying that “language courses help to improve your abilities in teaching in one way or another. You will be more confident in teaching. You have the background. You have the language skills which makes you a good teacher” (T10)

Hence, language proficiency is very important to these teachers of English because it is both the subject matter and the means of teaching the subject. Therefore, teachers felt the need to improve their abilities to use the language in order to manage the delivery of the curriculum and also to serve as models to their learners in using the language.

4.3.3.2 Methodology courses

Table 4.6 also shows that teachers regarded highly the importance of CPD activities which provide “formal” guidance to ways of teaching. The table shows that the second and the fourth highest mean scores were received by *curriculum support workshops and seminars* (mean: 4.42) and *methodology training courses* (mean: 4.29), both of which are related to methodology training

A Ministry official talked in detail about the nature of these methodology training courses:

The formal courses provided by the Ministry last for 150 hours or 100 hours. They mainly focus on techniques on how to teach different skills. There is also the theoretical part as well to enable teachers to understand how pupils learn. The delivery of the course is usually planned by the trainer in the region. We use both intensive weeks and day release systems. We have this intensive week at the beginning to introduce them to the course and give them the theoretical part. The day release helps them to learn something and then they can go away for a week. We assume that during that week they will have a chance

to apply some what they have learned. So, it happens sometimes that they say we have tried this but it did not work well or we had some difficulties in reading or whatever. They have a chance to take things from the course to the class. We also do micro teaching, team planning and team teaching during the course. Teachers here get feedback from their colleagues. So, the courses are mainly practical. The training room could be considered as a mini classroom. (O3)

The above quote shows that methodology training aims at guiding teachers on how to teach and how to provide the conditions in which pupils learn. It also states that the Ministry sponsored courses cover both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical aspects of the curriculum. The courses are planned centrally and they seem to be linked to teachers' practice in class. During the interviews, teachers provided various justifications for the importance of the methodology courses. For example, one teacher felt that these courses were important to learn theory and philosophy:

I think that these courses help in making teachers being updated with the theoretical approach and the practical approach of teaching. We need to examine occasionally our teaching beliefs; our teaching situations and we need to look at different types of philosophies of courses. (T3)

Another teacher thought that the value of the courses lies in providing opportunities to learn new things related to teaching:

I find the methodology courses more useful. We learn new things and we apply them in teaching. I found the lower secondary course very beneficial. All of those ideas are relevant to the actual situation. (T8)

One teacher regarded methodology courses as means of getting to know the ways of dealing with the new curriculum:

Methodology courses are very important for some teachers who face some difficulties dealing with the curriculum. The Lower secondary course helps all teachers who deal with basic education. They implement what they take at this course. (T5)

While the above quotes share the basic and probably general aim of the methodology courses which relates to helping teachers to understand the curriculum and improve classroom practice, some teachers viewed the value of such courses differently. For example, one teacher said that the “methodology courses are great chance for us as language teachers to practise and improve language” (T3). This quote reinforces Section 4.3.3.1 which showed that teachers see strong links between language improvement and teaching improvement, with each supporting the other. Another teacher said the methodology courses “help to share ideas and discuss them with other teachers” (T4). In this case, the courses provide chances to exchange experiences between teachers through collaboration.

The above shows that although the planners of the methodology courses may think of them as a means towards improving teaching through a better understanding of the curriculum, there may be a lot more which these courses may offer to teachers.

It has been illustrated in Section 1.3.4.1 and Section 1.5.2.1 in Chapter 1 that language courses and methodology training constitute the two main parts of the formal training organised by the Ministry. The fact that these have both been ranked as the most important CPD activities by almost all teachers suggests that teachers value formal training more than other types of CPD activities. Such a finding is surprising since it was shown earlier (Section 4.3.1.1) that the majority of the teachers seemed to recognise the importance of other forms of CPD. This shows that there is some inconsistency between teachers' general beliefs about CPD and the value they assign to specific CPD activities.

A Ministry official attributed teachers' preferences for formal courses over other alternatives to the fact that CPD may be perceived by a wide range of people within the system to refer to training. Other formal and informal types of CPD are not well-recognised:

I think still here training is seen as a means to PD. Yes, there are all sorts of different other activities people can do to be involved in their own professional development. But I don't feel they are given enough weight in terms of importance for people to see that solutions can come from working informally or working on other areas such as peer observation or action research. There still seems

to be an expectation that the Ministry should provide this course.

(O7)

This quote may shed light on teachers' preference for formal training. In addition, it raises a crucial issue related to teachers' conceptualisation of CPD. It states that although a wide range of CPD activities exist which teachers could get engaged in within the system, certain types may remain dominant and preferred more than others. In this particular context which, like many, has traditionally been centralised, teachers have been accustomed to having CPD provided to them in the form of formal training courses. In addition, the lower appreciation of some CPD activities could be attributed mainly to the lack of awareness-raising of the importance or the availability of those activities.

4.3.3.3 Classroom observation

With regard to classroom observation, Table 4.6 shows that teachers value certain types of observations more than others. *Observing other teachers' lessons* (also known as *peer observation*) is considered the most valuable type of observation by teachers. Table 4.6 shows that it is the second most important CPD activity following the language courses (mean 4.32). Almost all teachers (11 out of 12) who were involved at the interview stage talked extensively and positively about this activity. Here are two extracts reflecting the way teachers view *peer observation*:

I think that peer observation is very important for teachers; especially the new ones as they may learn things from experienced teachers on various aspects such as class management..... We teachers benefit from each other through peer observation to get to know ways of teaching and techniques used by each one of us. There are some aspects in the curriculum which cannot be explained except through modelling such as teaching songs and rhymes. So, peer observation is useful here. Also, in the class we have kids of different abilities and learners with learning difficulties. Again, teachers need to know how to deal with them. They require special care. Teachers can learn this through observation. New teachers usually lack patience. But they learn this from experienced teachers who are used to be patient with

kids. Peer observation is also useful for experienced teachers. This is because we do it on our own. (T1)

Peer observation helps in benefiting from each other. It encourages teachers to share ideas....We want to learn from each other rather than do inspection. We consider each other friend. (T8)

During the interviews, teachers viewed, as the extracts above reflect, *Peer observation* as a way of learning from each other rather than evaluating or criticising colleagues. The later characterised inspectors' visits, the only type of observation available before the reform (as described in Section 1.3.4.2 in Chapter 1). It seems that, generally speaking, exchange of experiences and learning from each other, as also shown in the previous section (4.3.3.2), is valued by teachers.

The above quotes also show that teachers feel peer observation may provide opportunities for teachers to learn from practice or through modelling. The following is from the quote above: "There are some aspects in the curriculum which cannot be explained except through modelling such as teaching songs and rhymes" (T1). This quote reveals that teachers feel that peer observation provides opportunities to see concrete examples of how some classroom activities can be performed. Such finding stresses the importance of the practical dimension of CPD.

Another interesting and at the same time important aspect of peer observation referred to in the quotes above is that teachers practise it in a less formal way where they regard colleagues as friends. Such an atmosphere appears to be less threatening and may encourage teachers to focus on the possible benefits they can gain from their participation. Generally speaking, this aspect of collegiality is stressed by teachers and it appears in various places in the questionnaire and the interview data.

Table 4.6 shows that teachers also value other types of observation, though to a less degree, which suggests that they are less popular than peer observation. This perception was also reflected in teachers' interview. For most teachers who were interviewed, *senior teachers' observations* were useful because they useful. Here are two examples:

Senior teachers' visits are also useful. The teacher can also benefit from her. She can advise, give some comments. She can speak with the teacher more seriously. She could talk about anything in the lesson not

like peer observation where teachers can talk about the good things only. Senior teachers' visit is more professional, more serious. Senior teachers are required to write reports on teachers so they have to visit them. (T6)

I think that senior teachers and other teachers' visits are useful because he is in your school and you can talk to him and discuss with him. You can share your ideas with him. He is in the situation and in the context. You can benefit from him a lot. (T9)

However, observation by the senior teacher becomes less popular if it is regarded as a formal activity which involves finding mistakes and writing reports:

Senior teachers' observation aims at finding mistakes or writing reports. So, we do not feel comfortable with such observation. I am not saying here that all senior teachers aim at finding mistakes but at least some of them are. (T1)

Hence, where the focus of the observation is on mistake finding and on the formality of the report writing, it is not usually welcomed by teachers.

Since this type of observation was introduced as part of the reform (as mentioned in Chapter 1), Ministry officials seem to try to support this CPD activity. A Ministry official said that "it's more of a friendly meeting. We encourage senior teachers not to be too direct to teachers and to treat them as friends more than taking their position as an authority" (O2).

Despite the officials' efforts, the previous quote shows it seems that there are practices performed by some senior teachers which may make this CPD activity of less value and use to teachers. This finding shows that there may be some CPD activities which are not performed as planned and intended by the policy makers and so do not achieve the intended goals.

With regard to *supervisors' observation*, which used to be called inspectors' observation (as explained in Chapter 1), Table 4.6 showed that it was considered to be among the six most important CPD activities by teachers with a mean score of (3.99). Interestingly, seven teachers (out of the twelve teachers involved in the interviews

talked about *supervisors' observation*, six of whom had negative views about it. Here are three examples:

Supervisor may have more experience but the syllabus changes and he may not be aware of these changes for various grades. While the teachers go through all of the syllabus and they know how to teach each part. Supervisors do not know about the school situation. (T4)

They may come twice a semester to the school and when he comes he finds eight teachers. So, I don't think that the supervisor will know enough about the teacher. (T7)

Supervisors think that they are above teachers and have more experience and more authority, so everything will be controlled. Most of them are from the old fashion of teaching. I think that all of them are using the traditional methods. They don't even read about modern techniques of teaching. Supervisors make formal visits. So, teachers try sometimes to control their lessons as they need visitors to see that they are doing well. (T9)

These quotes contradict the questionnaire data where supervisors' observation was viewed as being important. There was only one teacher who praised supervisors' observation by saying that "supervisors have good role in helping the teachers to improve" (T8).

The above shows that supervisors' visits are not favoured by teachers for a number of reasons. They are formal and less frequent. In addition, teachers seem to feel that supervisors aim at finding mistakes and they lack knowledge of the curriculum and of the school situations. It seems here that teachers are relating supervisors' current role with their previous role which was connected with inspection and finding mistakes. In addition, teachers seem to compare between the closeness of the senior teachers who are aware of the curriculum and the school situations on the one hand and supervisors who are regarded as outsiders and lack knowledge of the newly introduced curriculum. Therefore, it seems here that teachers make judgments on the people observing them on the basis of their familiarity with the context as well as their knowledge of the subject.

The fourth type of observation is the one done by teacher trainers. This type of observation was reported as being among the least important CPD activities as shown in Table 4.6 (mean: 3.76). The purpose of these visits is to follow up the impact of CPD courses on teachers' performance in class. Teacher trainers describe these visits:

We also do school visits thorough which we follow up the teachers who are with us in the training courses. These visits are followed by discussions related to our observations or any other issue teacher would like to discuss with us. (O3)

I also observe them in schools to see their practice and how far they apply what they learn in the course. (O4)

I visit schools. I may also do class observation and invite other teachers to observe and join the discussion. It's not formal. The one thing that I stress when I go to the school is that I am not a supervisor and I am not here to judge you. However, when I go to school it allows me to see if the teacher is using the techniques covered in the course. It does reflect what I write in the report. I don't write negative things in the report. It's not a pass or fail course. But if somebody is doing well, it will be clear in the report. (O6)

But teacher trainers face the problem of large number of teachers which makes it hard for them to do these visits as required:

I usually have a lot of teachers for each course. I only visit some teachers during the course. (O4)

This may justify why this type of observation is not popular among teachers though some may recognise its value. There were only two teachers who talked about *teacher trainers' observation* at the interview stage:

We benefit from him because he visits us in the class and he tells us in advance that he will come. He has a rich experience which he shares with me. (T7)

I feel I can benefit from teacher trainers because they focus on the syllabus, my skills as a teacher and how to teach well. (T10)

These quotes from teachers provide evidence that there are ways in which teachers' trainers' observation may become useful. It was interesting to see two teachers only (out of twelve) talked about this type of observation. The above quote from the Ministry official showed that teacher trainers' visits are not regular. This raises an interesting issue related to the possible relationship between the frequency of an activity and teachers' perceptions of it. For example, peer observation, which is being practised regularly in school, is highly valued most by most teachers.

4.3.3.4 Less important CPD activities

Table 4.6 also shows that besides *teacher trainers' observation*, there are also two other less important activities namely: *preparing lessons jointly with colleagues* (mean: 3.45) and *informal meetings with other teachers* (mean: 3.79). Although the mean scores for these activities are not that low, it is interesting to see that respondents regarded them to be of a relatively less importance compared to the rest of the CPD activities. Both of these activities are promoted in the Ministry's documents on professional development. There were only two participants who talked about these activities at the interview stage which reinforces the suggestion in the quantitative data that they are relatively less valued by teachers.

With regard to *preparing lessons jointly with colleagues*, one teacher commented that it is "not practical. Actually, we teachers do not have the time to do this. Also every teacher prepares in his own way. Also, they teach different levels" (T1) and for *informal meetings with other teachers*, a teacher stated that "when we meet during free periods, we talk about things in general. We do not talk about teaching" (T7).

So, it seems that such activities are less important to these teachers for two main reasons. Firstly, some suggested activities seem to be less practical and may not fit within the system as teachers may not be aware how and when they can practise them. The quote illustrates that preparing lessons jointly with colleagues presupposes that they teach the same lesson at the same level.

Also, the second quote above shows that some teachers may not have suitable time to benefit from informal meetings with other colleagues within the working day. It should be noted here that (as we shall see later in Section 5.3.3.2 in Chapter 5) the system assumes that CPD will occur during the normal teaching day.

Although the above views were expressed by only two teachers which may not necessarily reflect other teachers' views with regard to these two CPD activities, the justifications they provide here seem to be of common concern to other teachers as shown in some other sections in this chapter and the next one.

4.3.3.5 Additional CPD activities

In an open-ended question in the questionnaire (in sub-section A in Part 2), teachers were asked to list any other possible CPD activities which they think can be useful but were not mentioned in the questionnaire. A total of 91 respondents (28.1%) answered this question.

Respondents wrote varied responses to this question. Some of the activities suggested had either been covered by the questionnaire such as *reading up-to-date materials*; or may be regarded as extra-curricula activities rather than CPD activities such as *Organising competitions for students*.

The most frequently suggested activities were *using the internet* and *doing action research* and they were suggested by 17 and 15 respondents respectively. These two activities were also focused upon by teachers during the interviews. There were seven teachers who talked about the *use of internet* and four teachers who talked about *classroom research* as sources for professional development. Teachers talked extensively about using the internet. In the words of one teacher:

Using the internet is also useful and important because we can find what other teachers have in their schools. We can learn from different countries. We can benefit from them, their ways of teaching skills, different skills, and different methods. We get information by reading some articles. Some teachers can bring some articles from the internet and we keep them in a file which we call professional improvement file. Teachers can read it and get some information about different topics related to teaching or learning. (T6)

Further quotes and details about teachers' actual use of the internet will follow in the next chapter. It is interesting to see in the quote above that the teacher here stresses the importance of using the internet to exchange ideas and experiences. This issue of sharing experiences, as previous sections showed as well, seems to be highly valued by

teachers. The quote also shows that the internet can be used as a source to find materials for other CPD activities such as reading professional materials and conducting workshops.

With regard to research, here is how one teacher describes the way through which *research* becomes important:

With researching and collecting data and analysing data, you have some findings. And from these findings you can judge how beneficial your strategies and styles are. Also you will be able to know how pupils will improve their learning in English. (T9)

Research, according to this teacher, could be used to evaluate and consequently improve teaching and learning. Although only a few teachers talked about research in this sense, such a perception of research aimed mainly at improving teaching and learning seems promising as it may suggest that there are teachers who may consider research for CPD purposes.

The next most frequently suggested activity was *reflection* which was mentioned by eight teachers. There was one teacher who talked about it at the interview stage:

We have reflection sheets in our preparation books. I reflect on my lessons and find the strengths and weaknesses of my teaching. I can then improve myself. But sometimes we do not use properly. We write it because it's required by the system. BUT still sometimes I learn from it a lot. If I find a problem, I consult inspectors or colleagues so I can solve it. (T2)

Unlike the previous activities (*internet* and *research*), *reflection* is integrated into the curriculum and in the teachers' preparation sheets. It was surprising to see that not many teachers mentioned reflection in the questionnaires and that there was only one teacher who talked about it at the interview stage. In the above quote, this teacher points out that reflection is being practised because it is required by the system. This, in effect, suggests that an activity can be practised to follow the system but not for its own intended benefits.

The rest of the suggested activities were of low frequency (mostly mentioned by one or two respondents). They involved specific activities such as *listening to native speakers*, *using computer software*, and *doing self-study*.

At the interview stage, one teacher also stated that *Educational supplements* could be regarded as a source for professional development. This teacher was referring to the educational publications produced regularly by the Ministry and he focused more specifically on the ones related the teaching of English:

These are published monthly and sent to schools. They talk about educational issues. Teachers from all regions participate in these issues. I myself use them. I read them and make use of the content to participate in conferences and present workshops with colleagues. (T7)

The Ministry produces a wide range of Educational Supplements which are published regularly. The supplements take different formats such as magazines, newspapers, leaflets and booklets. They provide a useful source to inform people of the Ministry's plans, policies and projects. They are also used to report some of the research being carried in schools. The above teacher reports on how the supplements can be used. It is interesting to see here that despite the wide range of supplements produced by the Ministry and some regions the majority of the teachers do not seem to be aware of them.

There were also some other CPD activities which were mentioned by Ministry officials. The first of these are the *induction meetings* and the *orientation meetings*. The Ministry officials regard these workshops as being vital for any beginning teacher and for experienced teachers who move to teach an upper level for the first time. Teachers did not talk about these as CPD activities. This could be because they are offered to most of them at the start of their career and they are not expected to take them again. A Ministry official talks about these meetings:

We have normal curriculum support sessions. We carry on these sessions at the beginning of each semester. These are orientation sessions for new books targeting new teachers and we have induction sessions for those teachers who are already in the system but moving to teach a different stage for the first time to help them deal with the book in that particular stage. These are mainly three day sessions. We

call them workshops. We also have training for newcomers who teach in basic education. They are supposed to be attending a whole year course to train them to teach in basic education. As we cannot wait for a whole year to get them trained. We give them a three day orientation to the books. This is a quick training to make them capable of handling the material. (O1)

The quote shows that such meetings are vital for new teachers and for introducing new books. Another CPD activity mentioned by Ministry officials is what is known as the *Wilaya (town) meeting*. This activity started in some regions but it seems to be spreading in other regions more and more.

This meeting is organised once a semester or twice a semester and aims at bringing together all senior teachers in each Wilaya. Supervisors, teacher trainers and senior teachers attend this meeting. We talk about new projects, problems, articles, new ideas and new techniques. We feel we get close to the senior teachers. Senior teachers feel that they are free to talk. It's more of a discussion forum. We end the meeting with an action plan. (T4)

So, the Wilaya meeting is another CPD activity which was not reported by teachers. The above quote shows that this meeting targets mainly senior teachers. It should be noted here that some of the study participants are working as senior teachers in their schools.

The above discussion on the additional CPD activities shows that the list of possible CPD activities presented in the questionnaire can be extended. It also showed both that some teachers may find activities which are not stated in the Ministry documents to be CPD. On the contrary, there can be some cases where teachers may be unaware of some CPD activities that are available in the system.

4.3.4 Beliefs about benefits of CPD

Another sub-section in the questionnaire (sub-section B in Part 2) asked teachers to rate the possible benefits CPD (actual benefits shall come in Chapter 5). The majority of the mean scores in this sub-section, as Table 4.7 shows, are above four, which is considered

to be high. The low standard deviations for almost all of the statements again suggest homogeneity among respondents on their views.

Table 4-7: Teachers' beliefs about benefits of CPD

Benefits	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Improve their language skills	323	4.66	.543
Become better at teaching English	322	4.54	.611
Become more confident in the classroom	322	4.48	.749
Improve their communication skills	321	4.45	.641
Learn about how to assess students	320	4.15	.819
Develop professional study skills	321	4.13	.674
Develop their skills at planning lessons	320	4.06	.858
Develop their time management skills	323	4.04	.812
Learn about how their colleagues teach English	321	4.00	.748
Get a qualification that leads to promotion	317	3.80	.894
Improve their computer skills	316	3.62	.937
Increase their chance of finding a better job	318	3.42	1.026

* mean scores are out of 5

A number of observations can be made by looking at Table 4.7 above as well as the interview data.

4.3.4.1 Improving language

Table 4.7 shows that respondents regarded *improving their language skills* (mean: 4.66) as the most important benefit CPD can have. This finding is congruent with teachers' views presented earlier (see Sections 4.3.1.2 and 4.3.3.1) as they regarded *language training courses* as the most important CPD activity. During the interviews, teachers agreed that improving language was a potential benefit of CPD. Here are two examples:

I need to improve my language. I need not to be afraid to speak with others. This is the language which we teach to others. We should as teachers to be better than others in speaking this language. I think the main aim of most of the PD activities is to improve language. (T9)

They (language courses) improve language and this helps improve your abilities in teaching in one way or another. You will be more

confident in teaching. You have the background. You have the language skills which makes you a good teacher. (T10)

The quotes show that teachers believe that improving language is essential to improving teaching and gaining confidence in the job. The link between language competence and effective teaching is one noted earlier.

Teachers' responses, as the above also show, focus mainly on speaking as the most important aspect of the language. Table 4.7 also shows a high mean score for *improving their communication skills* (mean: 4.45). It seems that the majority of the teachers feel that speaking is the most important language skill they need. In fact, one teacher stated this very clearly by saying that "we as teachers want to communicate fluently with others as well as with students. We want to improve our communication skills" (T9). So, communication is important to use in class and to talk with other people.

One teacher also added that improving language and particularly communication skills can be achieved in different ways: "there are a lot of opportunities to improve English here such as attending the language improvement courses, methodology courses and using the internet. I think that experience in teaching English also helps in improving the language" (T1). This teacher suggests that language improvement is not confined to language courses and methodology courses only. It can also be achieved through practising other types of CPD. Various CPD activities can be planned to achieve parallel aims.

4.3.4.2 Improving teaching

The next highest mean scores were for the following benefits: *become better at teaching English* (mean: 4.54) and *become more confident in the classroom* (mean: 4.48), both of which are related to the work teachers do inside the classroom. Previous sections showed that teachers connect language and teaching improvement. Both of these aspects relate to gaining confidence in class. One teacher tries to show this link in the following:

I think the main aim of most of the PD activities is to improve language. The other thing is to become better in teaching. This gives the teacher confidence to talk, communicate and present things. Being

more confident in the classroom is important in giving instructions and explaining things to students. (T9)

Improving teaching is, therefore, another important broad benefit of CPD. This finding justifies teachers' responses presented earlier (see Section 4.3.3.2) as they regarded those CPD activities related to improving teaching as among the most important ones. It seems so far that, generally speaking, there is a strong inter-relationship between gaining more language confidence and improving teaching. Teachers and Ministry officials seem to share the opinion that better language proficiency is a prerequisite for better teaching.

4.3.4.3 Less important benefits

Table 4.7 shows that the benefits which are not related to improvement of language nor teaching received the lowest mean scores as follows: *increase their chance of finding a better job* (mean: 3.42), *improve their computer skills* (mean: 3.62) and *get a qualification that leads to promotion* (mean: 3.80).

Such aims as well as others may seem of less importance to some teachers as they do not see them related directly to their actual job. This was stated very clearly by one teacher at the interviews: "I think time management and computer skills are not necessary for the teacher. It's up to him" (T6). Thus, it is a personal choice which does not relate to teaching according to this teacher. Another female teacher referred to some cultural and social factors which influence teachers' views:

Probably finding a better job might apply to male teachers because we as female teachers I think being a teacher is a good thing. It's ok if we get a better job with the same field (teacher, senior teacher or supervisor) but a different job is more suitable for male teachers only.
(T6)

Despite the social and cultural factors mentioned above, the varied ranking of these benefits may be attributed to the fact that teachers may not necessarily be aware of the relevance of these aims to their CPD and as such they may limit their perception of CPD to teaching and language improvement. It seems here that those teachers, in this respect, focus on the most essential and immediate aims which they feel help them

improve their job performance and tend to be less appreciative of other potential skills and benefits.

However, it could be argued that some of the above benefits are relevant and essential for teaching. For example, *improving computer skills* could be considered as a basic skill which teachers require as technology is integrated into most of the new curricula. Also, within the context of the study, CPD as a means of *upgrading the qualifications of teachers* was regarded as a main component of the new reform as illustrated in Chapter 1. A possible reason for teachers' views on such benefits could be the fact that such benefits may not be valued in their own right, but considering them to improve teaching or language might be valued more positively. Another possible reason, which is related to the former one, is that most teachers might not really have much awareness or interest in the wider strategic context beyond their basic roles linked directly to their daily teaching duties.

4.3.4.4 Additional CPD benefits

One open-ended question in the questionnaire (in sub-section B in Part 2) asked respondents to state any further possible benefits of CPD. A total of 47 respondents (14.5%) answered this question. Most of the answers to this question focused on *improving teaching strategies* which was mentioned by 21 respondents. It should be noted that the questionnaire contained a statement related to improving teaching which is *becoming better at teaching English*. However, the presence of this additional statement in the open-ended question reconfirms the perceived importance of any CPD that can be seen to improve teaching.

The second most frequent suggested benefit was *Exchange of experiences between teachers* which was mentioned by eight teachers. In fact, it has been shown so far that exchange of experiences through collaboration is highly valued by teachers.

The rest of the suggested benefits were of low frequency (mostly mentioned by one respondent). The small proportion of respondents who contributed to this question may imply that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the list of possible benefits presented through the questionnaire.

4.3.5 Beliefs about involvement in decision-making

Another sub-section in the questionnaire (sub-section C in Part 2) listed possible individuals who might be involved in one way or another in making decisions related to teachers' engagement on CPD activities. Respondents were asked to state the extent to which they preferred certain individuals to be involved in the decision-making process. At the interview stage, teachers were asked to comment on their responses to this issue in the questionnaire.

4.3.5.1 People who should be involved in decision-making

Mean scores in Table 4.8 suggest that respondents in general prefer that the decisions related to joining any CPD activity are made by themselves and those people who are working closely with them inside the school except for headteachers.

Table 4-8: Teachers' beliefs about who should make decision related to CPD*

People	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
The teacher	320	4.56	.669
Senior teachers	321	4.38	.745
Supervisors	321	4.26	.838
Teacher trainers	322	3.72	.932
Head teachers	313	3.56	.946
Officials from the regional office	319	3.37	1.079
Central authorities from the Ministry	313	3.31	1.142
Other colleagues	315	2.96	1.064

* mean scores are out of 5

Table 4.8 shows that respondents preferred the decisions about their CPD to be made by *the teachers* themselves (mean: 4.56), *their senior teachers* (mean: 4.38) or *their supervisors* (mean: 4.26). This could be attributed to two factors. First, teachers know their abilities as well as their needs and as such they should be able to participate in making such decisions. Second, it is understandable that teachers may feel that they can trust the people surrounding them more as they usually interact with them directly through their daily work. All teachers participating at the interview stage agreed to this as well. Here are two examples from their responses:

I think the teacher can make the decision himself or herself because the teacher knows what he needs more than the others. Some teachers may have some circumstances or reasons for attending or not attending this course. So they should have the right to make the decision. After that, the senior teacher and the supervisor can participate. The senior teacher can write some comments about a certain teacher. The senior teacher and the supervisor write the report at the end of the year. They write recommendations for the teacher. They should make the decision. (T6)

The teacher should make the decision as he knows himself, his skills and knowledge about teaching and learning. I think the teacher should take that decision. He should say that I need to attend this course.... I also think that supervisors and senior teachers should be involved as they are in the school. They are close to the teacher. They know teachers' weaknesses and strengths. (T9)

It was interesting to see that the headteacher, who is supposed to be close to teachers, was not among the most recommended individuals. In the words of two teachers:

The headteacher could only be involved if he used to be a teacher of English. But most of headteachers have no knowledge about teaching English. When they go to visit teachers in class, they cannot support him a lot. They may only comment on some management issues in the class but can't help in the technical side. (T10)

The headteacher might also be involved but in one case only which is if he was an English teacher. But I don't think that other headteachers will be able to know English teachers needs because they know nothing about the curriculum. (T11)

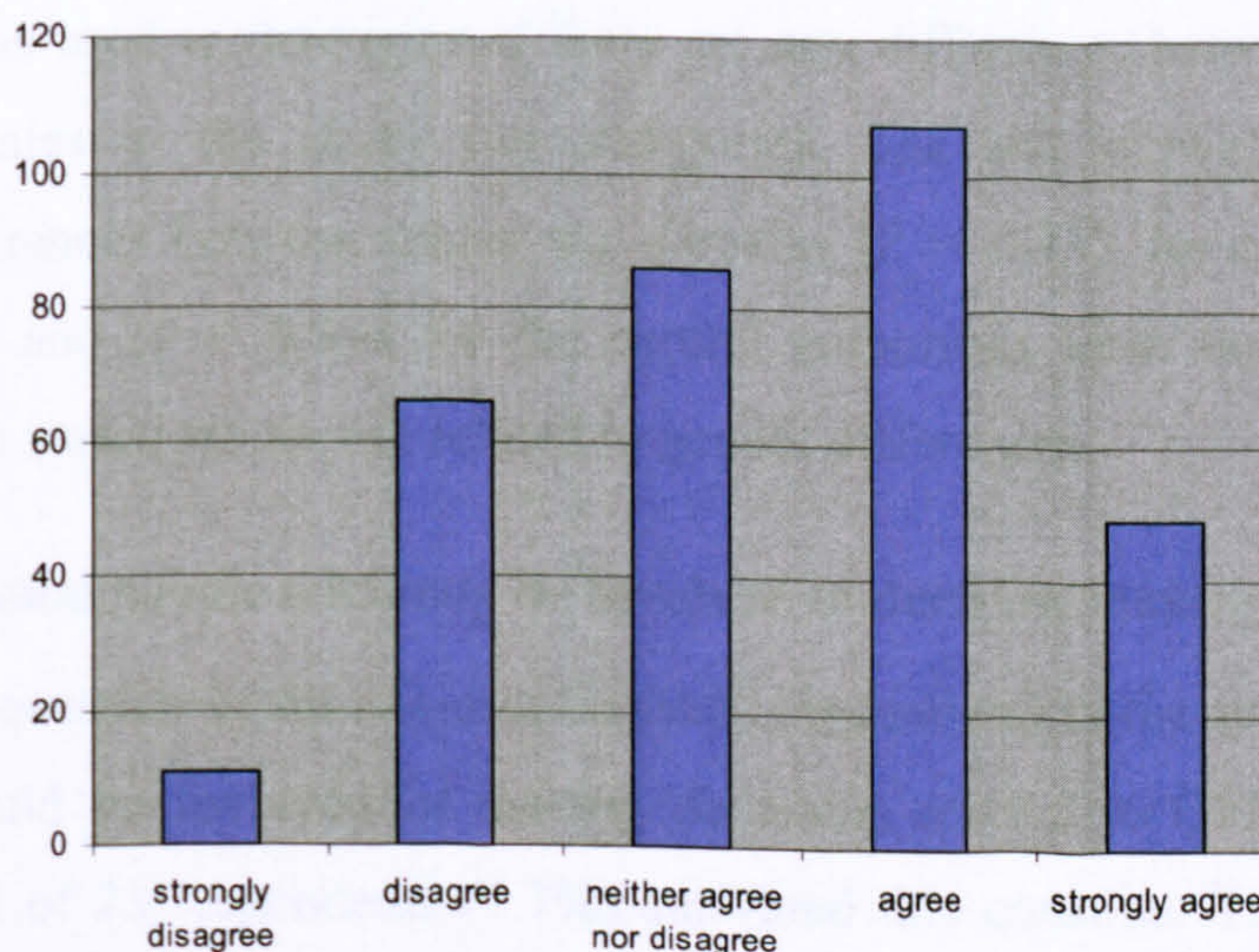
During the interviews, teachers had two varying points of views regarding involving regional officers and Ministry officials. The following two extracts represent these two points of views:

Other groups in the region or working at the Ministry should also be involved because they also know what the system requires and what the teacher lacks. (T1)

I don't think that people from the region or from the Ministry could be involved because they are away from the teacher. They are not in the field. (T11)

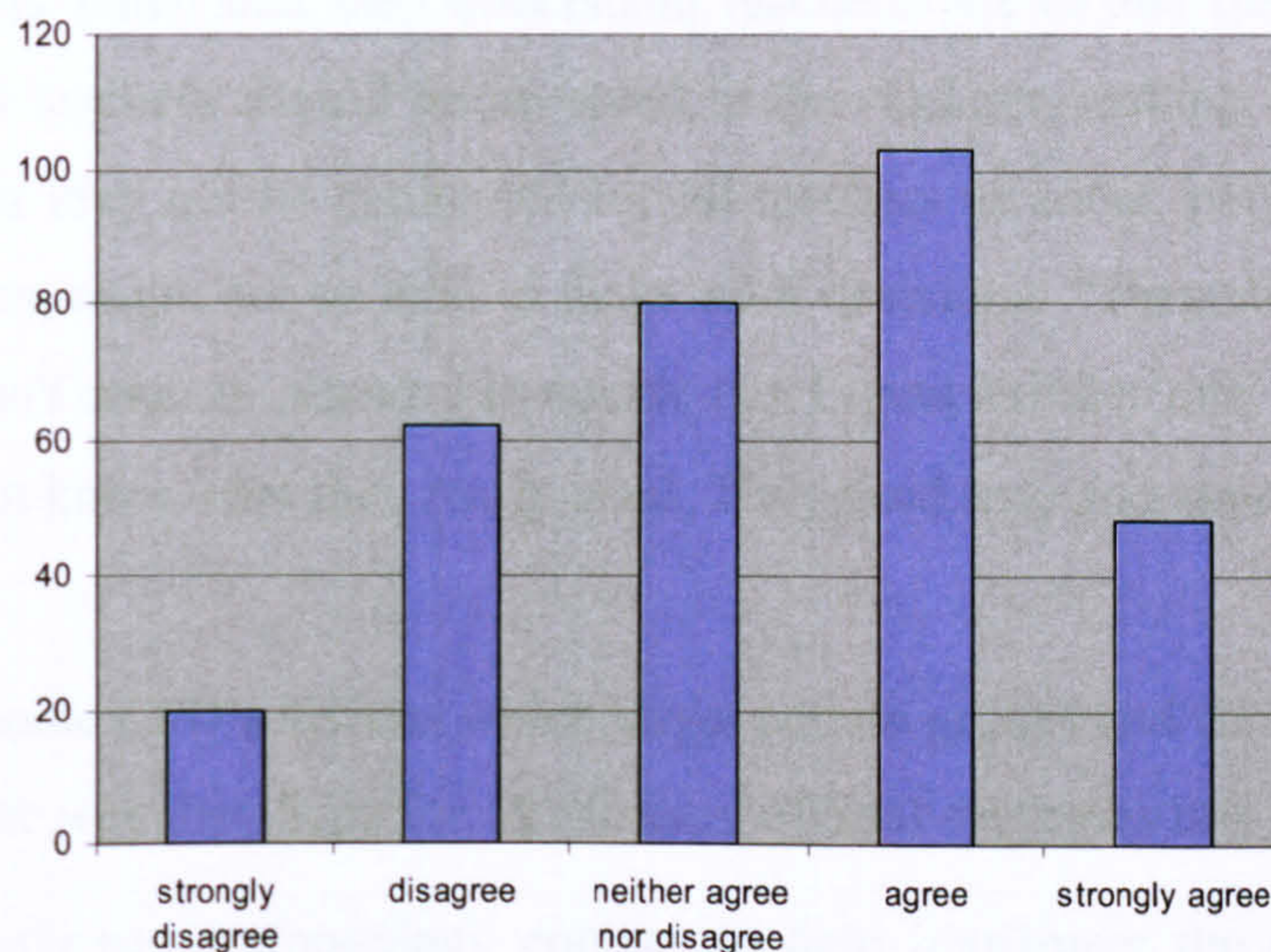
These varying views are reflected in the relatively high standard deviations for both categories; *officials from the regional office* and *central authorities from the Ministry*. The variety in respondents' views becomes more obvious when looking at the bar charts in figures 4.1 and 4.2 below. For Figure 4.1, the question was whether teachers think that regional officials should be involved in making decisions about their participation in CPD.

Figure 4-1: Teachers' beliefs about involvement of regional officers in decision-making



For Figure 4.2, the question was whether teachers think that Ministry officials should be involved in making decisions about their participation in CPD.

Figure 4-2: Teachers' beliefs about involvement of Ministry officials in decision-making



The varied responses illustrated clearly in the figures above entail that there is a wide range of views amongst teachers with regard to these two categories. An independent sample t-test was used to determine if there are any differences between responses of males and females to the above two categories. The test showed no statistically significant differences between males and females ($P = 0.232$ for officials from the regional office) and ($P = 0.894$ for the central authorities from the Ministry). This suggests that the variations are not related to gender differences.

4.3.5.2 Additional people who may be involved in decision-making

An open-ended question in this sub-section asked respondents to list any other groups of people who could be involved in making decisions related to CPD of teachers of English. A total of 25 respondents (7.7%) answered this question. This is a relatively small number which suggests that the people named in the questionnaire accounted for most possibilities. The groups suggested included students, ELT specialists, families and independent educational institutions. These groups do not emerge here as being a strong influence on decisions about CPD as they were suggested by very few respondents and do not belong to the “formal” educational system which is usually responsible for making such decisions. us, their involvement is not practical.

4.3.5.3 Officials' views

Ministry officials stated that they understand teachers' views and their justifications. They agree that teachers should be involved in the decision making but one of them thought that this may not be applicable for all teachers as some, particularly the less experienced ones, might not be able to make such decisions: "They should be allowed to say that I don't want to attend this course but I need another one. However, some teachers may not know what they really need. They need help and support from others" (O4).

There are also some CPD activities which target certain groups and cannot be offered to all teachers in the way they hope for. A Ministry official expresses this:

We mainly run methodology courses to help implement the reform, new curriculum and new principles ... we are getting a massive amount of new teachers who are new to the curriculum and new to teaching .. Therefore, a lot of our courses now focus on new teachers... Also, you can only release the teachers for a certain amount of time. Even if we have three trainers in a region and you want to run three training programmes, you cannot release three groups of teachers at the same time. (O7)

The quote above implies that the system is restricted by factors which limit the scope of formal programmes of training to certain targeted groups. Moreover, criteria used by the system regarding selection for such CPD opportunities do not seem to be transparent to teachers (as will be shown in 5.5. in Chapter 5). Of course, the above relates particularly to the decision making on joining the formal CPD activities such the training courses and the conferences which is usually decided upon by the Ministry or the regions.

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I presented an analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data related to teachers' beliefs about CPD. The analysis involved teachers' conceptualisation of CPD, various CPD activities, benefits to CPD and the individuals who should be involved in making decisions regarding teachers' involvement in CPD. Ministry officials' responses to teachers' views were also presented as appropriate.

The analysis revealed that the group of teachers involved in the study shared positive attitudes towards CPD. Generally speaking, teachers agreed with the importance of CPD in serving two essential and complementary purposes: teaching improvement and language improvement. They also showed an awareness of both formal and informal CPD activities.

The analysis also showed that teachers valued some CPD activities more than others based on varied factors such as the immediate relevance of the activities to teaching improvement, their availability and practicality. Although teachers expressed their recognition of the importance of various types of CPD, the findings showed that Ministry sponsored formal training courses were regarded as the most valued ones. Besides formal training, teachers also regarded classroom observations to be useful. Teachers preferred the classroom observation which aims at improving teaching as well as sharing ideas with each other rather than the judgmental observation which involved evaluation and report writing.

With regard to the benefits of CPD, the analysis showed that teachers, in general, viewed CPD as affecting mainly teaching improvement; and that improvement of language is a prerequisite to the improvement of teaching. In addition, teachers valued the CPD benefits which they felt that could support the improvement of teaching.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that teachers showed a lack of awareness about the Ministry's procedures followed in the decision-making process related to their involvement on CPD. They preferred such decisions to be made by themselves and/or the people who were close to them as they were aware of their school context, particularly senior teachers and supervisors.

These results will be discussed further in Chapter 6, along with the possible implications that could be drawn for the Omani context and for research in general. Next, Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the data related to teachers' reported practices in CPD.

5 DATA ANALYSIS II: TEACHERS' REPORTED CPD PRACTICES

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings related to teachers' beliefs about CPD. This chapter will focus on the findings related to teachers' reported CPD practices.

Both the questionnaire and the interviews contained questions and statements which requested teachers to report on their practice with regard to CPD. Reference to data sources will be indicated for each section in this chapter.

In the questionnaire, the whole of Part 3 was devoted to this issue. It was divided into three sub-sections: different types of the CPD activities practised, the actual perceived benefits of the CPD activities and the people who were involved in making decisions related to teachers' CPD. Similarly, in the interviews teachers were also asked to comment and expand on their questionnaire answers. Ministry officials were then asked to comment on teachers' answers and views.

This chapter starts by presenting in detail the CPD activities reported to have been practised by teachers before and after the reform. It will then shed light on teachers' reported benefits from CPD. This will be followed by an analysis of teachers' views of the people involved in the decision-making process related to their involvement in CPD. Main obstacles to CPD, as seen by teachers, will then be identified. For each section, key issues will be highlighted and links to the findings in the previous chapter will be made as appropriate.

5.2 CPD experiences

At the beginning of each interview, teachers were asked to talk about their CPD experiences before and after the beginning of the reform. The aim of this was to get an overview of teachers' CPD practices during both periods as this may help in understanding teachers' perceptions of various issues being investigated in this study.

5.2.1 CPD prior to the reform

Teachers were asked to talk about their CPD experiences during the pre-reform period. All the twelve teachers who were interviewed talked very briefly in their responses to this question. This could be attributed to either the relatively limited availability of

alternatives during this stage as described in Section 1.3.4 in Chapter 1 or teachers' limited perception of CPD before the reform. Another possible reason for this could also be the time factor as they had done such activities a long time ago.

With regard to the CPD activities practised, almost all teachers stated that they were involved in different types of formal courses such as PET, GARLIC, PICOT and HOTDC, all of which focused mainly on language improvement with some aspects related to methodology. Details of these courses were presented in Section 1.3.4.1 in Chapter 1. Teachers also stated that these courses were organised by the Ministry and took place either in the regions or in some private institutes.

It is interesting to see that although some activities such as classroom observation, curriculum workshops and meetings were available before the reform as shown in Chapter 1, teachers did not talk about these CPD activities. Teachers' responses were confined to the formal courses mentioned above. Although teachers' current views of CPD seem to include a wide range of activities as shown in the previous chapter, their reflection of their CPD prior to the reform was dominated mainly by the formal courses.

Teachers' responses also revealed some variations in the stage at which they took these courses during their careers. The following quotes from teachers' responses not only reflect this finding but they also show that there were some long gaps between courses:

After I joined teaching, I did not attend any courses for five years. (T1)

I started my PD with a language course called RELIC and then I attended a methodology course called PICOT. Then I didn't do any course for around five years. (T4)

During the first seven years of teaching I did not have any courses. Then, I started taking language courses. (T9)

I started work in 1995. In the first four years I did not attend any courses. (T12)

These quotes show that some of these teachers had to wait for a number of years until they got an opportunity to take a course. They also suggest that these teachers' dominant perception of CPD was confined to formal training. Such perception could be attributed to the fact that other forms of CPD, as mentioned in Chapter 1, were not given enough weight by the system.

The above illustrates that although the previous chapter showed that, generally speaking, teachers' conceptualisations of CPD had developed to go beyond formal training, teachers' reflections of their past experiences related to CPD, during the interviews, did not reflect this change. Formal training courses seem to stand out as the major component of CPD in teachers' past experiences; and they are still highly acknowledged and recognised by them. More details related to this issue shall follow in later sections of this chapter.

5.2.2 CPD after the introduction of the reform

Teachers were then asked to talk about "their CPD experiences after the beginning of the reform". They responded extensively to this question as I illustrate throughout this chapter. In general, teachers' responses revealed that there are a variety of CPD activities which are currently available in practice. Among the activities that teachers mentioned were: attending local, national and international conferences, peer observation, workshops, meetings, seminars, exchange of visits with other government and private schools, reading and using the internet. Further details about these CPD activities will follow in the next section.

A Ministry official justified teachers' lengthy descriptions of the CPD activities after the reform by saying that "I think the teachers have developed a wider perception of professional development and they are more aware now of the importance of it than before" (O2). Another Ministry official also added that "teachers are very keen to attend courses, conferences or workshops. They always tell us they want to attend" (O1). These responses imply that these officials feel that teachers have developed an awareness of the importance of CPD activities as well as keenness to take part in them. This, in effect, shows that teachers' growing awareness of the importance of CPD is recognised by the Ministry officials.

Furthermore, teachers' responses also showed that most of them considered some activities which require more active planning and participation on their part. Among these activities were presenting papers at conferences, organising workshops and doing research. Certainly, such activities do not involve attending only but they require additional preparation and effort from the teachers.

The responses of five teachers (out of the twelve interviewed) mentioned not only the CPD activities provided by the Ministry but also the ones they did on their own such as

reading and surfing the internet. One of these teachers, for example, talked about practising “*joint teaching*” and stated that “I did not do this because it’s required by the system but because I read about it in a book” (T6). Another teacher was explicit in classifying CPD activities into two types:

I can talk about two types of professional development. I would call the first one the formal one as it follows the ministry’s plan while the other one is the informal one which I take care of on my own. (T3)

Such an orientation from teachers did not seem to be highly acknowledged by Ministry officials as they focused, during the interviews, on talking about their basic role of managing the CPD activities offered by the Ministry. This reflects the top-down policy followed by the system. Further details about the Ministry’s response to such teachers’ initiatives related to CPD will follow later in this chapter (Section 5.3.5). Yet, there was only one official who responded positively to teachers’ own initiatives related to CPD by saying that:

This is what we have been conveying to teachers (practising CPD on their own). We ask them not to wait until they are fed by the Ministry. We ask them to move ahead and further develop themselves professionally. We keep telling them that the opportunities from the Ministry are limited. We encourage them to go to private institutions and conferences, ELT newsletters and websites. (O2)

We shall see later on throughout this chapter that in some cases such initiatives from teachers might not receive the sufficient support and the encouragement from the regions nor from the Ministry.

In brief, the above suggests that unlike the situation before the reform, the CPD activities teachers reported to be practising after the reform were varied. It also showed that some of the activities reported require active participation by teachers as well as enthusiasm and confidence. The next section sheds light in more detail on different types of CPD activities teachers said they did.

5.3 Reported practices related to different types of CPD activities

One sub-section in the questionnaire (Sub-section A in Part 3) listed 17 CPD activities. Teachers were asked to state the extent to which they had practised each one of them.

Table 5.1 provides a summary of teachers' responses using mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 5-1: Teachers' practices related to CPD activities

CPD activities	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Observing other teachers lessons	323	3.45	.709
Supervisors' visits and observation	320	3.37	.764
Senior teachers' visits and observation	316	3.26	.810
Reading professional material	322	3.11	.711
Informal meetings with other teachers	314	3.00	.888
Joint teaching and discussion of lessons	319	2.94	.870
Curriculum Support workshops and seminars	321	2.82	.768
Attending regional ELT conferences	316	2.76	.876
Language training courses	322	2.73	.767
Giving a presentation or workshop	320	2.68	.913
Methodology training courses	318	2.59	.780
Teacher trainers' visits and observation	323	2.52	.861
Professional visits to other schools	321	2.48	.852
Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues	319	2.37	.866
Travelling to English speaking countries	319	2.13	.817
Attending national ELT conferences	319	1.97	.955
Attending international ELT conferences	315	1.62	.917

* mean scores are out of 4 (with 4 being "always" and 1 being "rarely")

Table 5.1 shows that the three most commonly practised CPD activities are based on classroom observation. It is also important to note from the table that most of the CPD activities which received the highest mean scores are usually practised inside school and may fit smoothly into teachers' daily work. On the contrary, CPD activities which require travel and may involve some cost received the lowest mean scores. A Ministry official attributed such variations to the nature of the CPD activities:

I think the nature of CPD activities also affects teachers' perceptions of practice. For example, conferences are once a year. Language training courses are infrequent. Methodology courses at the moment specifically target new curriculum, Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. There is not a

vast array of courses to choose from. Some activities are likely to be more frequent because they are school based activities. (O7)

The above quote seems true but it may not apply to all activities in the table. For example, activities such as *teacher trainers' visits and observation* and *preparing lessons jointly with colleagues* are school based but they appeared to be among the least practised activities. Therefore, some activities are necessarily infrequent but others which could be done more frequently are nonetheless not common.

Also, a few teachers stated that some CPD activities such as courses and conferences were less practised because of the limited opportunities which were either “not enough” (T1), “not announced well” (T10), or “very limited as decision about them is made by others not by teachers” (T12).

It is interesting to compare the ranking of two related CPD activities: *joint teaching and discussion of lessons* and *preparing lessons jointly with colleagues*; the first was the sixth while the second came as the fourteenth in the table with mean scores of 2.94 and 2.37 for each respectively. It can be argued that the latter may probably imply the former too (i.e. if they teach jointly they probably plan jointly). Also, both of them share the element of collaboration among teachers. Yet, they had different ranking. This could be due to the fact that *joint teaching* (along with planning) is common in Oman; particularly in the training courses. However, teachers find it difficult or impractical to practise *joint planning of lessons* solely (i.e. no joint teaching involved) as an activity as they usually teach different levels in most cases.

During the interviews, teachers were asked to provide more details about their CPD practices. Their responses as well as the results shown in Table 5.1 highlight a number of issues which I discuss below.

5.3.1 The state of classroom observation

Table 5.1 shows that according to teachers, the three CPD activities they did most often involved observation. These observation activities are ones which are formally built-in to the system and which to a certain degree teachers are required to participate in.

This could be attributed to the fact that observation is the only CPD activity which is practised in class while teachers are performing their normal role of teaching.

Peer observation, which was regarded by teachers as the most preferred type of observation as shown in the previous chapter, came at the top of the list in Table 5.1. In the interviews, almost all teachers talked extensively about peer observation. Overall, teachers talked positively about peer observation and agreed that they “practised it all the time” (T1), they “had a set timetable for peer observation” (T6), they found it “effective and informal” (T9) and they “benefited from each other and shared ideas” (T8).

Teachers' descriptions of the way they practised peer observation suggested that peer observation may vary across regions. To be more precise here, when teachers were asked about how they approached peer observation they provided different answers. For example, one teacher said that: “the Ministry is providing a form to be used for peer observation. Some of the aspects in this form are not related to the teaching situation” (T3). Another teacher stated that “we get the forms from the region. The form focuses on four aspects: planning, performance, reflection and assessment” (T8). One teacher also claimed that “for peer observation we have a form where teachers can write some comments about the observed teacher, the class and the pupils. In my school, we design our own observation forms” (T6). Another teacher thought that they needed to be clearer about peer observation: “peer observation needs to be developed in our schools. We need to be clearer about it. It's a very sensitive issue. Goals of peer observation need to be made clear” (T3).

For this particular activity, the structure of the observation form determines the way the observation is to be handled and performed. A Ministry official's response was that: “teachers come to me and ask if I have any Ministry document about what senior teachers do in schools and about peer observation but there is nothing” (O7).

This comment further supports the view that while peer observation is widely promoted in ELT in Oman, there may be no explicit framework which defines what it is and how it should operate. In practice then, although teachers rated peer observation as the most common CPD activity they practice, it may involve a range of activities in different schools.

In fact, the lack of a guiding document does not apply only to peer observation but to all other CPD activities. All teachers and officials interviewed agreed that they were not aware of a comprehensive document which guides their CPD.

Senior teachers' observation was ranked by questionnaire respondents as the second most practised CPD activity (see Table 5.1). It was also praised by the majority of the teachers during the interviews. For example, one teacher said that: "we found it (senior teachers' visits) more beneficial than others because he is very close to his colleagues and he knows the requirements and what is lacking" (T8). Another teacher also shared a similar opinion: "The senior teacher is in my school and we feel close to each other. We understand each other easily as we all know school situation" (T11)

With regard to supervisors' observation, although it was reported to be among the most practised CPD activities as shown in Table 5.1, five out of the seven teachers who talked about it in the interviews said that they did not find it useful. For example, one teacher reported that: "I didn't benefit that much from regional supervisors. They focused on areas which are not related directly to the actual teaching such as registers and timing. Also, my supervisor does not have experience in basic education" (T10). Another teacher also confirmed this by saying that most supervisors are following traditional methods and they do not read about the new methods of teaching" (T9).

It was shown in Chapter 1 that as part of the reform supervision was meant to replace the old inspection system; and that supervisor's observation was intended to encourage teachers to use reflection to improve their teaching rather than evaluate them or judge their performance. Although the findings above showed that supervisors' visits are very common, the above quotes from teachers and the data from questionnaire respondents presented in the previous chapter showed that supervisors are not behaving in the way the reform intends and consequently their visits may not be valued by teachers.

The above discussion revealed teachers' preference of the observation that is linked to exchange of experiences with colleagues rather than evaluation by superiors. It also showed that the high frequency of a CPD activity does not necessarily reflect its perceived value and importance. Some CPD activities may become more frequent only because they are a required part of an administrative procedure, a state of affairs, which is common in top-down systems.

5.3.2 The absence of language improvement opportunities

The previous chapter showed that language was regarded by teachers as well as Ministry officials to be highly important and was considered as a prerequisite to teaching improvement. Also, Section 5.2.1 in this chapter showed that language courses

used to be the dominant component of CPD before the reform. It was shown in Chapter 1 that as part of the education reform the focus of the formal courses has shifted from improving language to improving teaching methods. This shift was reflected in teachers' responses regarding their current CPD practice which covered a wide range of activities, none of which aimed mainly at language improvement.

Although all teachers interviewed stated that they had taken a number of language courses before the reform, all of them shared the view that they still need to improve language. This was apparent in all interviews. Here are examples from three teachers:

I need to improve my English and keep practising it. I need to learn from grammar books. I need to take language courses. (T2)

I need more language courses to refresh my mind about writing. (T4)

I also want to do anything that helps me to improve my speaking skill and writing skill. I want to improve skills in writing assignments. (T6)

Similarly, all Ministry officials interviewed agreed that there is a need for language improvement for teachers which is missing in the current CPD. For example, one official stated that: "I would say that I wish the Ministry should have more focus on language improvements. Methods can be learned as you go along. Language is the main thing for any language teacher" (O1). Another Ministry official described the language level of the teachers by saying that: "I have many examples which unfortunately show that the level of teachers' language is below the learners. When we need to explain something like grammar to teachers, they find it difficult to understand" (O4). These quotes suggest that some Ministry officials feel that teachers need more opportunities to improve their language. In fact, another Ministry official thought that "the situation is getting complicated with the growing demands of training. The provision of language courses is problematic because of this. The number of new teachers is growing. We have fewer opportunities to provide language improvement courses" (O7).

The above raises three issues. The first of these is that a balance seems to be required between focusing on teaching methods and giving care to language improvement. The current CPD system seems to prioritise methodology over language. This was reflected in the questionnaire responses as almost all of the CPD activities teachers reported practising focus mainly on teaching improvement with the exception of language

training courses which focus solely on language. This issue is crucial considering the fact that English is the subject matter as well as the means of teaching. The second issue is related to the need for a balance between individual needs and the system requirements. It is understandable that curriculum reform requires appropriate training. However, teachers' basic individual needs and requirements should be considered as well. Finally, it should be noted that methodology improvement can be achieved through various CPD activities such as classroom observation visits to other schools while language improvement can mainly be enhanced through formal training. This fact reinforces the necessity to give enough care to language improvement.

5.3.3 The status of formal courses

Table 5.1 presented earlier showed that language courses and methodology courses were ranked by questionnaire respondents as the ninth and the eleventh most practised CPD activities respectively (out of the seventeen CPD activities included in the table). The ranking suggests that teachers do not regard formal courses among the mostly practised CPD activities. This is not surprising as it is understandable that formal courses may be available less often than informal or school-based forms of CPD. There is always a limit to the frequency of the formal courses particularly under a centralised policy where there is a high demand for training while they involve a lot cost, time, staff and administrative requirements.

It was shown earlier (Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2) that all interview participants stated that they had attended formal training courses on language and methodology. Yet, when they were asked about their future CPD requirements, the majority focused on formal courses particularly the language courses. Therefore, it seems that formal training opportunities are available but they may not be enough or as frequent as teachers would wish to have. This may partially explain the low ranking of formal training in Table 5.1.

Since formal training (methodology and language) constitutes an essential component of CPD in the system; and since teachers seemed to value it highly, it was further investigated through the questionnaire and the interviews. The following presents teachers' views and experiences on formal training.

5.3.3.1 Teachers' general perceptions of the formal courses

The questionnaire data showed that teachers regarded highly the benefits they had achieved from the methodology and language formal courses (more details will follow in Section 5.4). Also, in the interviews, teachers talked positively about the formal courses they attended. Various quotes conveying teachers' overall satisfaction and appreciation of the formal courses were presented in various sections in the previous chapter. Here are three more examples:

I have improved my language through the courses. (T5)

The RELIC has helped me improve my language especially the writing and the speaking. I became more confident to discuss and speak with the teachers and others. (T6)

The methodology courses helped me learn new things. They helped in thinking about change. They also provided me with new ideas and ways of teaching. We exchanged ideas with other teachers. (T11)

Thus, as these quotes suggest, teachers valued the formal courses because they helped them improve in the two main areas which they stated that they needed most: language and methodology. In other words, these formal courses seemed to satisfy teachers and achieve the set goals behind them as described in the Ministry's general professional development plan (see Chapter 1 for descriptions of the goals and specifications of the courses).

5.3.3.2 Course style (intensive versus day-release)¹

Section 1.3.4.1 in Chapter 1 discussed the ways training courses in Oman were delivered. It should be mentioned here that teachers usually take the formal courses during the teaching days and their lessons are covered by substitute teachers who are not necessarily teachers of English. Therefore, teachers are expected to be responsible for the continuation and completion of the delivery of the curriculum for their classes. A Ministry official describes this situation as follows:

¹ For intensive courses, teachers are usually released from schools for a number of weeks to attend training; while in the day release courses, they are released from schools on one particular day of the week either for one semester or for the whole year. In both cases, teachers are still responsible for carrying on the lessons they have missed while they were on training.

In this context, CPD is believed to be part and parcel of the teaching day. We have a very restricted system whereby CPD is organised during the academic year. We have to take teachers out of their actual teaching duties. Other teachers usually cover for the absent teacher.

(O7)

Unlike the situations in some other contexts (e.g. the UK), training days in Oman are normally days when children are at school. As a result, the course styles being followed are a result of the restrictions of the system which does not allocate certain days for formal courses. Of courses, this applies to all other types of CPD.

During the interviews, a minority of the teachers (three teachers) talked about course styles. According to these teachers, intensive courses help them make continuous focus on the course but there is no chance to link the course to their daily practice. However, the day release courses provide a chance for teachers to apply what is learned but there are gaps between the training days.

Therefore, it seems that the appropriacy of any course style depends on the course content and aims. For example, conducting methodology courses through day-release system provides opportunities for teachers to apply what is learned and provide immediate feedback to the course designer. Teachers agreed with this but in some cases there are some difficulties as reported by one teacher: "On day release we do two jobs during that week: training and teaching. We are usually overloaded with work in schools. The training is an extra burden on us" (T11). With regard to the language courses, the teachers who answered this question preferred to have them through intensive courses as they help in "avoiding gaps" and making teachers focus on the course.

Despite the advantages and the disadvantages of the course styles mentioned by these teachers, it seems that formal courses may be seen to be a distraction from teachers' primary role of teaching. This is because there is no time allocated specifically for them within the system, a fact which applies to all other types of CPD.

5.3.3.3 Involvement in decision-making related to the content of courses

In one sub-section of the questionnaire (Question 3 in Part 4), teachers were asked about whether they were involved in making decisions about the content of the training

courses offered to them and whether they were happy with the situation. They were requested to tick one of the four scenarios presented, as shown in Table 5.2 below, and to explain their choice. Table 5.2 presents a summary of respondents' choices.

Table 5-2: Involvement in decision-making about the content of the courses

Scenario	N	%
Not involved and not happy	169	52.2
Involved and happy	63	19.4
Not involved and happy	46	14.2
Involved and not happy	7	2.2

Table 5.2 shows that the majority of the respondents, 169 representing 52.2%, said that they are not happy about not being involved. The following represent typical justifications of all other answers which argued in similar ways:

We are in the field and we know better what is going on and we know the needs of our colleagues. (24)

I feel I am the best person who knows my abilities and needs of training. (98)

The teacher is the one who is on the field and s/he knows best what is needed. (193)

However, it is interesting to see that there are a considerable number of participants, 63 representing 19.4%, who said that they were involved and happy. In their comments, some respondents explained how they were involved:

At the end of each training course I am given the chance to fill in a form in order to give feedback about what I think was important or not important and omit or add issues. (6)

Supervisors always ask senior teachers about the needs of teachers and that makes me happy. (127)

Recently, there has been a very important change in the way of conducting professional development courses in our region. The English section established a way of keeping important information

about every teacher and what they need (teachers' database). Also, they try to conduct such courses after speaking to senior teachers and they involve teachers themselves. (310)

These comments suggest that for some teachers being involved in decisions about the content of training courses meant being asked to provide feedback after the course. Other teachers thought that they were involved indirectly through the reports about teachers' needs provided by their senior teachers or supervisors.

It was also interesting to find that there were 46 (14.2%) participants who said that they were not being involved but they are happy about this. I have referred to this in Section 1.3.4.2 in Chapter 1 by saying that there are some teachers who prefer not take responsibility in the decision making for various reasons. Some respondents justified their answers in this way:

In all my teaching life, the Ministry or the people responsible for courses used to send our names to join courses. I found the courses helpful and useful. (74)

Although I am not involved but it seems to me that the content of the training courses were beneficial and has an impact on my professional development. (176)

Those courses are developed by professionals. These courses are relevant to English teaching needs. So, I am happy. (225)

These quotes represent a few examples which reflect the overall satisfaction of teachers about the courses as I have referred to earlier (see Section 5.3.3.1). Yet, a very small number, seven participants, said that were involved and that they were not happy about this. Only one teacher provided a justification for this option by saying that: "sometimes we attend professional discussions about curriculum. We give our opinions. We never received any feedback on our comments. This gives us a negative feeling about ourselves" (54). In response to this a Ministry official stated that: "our courses always have a basic core outline. Each teacher trainer will deliver it slightly differently. That's done through an accumulative knowledge and feedback from the teachers during the course. Teachers may not necessarily be aware of this procedure" (O7). The response from the official states that teachers are not necessarily aware of this indirect

involvement through the feedback they provide on the courses. Also, it is possible that teachers might not even care about giving feedback if they are not sure about its relevance and importance.

This discussion suggests that while teachers' feedback on courses may be used to inform the design of subsequent CPD activities, teachers are often not aware of this process and thus may feel that their feedback has not been acted on.

In the interviews, teachers were also asked if they had a chance to provide feedback on the courses they had attended. All six teachers who answered this question agreed that they were given "a questionnaire for evaluation of courses" (T3) or "evaluation sheets" (T5) to "talk about what we have benefited from the course, which parts were useful, which parts were difficult and suggestions for improvement" (T5).

Ministry officials were asked about how the feedback is dealt with and the extent to which feedback helps in improving future courses. They said that they consider different ways of getting feedback such as feedback sheets or individual interviews. They also stated that they make use of the feedback to improve courses which makes the feedback "more of a benefit to the groups taking the next courses" (O2). The following is a description of how and why feedback on formal courses is sought from teachers:

For every course, we had some feedback sheets to ask teachers to report on some of the activities they have done and focus on what they've learned and to comment on what they've done in terms of things like usefulness, interest, ease or difficulty. (O5)

The above discussion highlights the importance of feedback on formal courses as it is regarded by the Ministry as a basic component of the course design. The feedback seemed to be recognised by most teachers as well as Ministry officials. It seems to stand out as a means through which teachers see themselves as indirectly involved in providing some input to the subsequent courses.

5.3.4 Other CPD activities

Both the questionnaire data and the interview data showed that attending conferences, particularly the regional ones, was one of the most common activities. Table 5.1 presented earlier showed that "attending regional conferences" was ranked by

questionnaire respondents as the eighth most practised CPD activity with a mean score of (2.76). However, national and international conferences came at the bottom of the table, not surprisingly perhaps given the limited opportunities teachers have to attend such events.

In addition, besides *observation* and *formal courses*, *participating in conferences* was the only other form of CPD which teachers involved in the interviews talked about positively and in some detail. Nine teachers (out of the twelve teachers involved) stated that they had participated in conferences; mostly regional ones.

Generally speaking, teachers valued conferences for various reasons. For example, two teachers were happy about the way conferences were organised as they gave them “more than one option (i.e: concurrent sessions) to choose from” (T1). They were “able to decide on their own about the presentation to attend” (T6). The majority of the teachers’ responses focused on the practicality of the conferences and their relevance to the classroom situations. Here are two examples:

I learned from the regional conferences better ways of teaching different skills. The more I attended such events, the more I gained from other experiences which help me and the pupils. (T5)

I found regional conferences useful as they focused on the experience of teachers in schools. Teachers came to these conferences with their experiences and the projects they did in their schools. They shared them with other teachers. So, we benefited from them. They contained some practical things from the classrooms. (T10)

A few teachers, though, thought that external conferences (e.g: SQU or TESOL Arabia¹) were not that useful. A teacher justified this by saying that: “most of them covered theory but not application. We need things which we can apply in school” (T4).

Like the training courses, attending conferences can be seen as another form of the formal and centrally-managed CPD activity. However, regional conferences may become less formal and teacher-centred to teachers when presentations are given by their peers, which is more often the case.

¹ Descriptions of these conferences was provided in Section 1.5.2.3 in Chapter 1.

The above quotes also show that teachers may value conferences because they examine practical issues and they offer a chance to exchange ideas and experiences with other teachers. Yet, conferences were not the only CPD activity which had such features. There were a few teachers who acknowledged the value of some other CPD activities as they helped them in sharing practical experiences with others. Examples of these activities are meetings, school visits and reading professional materials.

5.3.5 Additional CPD activities

An open-ended question in the questionnaire asked teachers to list any further CPD activities which they had engaged in but which did not appear in the questionnaire. A total of 34 respondents (10.5%) answered this question.

I found that some of the activities suggested by teachers had already been covered by the questionnaire. These are: *peer observation*, *meetings*, and *participating in regional ELT conferences*. There were also a few respondents who regarded some day-to-day school-based activities they organise for their pupils as CPD activities. As a result they included activities such as *training pupils for competitions* and *establishing English clubs for children* in their responses to this question.

Overall, the frequencies of most of the activities suggested by teachers were low (one or two teachers only) except for the use of internet and doing research which were mentioned by ten teachers and five teachers respectively. During the interviews, there were seven teachers who talked about the use of internet while four teachers talked about research as CPD activities. Teachers' responses contained a few examples showing how these two activities were practised.

With regard to the use of the internet, here are some quotes which reflect this:

I personally sometimes surf the net to find articles related to teaching English. Sometimes, I search for certain topics such as motivation. We usually discuss such articles when we conduct workshops in our school. I find the internet very useful. I sometimes find some internet pages where teachers from different countries write about their experiences in teaching English. (T1)

There are some discussion forums. We can discuss things with other teachers around the world. I have also made use of the BBC

discussions on how beneficial to use L1 in class. I found a lot of Arabs who share similar ideas with me. Some of these people have a lot of experience in this issue. There are also some websites which provide articles about related issues. (T9)

I am a member of some internet societies. It's useful. We meet different people from different countries. We share ideas about teaching and different things in life. Sometimes, there are discussions about teaching and we come up with ideas. Sometimes we read articles about other experiences in teaching reading, the problems others have faced and the solutions they have come up with. Even if it does not necessarily reflect our context but there are some points which we may benefit from. (T12)

The above quotes represent examples of how teachers say they use the internet for professional development on their own. They also illustrate different ways through which teachers can benefit from the internet for their PD such as participating in ELT discussion forums, reading articles and sharing experiences with others. Due to the fact that almost no schools have internet facilities, these teachers stated that they use the internet in their own time. They all agreed that they find it useful and enjoyable.

Regarding research, here are two example quotes:

I did one research on how I can develop my students' writing. When I started teaching grade nine I found that most of the pupils have difficulties in writing. They made a lot of mistakes related to grammar and spelling. I chose 20 of my pupils for the study. They were of different levels. I asked them to write a story. I found that 10 of them were capable of writing long texts. Then, I sat with the pupils. I explained to them the purpose of my research. I then asked them to write again and I corrected their work. This continued for a while. At the end I found that the students have improved. (T8)

I wasn't aware of how much of L1 I can use in class. If I stop using L1, my students will stop understanding. On the other hand, if I use it a lot, pupils will depend on it all the time. I did some reading. I found that people talk about the benefits of using L1 in L2 classes. I started

researching my classes using some ideas from previous research. I learned about research in my BA course. (T9)

Such quotes show that a few teachers in this study referred to research as a form of CPD they do. However, it is interesting to see that the description of research in the above quotes over-simplifies the process. These quotes, particularly the first one, suggest very direct links between research and learning improvement which can be hard to achieve.

The above discussion about the additional CPD activities shows that such activities come through individual initiatives by the teachers themselves. According to Ministry officials, though, central support for individual professional development initiatives is often not available:

The problem is that we do not have this culture of supporting individual initiatives. Everything comes from the ministry. There are some individual attempts. I cannot say that they are encouraged. One senior teacher was doing a PD project for her teachers in school for three years. As supervisor, I reported this to the region. The region did not even send her a letter of appreciation. She is still doing this only because she feels the benefit of it for teachers. So, there is this lack of encouragement of such initiatives from the ministry. (O3)

We report individual PD initiatives to the senior supervisor in the region. We are not sure whether these ideas reach the ministry or not. Sometimes, some projects may not find support from the region. (O5)

Such responses from these two officials suggest that there may be a lack of a follow up and support system to individual CPD initiative from teachers.

5.4 Benefits achieved from CPD

One sub-section in the questionnaire (Sub-section B in Part 3) consisted of 12 possible benefits of CPD. Teachers were asked to evaluate them according to their own experiences of CPD – i.e: to say to what extent they had experienced each benefit. Table 5.3 shows the means and standard deviations of those benefits.

Table 5-3: Benefits achieved from CPD

Benefits	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Become better at teaching English	323	4.39	.737
Improve their language skills	321	4.36	.862
Become more confident in the classroom	321	4.24	.868
Improve their communication skills	321	4.17	.825
Learn about how to assess students	323	4.01	.852
Develop professional study skills	322	3.93	.933
Develop their time management skills	320	3.90	.856
Develop their skills at planning lessons	320	3.90	.896
Learn about how their colleagues teach English	320	3.89	.800
Improve their computer skills	322	3.43	1.066
Get a qualification that leads to promotion	317	3.31	1.131
Increase their chance of finding a better job	317	3.03	1.132

* mean scores are out of 5 (with 5 being “strongly agree” and 1 being “strongly disagree”)

Table 5.3 shows that the benefits which teachers reported that they had achieved most through CPD are those which are directly connected with the improvement of either language skills or classroom practice. These are *become better at teaching English* (mean: 4.39), *improve their language skills* (mean: 4.36), *become more confident in the classroom* (mean: 4.24) and *improve their communication skills* (mean: 4.17). On the contrary, the benefits teachers reported that they had achieved least in comparison to other activities were *increasing my chance of finding a better job* (mean: 3.03), *getting a qualification that leads to promotion* (mean: 3.31) and *improving my computer skills* (mean: 3.43), each of which is not related directly to the teachers’ performance in class nor their competence in English.

It is interesting to see that while formal language courses were not among the mostly practised CPD activities (see Table 5.1), improving language and communication skills are among the benefits which teachers reported to have achieved most as shown in Table 5.3 above. This may suggest that the activities teachers do practise, even if not specifically designed for language improvement, are seen as beneficial in terms of language improvement.

In addition to this, teachers were asked in the questionnaire to list any further benefits of the CPD which they had experienced. A total of 31 respondents (9.6%) answered this question. The benefits reported by teachers were specific, practical and of very low frequency. Also, they were related to various themes such as improving teaching, dealing with change, dealing with young learners, gaining confidence and use of technology.

To get more in-depth details about the benefits gained from CPD, teachers were also asked to talk about the issue in the interviews. A recurrent theme in the interviews was that teachers valued specific and practical benefits of CPD; numerous examples were provided and below I cite some of these:

Me personally, I learned how to prepare tests, I learned how to deal with young learners as they need special care, I learned how to deal with weak learners, I also improved my language, I learned how to interact with other colleagues, I learned how to analyse lessons so I can make them suitable for different children, I learned how to prepare different activities. Most importantly, I became more confident in teaching. (T1)

I have improved my English through attending courses. In these language courses we had a chance to learn and practise the language. The new curriculum has also forced us to improve. The support that we got from senior teachers, supervisors, schools and the region helped us continue improving our teaching. (T11)

Other teachers linked the benefits to certain CPD activities. For example, one teacher talked about workshops as a way that “helped in coming up with very nice ideas and sharing them with other colleagues” (T4). Also another teacher reported on the benefits of professional visits to other schools by saying:

We visited these two schools (Indian school and the American Academy) and we were introduced to their course books. Also we saw the materials which they used in teaching. We were able to see the methods teachers followed in teaching. The most important thing we benefited from was the ways of teaching and how to deal with young learners. (T11)

These responses show that these teachers focus on reporting the immediate and tangible benefits which are related to gaining confidence, dealing with learners, dealing with daily classroom activities and interacting with other colleagues. Yet, there were a few responses which showed other external benefits. For example, two teachers reported that they practised some CPD activities not for the sake of benefiting from them but for other reasons. For example, one teacher stated that “I practised peer observation because it was required by the system” (T2). Another teacher stated that: “I participated in some CPD activities for the sake of getting out of school” (T7). A Ministry official’s reaction to such views was that: “this is something which we cannot control. There are some teachers who come to courses to learn but there are some very few who are keen to attend to get out of the school” (O5). This was, however, not a major theme here.

Teachers' responses related to this theme as well as the official's response suggest that only a minority may consider such benefits. Some other benefits which a considerable number of teachers referred to in the interviews were the long term or the ultimate benefits of CPD such as getting a better job, doing higher studies or even leaving the ministry. Here are some examples:

To move forward and get promotion. From a teacher to a senior teacher and then supervisor and so on. (T5)

I want to change to another job other than teaching. (T6)

To do MA and this may then help in getting a better job such as supervisor or course book designer. (T11)

If I have a chance, I'll not remain within the field of Education. I want to change my directions and leave the ministry. (T12)

In the interviews, after talking about the benefits gained, the majority of the teachers stated that they still need to continue improving. For example, there was one teacher who said that “I cannot say we did not benefit from CPD but I think it was not as we hoped” (T12). Another teacher stated that “I was able to improve on different aspects but I still need to improve more and more” (T1). Also, one teacher said that “the more activities I practise, the more I improve and the more confidence I gain” (T9). Such quotes provide some evidence to one of the themes related to teachers’ beliefs presented

in Section 4.3.1.3 in Chapter 4 which showed that, generally speaking, teachers regard CPD as a continuous process.

5.5 Involvement in decision-making

One sub-section in the questionnaire (Sub-section C in part 3) asked teachers about who was involved in the decision-making process related to CPD. Respondents were required to rank different individuals and say how much they were involved. Table 5.4 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for each individual.

Table 5-4: people made decisions related to CPD

People	<i>N</i>	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Myself	320	3.98	1.245
My supervisor	311	3.61	1.047
My senior teacher	299	3.26	1.158
Officials from the regional office	313	2.96	1.308
Central authorities from the ministry	308	2.72	1.332
My head teachers	309	2.71	1.140
My teacher trainer	304	2.67	1.187
Other colleagues	316	2.27	1.160

* mean scores are out of 5 (with 5 being “usually” and 1 being “never”)

Unlike the data in all of the other parts of the questionnaire, mean scores are relatively low in this sub-section of the questionnaire. The low mean scores reflect a distribution of responses (as suggested by the standard deviations) rather than consistently low ratings across the sample. The highest mean scores were for *myself* (mean: 3.98), *my supervisor* (mean: 3.61) and *my senior teacher* (mean: 3.26). High ratings here mean that teachers reported high levels of involvement in CPD decision-making by certain individuals. On the contrary, the rest of the categories received lower mean scores which entails less involvement.

Similar variations were also apparent at the interviews. Teachers were asked about who made decisions regarding their involvement into CPD. The diversity was obvious in teachers' responses. For example, one teacher thought it was the Ministry: “from my experience, the Ministry people make all decisions. Well, yes, they may consult my supervisor but at the end the decision is made there” (T1). Another teacher said that the region made the decision: “the decision is made by the officials in the region. They send letters to schools informing the teacher to attend a certain course” (T5). However, one

teacher was more specific and said it was the English department in the region: “the English department in the region makes the decisions. They have some criteria for each course” (T8).

Yet, other teachers provided different answers to this question. For example, one teacher said that “the process (of selection of candidates to attend courses) is not clear to us” (T3) while another teacher stated that “we do not make any decisions. We find our names being sent to school that we have to attend a certain course” (T11).

Such varying responses suggest that teachers have different perceptions about who makes decisions about their CPD. In fact, each teacher provided a unique response to this issue. This suggests that the system of selection of candidates is not conveyed to teachers. It also shows that there is lack of a unified and transparent system of selection.

It is very interesting to see that although Table 5.4 showed that “the teacher” was considered to be highly involved in the decision-making process based on the questionnaire data, the interview data suggested that this applied to certain types of CPD but not to others. This can be explained by pointing out that during the interview teachers were focusing on, as the above quotes suggest, the CPD activities which are formally organised by the ministry such as training courses and conferences. However, the ranking teachers made in Table 5.4 could be justified by either assuming that teachers may have considered other types of CPD activities which they can make their own decisions about; or that they might have answered in terms of what they hoped for rather than in terms of the actual situation.

All Ministry officials agreed that teachers are not involved in the decision-making process. They also agreed that the courses are planned by the ministry and the selection of participants is done through supervisors. One official describes the process:

The decision making is a top-down process. It comes from the Ministry or the supervisors. It's not the teachers themselves who say that we need something. Teachers are nominated by other people like supervisors and senior supervisors. (O4)

Another Ministry official pointed out a rationale for following this top-down system in making such decisions: “we do the nomination because we know who attended what. So, we try to give opportunities to as many teachers as possible” (O1). One Ministry

official explains how the ministry knows the "who" and the "what" referred to in the previous quotation:

We have different types of courses. We provide the PRIT methodology course to all teachers joining basic education. With the language courses, the selection is based on who needs the course most. We have limited opportunities. We have to control this. (O5)

These responses from the Ministry officials may explain the process of selection. They also confirm that it is done through a top-down process where the teacher is not involved.

Ministry officials were also asked whether teachers have choice to attend or not if they are offered such CPD opportunities. Although Ministry officials appeared to have similar views with regard to teachers' involvement in the decision making process, it was interesting to see that they provided varying answer to this question. Some said it was possible for teachers to refuse to attend a course they were nominated for:

The supervisors put names together for various courses. Names are sent to schools to see if teachers are interested. We didn't force people to come along. If a teacher refuses to attend, we take another one from the schools or region. (O5)

While others seemed to have a different answer:

Teachers have to attend. I remember that one of my teachers was pregnant and she did not want to attend a course but she was not allowed. She was able to attend 6 sessions and then stopped to give birth. Then she did the course again afterwards. (O4)

This shows that while the first official thought that teachers had a choice whether to attend or not, the second one stated that it was obligatory for teachers to participate if they are chosen. Yet, both of them agreed that there was no clear guideline on this through a policy which follows a well-established criterion. This finding stresses again the recurrent issue of the lack of a comprehensive policy which guides CPD.

An open-ended question in the questionnaire asked teachers if there were other groups which had been involved in making decisions related to their CPD. A total of 22 teachers (6.8%) answered this question. Almost all respondents focused mainly on

families and friends as being involved in making decisions about teachers' CPD. This could be attributed to social and cultural factors. It has been pointed out earlier in Section 4.3.5.2 in Chapter 4 that the involvement of such groups outside the education system might not be of a direct influence for practical reasons. However, some teachers, particularly females, may consult families before agreeing to participate in activities which involve travelling long distances.

5.6 Obstacles/challenges to CPD

At the interview stage, teachers and Ministry officials reported a number of obstacles to CPD. These obstacles were emphasised constantly by various participants and hence I discuss them below.

5.6.1 Lack of time

The main obstacle reported by the majority of the teachers interviewed was that there was not enough time specified for CPD. As one teacher explained: "The major problem is the time as we do not have enough time to do CPD activities" (T8). Another teacher also said that "sometimes we don't have enough time to do some activities" (T6). Teachers also reported that they may have one or two free lessons in some days which they use to prepare for other lessons.

It was explained earlier (Section 5.3.3.2) that CPD is conducted during the teaching days. Thus, teachers who attended CPD activities outside the school must make up for lessons they miss. In some cases they "found it difficult to arrange between teaching and study" (T6). This might result in teachers having less focus on CPD. In fact, it was shown earlier (Section 5.3.5) that when teachers were asked about additional CPD activities, some of them included some of the day-to-day activities which they organise for students such as competitions.

Such quotes show that there is no scheduled time allocated solely to CPD during the academic year. If teachers are to be engaged in any of the CPD opportunities offered to them, it will be at the expense of their teaching duties. The lack of allocated time for CPD in the education system may, therefore, affect negatively (a) teachers' coverage of the curriculum as required by the system (b) the frequency of teachers' engagement on CPD and (c) their perceptions of the status and importance of CPD.

5.6.2 Lack of coordination

Some teachers and teacher trainers described the difficulties they face when trying to manage with various issues and ideas related to CPD which come from different departments in the Ministry at the same time. They also reported that some regions may develop their own CPD initiatives in the form of professional development committees which go round schools and ask teachers to develop their own CPD folders. During the interviews, an experienced teacher described this in detail:

After 18 years of teaching, I feel that there is a lot of pressure on teachers because the Ministry is trying so many ideas at once. Every section at the Ministry is introducing something new to be applied by teachers. Teachers become overloaded with so many ideas at once. I feel there is no coordination between different departments. Me as a teacher, I have to do everything because this is my job. We cannot cope with this. We feel tired. Some instructions come from the Ministry. Others come from the region, all at the same time. I suggest that all these departments should sit together and agree on something. They need to send one thing as whole rather than send a lot of things from everywhere. (T 2)

A Ministry official commented on this issue by saying that: “in my opinion I agree. There isn't enough coordination across departments” (O7). I think that it may be understandable that different departments are having their own plans and activities. However, there needs to be a certain level of communication and coordination to avoid having gaps and discrepancies in the system.

5.6.3 Workload

Another obstacle mentioned by some teachers was that they were usually overloaded with lots of duties, particularly the administrative and the reform-related ones. For example, one teacher stated that “we teachers are usually too busy with duties in our schools but we have to sacrifice” (T3). A more detailed answer was also provided by another teacher: “we do not have time even to think and plan for CPD. We are overloaded with duties especially the admin ones. Different departments at the Ministry want us do many things for them” (T4).

It seems that teachers are expected to perform a variety of tasks in schools. As a result, they find it difficult to practise CPD whenever they have some time with no teaching duties.

5.6.4 Lack of materials and facilities

The fourth obstacle reported was that when teachers planned CPD at school level, they faced some problems related to availability of facilities and materials. In the words of two teachers:

Sometimes we decide as teachers among us that we do an activity. When we organise workshops we find out that the room we booked is not available for us. Also there is lack of materials like OHPs and OHTs inside schools (T5)

We are expected to do some activities but we do not have the equipment and place to organise them. (T8)

Proper venues and suitable materials are essential for some CPD activities such as organising presentations, workshops, meetings for teachers in schools. Lack of such resources hinders teachers from practising them.

5.6.5 Administrative problems

Other obstacles reported were related to some administrative difficulties. The following quotes describe such obstacles:

If we want take permission from the school to meet or do workshop, they may not accept. Also, when we invite other schools they may not accept our invitation. (T5)

If we want to do peer observation, we find it difficult to arrange our timetables. We will have to make a lot of arrangements. Also, if we want to visit other schools, we need to get permission to go and we have to plan this with the teachers there. If we want to attend a conference in Muscat, we cannot make the decision ourselves. We have to get approval from the region or the Ministry. (T6)

The quotes show that decision making regarding school-based CPD needs to be approved by either school administration or central authorities. As the examples in the quotes showed, such administrative procedures may serve as obstacles to teachers' CPD.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed teachers' reported practices with regard to CPD. This involved analysis of the CPD activities practised, benefits achieved from CPD and the people involved in the decision-making process. Within various sections, issues arising were highlighted and supported with evidence from the quantitative and qualitative data. The chapter ended by pointing out the major obstacles to CPD as reported by teachers.

The results show that teachers' CPD practices have developed from focusing on formal training courses before the reform to considering various forms of CPD activities after the reform. However, there are three CPD activities which seemed to dominate teachers' current CPD. These are: observation, formal courses and regional conferences.

Generally speaking, teachers reported that they found the activities which provided formal teaching and language input as well as those which offered opportunities to exchange experiences with others to be highly useful. Furthermore, the lower uptake of most of the CPD activities was attributed to various reasons such as their not being practical or not given enough weight by the system.

The results also show that the current CPD system lacks a major component which teachers regarded as a crucial aspect. This is the language improvement courses. Also, apart from the formal courses, the CPD system seems to lack a guiding document that contains the guidelines and the goals of the CPD activities.

Although most teachers agreed that they were given opportunities to provide feedback on the content of the training courses, decisions regarding their participation on the formal CPD were made through the regions and the Ministry. The selection of teachers for the formal CPD seems to lack the elements of transparency and clarity amongst teachers.

The results also show some obstacles to the practice of CPD activities, most of which were administrative such as lack of time, work load, lack of facilities and administrative procedures. These results, together with those reported in Chapter 4 will be discussed in the next chapter.

6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the beliefs and practices of teachers of English with regard to CPD in the context of a large-scale top-down education reform. Within this broad perspective, the study aimed to identify the CPD activities which teachers of English in Oman say they engage in and explore their stated beliefs about CPD. It also aimed to investigate policy makers' plans and views with regard to CPD and to compare them with the perspectives held by teachers. The purpose of these investigations was to develop a better understanding of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to CPD, the extent to which teachers' practices are influenced by their beliefs, and the factors influencing the beliefs and practices of teachers with regard to CPD.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 presented the findings of the study in relation to following research questions:

- What are teachers' beliefs about CPD, its role and different types of professional development activities?
- What are the professional development activities that teachers of English say they are engaged in?
- What are the benefits that teachers think they have gained from CPD?
- What are teachers' perceptions with regard to the people who should be involved in making decisions about their CPD?
- What do teachers think about who actually participates in making decisions about their CPD?
- What are Ministry officials' views regarding CPD (its definition, purposes, types of activities and how it is provided)?
- To what extent are the perspectives on CPD held by teachers congruent with the perspectives of Ministry officials?

Generally speaking, the findings showed an overall enthusiasm and commitment among teachers of English towards the CPD reform. However, the results also showed a certain level of mismatch between the teachers' stated beliefs and their reported practices on

the one hand and the various aspects of CPD system on the other. While the questionnaire data showed the patterns of this mismatch, the interview data with teachers and Ministry officials provided an additional insight into the various factors attributed to bring about the incongruence between teachers beliefs and the CPD system.

This chapter discusses the major issues suggested by the key findings of the above research questions (as shown in Chapter 4 and chapter 5) and with the aim of relating them to the literature.

In Chapter 2, I presented the research gaps and limitations in the previous Omani studies investigating the educational reform in general and the CPD for teachers of English in particular. Having recognised the value and significance of the studies on CPD in Oman, I argued that the scope of the research on CPD has been limited to either a small number of participants or only one type of existing CPD activity. In addition, the research on CPD in Oman has been done on an ad hoc basis. Studies seem to have been carried out in isolation with no apparent awareness or reference to the previous research carried out in the Sultanate.

This study is somewhat different in three ways. First, it widens the scope of earlier investigations by involving a relatively large number of participants. Second, the study is not limited to one aspect of the CPD system in Oman but it looks at various aspects and activities of the CPD system. Third, in this discussion, I will try to establish links between the key findings of this study and the results of previous research on CPD in Oman, an aspect which I see to be missing in the current research culture within the Omani education system.

Chapter 2 also identified some limitations of the general research literature on CPD. Overall, CPD evaluations in many cases tend to be of low level. They have taken the form of participants' satisfaction questionnaires (Guskey, 2000), or depended solely on feedback sheets given to teachers (Edmonds & Lee, 2002) and did not consider the purposes, outcomes and forms of CPD (Mujis, et al., 2004). Having recognised these limitations, I therefore considered investigating teachers' beliefs and practices on a number of aspects of the CPD system including CPD definition, activities, purposes, contents and process as well as the people involved in making decisions relate to CPD.

Another limitation of some of the previous studies on CPD that is they limit themselves to studying only those who receive/participate in the CPD (Muijs & Lindsay, 2008). In this study, the involvement of the Ministry officials who are responsible for the delivery and supervision of CPD helped in providing a broader picture of the way the CPD policy is conceived, led and managed. In the context of the study, these Ministry officials at various levels can be regarded as the links between the Ministry CPD policy makers and those affected by the policies, the teachers. The participation of the Ministry officials, therefore, helped provide commentary on, and interpretations and clarification of various issues and concerns raised by teachers. Still, though, teachers remain the primary participants and the overall research design is based on the data gathered from them.

There are three major issues emerging from the study which highlight the complex range of factors which interactively shape the relationship between policy and practice in educational reform (Fraser, et al., 2007; J. W. Little, 1993; J. C. Richards, et al., 2001). The first issue relates to the ambiguity of the CPD system as a whole due to the lack of shared guiding documents and communication gaps in the system. The second is related to the tensions that characterise the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and the CPD system. The final issue relates to the contextual factors which influence teachers' beliefs and practice in relation to CPD. I shall now move to discuss these three issues in detail.

6.2 Ambiguity of the CPD

One key issue to emerge from this study is that a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity surrounds the precise goals and implementation of the Ministry's policy for CPD. This lack of clarity was not confined to teachers but it also appeared to be common amongst Ministry officials who are responsible for implementing and supervising the CPD system. Fullan (2008) regards clarity as one of the basic characteristics of education reform. Ambiguity, he explains, is problematic and may lead to confusion particularly at the implementation stage.

In short, lack of clarity - diffuse goals and unspecified means of implementation - represents a major problem at the implementation stage; teachers and others find that the change is simply not very clear as to what it means in practice. (Fullan, 2008:89)

The findings showed a number of ways in which this uncertainty was evidenced in the context of the study. First and foremost, an overall examination of teachers' beliefs and practices together with Ministry officials' views suggests a range of sometimes incompatible views. Such incongruity may be attributed, at least partially, to the lack of an explicit and shared policy document both about the reform generally and with reference to CPD. Both teachers and officials' responses suggested that the lack of a policy document had resulted in a lack of shared understanding of the CPD strand of the reform (see for example Section 5.3.1). It is worth noting here that such lack of widely shared understanding is not unusual. The education system (and also some other sectors of the government) in Oman follows a system whereby access to policy documents is fairly restricted. The restriction is something that has been true of the Omani culture since the pre-modern/reform times and is therefore culturally understood and accepted by people.

The education reform literature points out in detail the development of various education reforms approaches and policies ranging from centralised to decentralised forms and models (Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Wedell, 2009). It also illustrates the importance of a shared understanding of the overall policy among those responsible for guiding and determining various aspects, processes and stages of the reform.

Within the bounds of the Ministry of Education, the policy of restricting access to actual policy documents has been a characteristic of the education reform since the beginning. In one of the few studies of the education reform in Oman, Al-Hinai (2003:294) found that the personnel responsible for the planning of professional development at the beginning of the reform complained that the general policy "had not been clearly communicated or outlined to them".

In actual fact, the lack of public dissemination of a single general policy document made it difficult to gather information about the CPD reform during the first stages of this study. All the information presented in Chapter 1 about the CPD of teachers of English had to be derived from a variety of sources including brief Ministry booklets, memos, notes, previous studies and various PowerPoint presentations, each of them focusing on different aspects of the reform on CPD. One overall linking document, though, was not available.

I would argue here that, in any reform context, access to various types of policy documents which state the aims and hoped for outcomes of the reform are necessary for those who are responsible for implementing the policy at various levels. They are vital for the success of achieving long-term strategies and aims (Harland, Kinder, & Keys, 1993; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Mascall, 2002). The lack of access to such documents is likely to result in a lack of clarity which will in turn contribute to lack of consistency between reform planning and its implementation. In her investigation of CPD in the Scottish context, Purdon (2004) concluded that discrepancy and lack of clarity with regard to the expressed purpose for CPD have led to disagreement and dispute among stakeholders in relation to the long term planned agendas.

Since pre-reform times the culturally favoured means for conveying policies and instructions, in Oman, has been through oral communication rather than written documents. Such a mode of communication may lead to policies and processes being interpreted differently by different people, and may not therefore be sufficient for the needs of a “modern” educational reform process.

More specifically, the findings also showed the absence of a code of practice or a practical guiding document for the various CPD activities. While the overall policy document containing the general and long-term goals may be useful for CPD coordinators or implementers at the Ministry or in the regions, if teachers are to understand the targeted purposes and possible means of CPD a document explaining the target process of CPD and more specific and immediate aims and objectives of each individual CPD activity is important.

Within the field of ELT, Chambers (1997) stresses the importance of outlining the INSET policy (i.e. CPD) in a document which needs to be made available to all relevant parties. Examples of such guiding documents are found in some education reform initiatives such as the *“Proposals for developing a framework for continuing professional development for the teaching profession in Scotland”* produced by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID, 1998) in Scotland; and *“Learning and Teaching: a strategy for professional development”* produced by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 2001) in England. In Oman, the lack of an equivalent formal document which structures CPD and the uncertainty this

may cause among teachers and Ministry officials were reflected in the findings of this study.

The different kinds of the formal training courses available in the Omani system seemed to be the only CPD activities which have been fully documented. As described in detail in Chapter 1, there is a plenty of accessible information about these language and methodology training courses which provides comprehensive details such as the objectives, the targeted groups, the content and the length of each of the courses. Apart from these very visible formal courses, information about the aims of all other types of CPD activities as well as when and how to practise them is scarce. As a result, teachers reported noticeable variations in their perceptions and practices with regard to most CPD activities.

For example, contradictions in the views about CPD expressed by respondents in this study may be, at least partly, understood in relation to the lack of an explicitly stated and shared guiding document. Such variations were apparent for example in teachers' definitions of CPD (see 4.3.1) and their desired focus for teaching improvement ranging from the focus on theory, practical aspects, skills and knowledge, gaining confidence and improving language (see 4.3.2). The variations were also apparent in Ministry officials' responses to policy-related issues such as whether the formal courses are mandatory for teachers (see for example 5.5) where one would expect a unified system in a rigidly centralised system. Since there is no formal guidance for both teachers and Ministry officials, it is inevitable that perceptions and actions are more likely to be inconsistent as they may depend on people's own interpretations, understanding and preferences.

Besides the reported variations on teachers' views on CPD, variations in the practice of certain CPD activities may also be attributed to the lack of a guiding document. For instance, peer observation was, according to the teachers, the CPD activity they engaged in most. Yet, it was shown to involve a wide range of practices in different schools. Some teachers, for example, said that they focus during peer observation on four aspects: planning, performance, reflection and assessment while others claim that they are supposed to write comments about the observed teacher, the lessons and the pupils (Section 5.3.1 in Chapter 5 presents such variations in detail). Despite the fact that it is the most common activity in the daily practice of teachers, both teachers and Ministry

officials agreed that they did not have clear guidelines for peer observation as a CPD activity. A previous small-scale study in Oman by Al-Habsi (2004) reported a similar finding. She concluded that most of the 65 teachers involved in her study valued peer observation but they asked for clearer explanations of and training for peer observation.

The consequences of the lack of clarity in the CPD system were also manifested in a number of other ways. For example, the findings suggested a lack of coordination between different departments dealing with CPD and the existence of communication gaps within the system (see 5.6.2). Coordination amongst the people involved in any reform process is considered vital in order to achieve the desired results (Fidler, 1997; Fullan, 2008; Markee, 1997).

Chapter 1 showed that there are two departments responsible for the CPD of teachers of English - namely the supervision department and the curriculum department. The data showed that various CPD roles could also be carried out by some other departments in the Ministry such as the Assessment Department and the Human Resources Development Department. At local level, some regions also seem to develop their own system of CPD in the form of Professional Development Committees which go round schools (see section 5.6.2). Unfortunately, the absence of a documented framework, as mentioned earlier, poses difficulties in finding sufficient information about the roles each individual department plays in promoting CPD.

While the involvement of different departments in supporting teachers' CPD can be regarded as potentially positive, as each one may complement the other, it may cause problems if different departments plan CPD without an awareness of one another. The lack of co-ordination among the various departments implementing CPD noted here may reflect a broader pattern in the Ministry; Al-Nabhani (2007: 48), in her recent study which aimed to identify the issues which require addressing in order to improve the education system, concluded that there was "weak communication, coordination and interaction between different directorates and within each directorate".

Awareness raising and familiarisation are considered to be essential for the success of any reform (Fidler, 1997). The study shows a lack of such awareness-raising programmes regarding both the importance of CPD and the various possible CPD activities. Consequently, some CPD activities may be less valued by teachers if they were not promoted sufficiently in the system (see Section 4.3.3.4).

There is additionally a lack of transparent criteria of selection of participants for various CPD activities outside the school context. In this respect, teachers had a wide range of opinions on how the decision-making related to their involvement in CPD is being made.

The above discussion highlights, through a variety of examples, some of the effects of the vagueness of the CPD system. Furthermore, the discussion stresses the need for a transparent system through which the CPD policy and guidelines are outlined in written documents that are made accessible to the people concerned.

In brief, Chapter 1 showed the proposed and ambitious CPD reform as intended by policy makers. However, the discussion above has shown that the actual details/expectations of the CPD reform seem not to have been communicated as initially conceived to the concerned people on the ground due to a number of inter-related factors, one important factor being the social, historical and cultural traditions of the context in relation to how information is communicated within and between the organisations that make up the entire system.

Previous reviews of CPD evaluations and previous studies on CPD presented in Chapter 2 (e.g. Goodall, et al., 2005; Hustler, et al., 2003; Kelly & McDiarmid, 2002; Muijs & Lindsay, 2008) have not given enough attention to looking critically at the extent to which the information about the CPD system is conveyed to those whom it affects. The involvement of Ministry officials responsible for the implementation of CPD in this study was valuable in providing a broad picture of the way CPD policy is or is not communicated in the Ministry.

Having discussed the issue related to the ambiguity of the CPD system, I now move to talk about the second main issue which emerges in this study which relates to the discrepancy between teachers' stated beliefs and the CPD system.

6.3 Tensions between teachers' stated beliefs and the CPD system

In top-down education reforms, the lack of success of various aspects of the reform is often attributed to the fact teachers fail to implement the reform in the way intended by the reform planners (van Driel, et al., 2001). In educational reforms too, the literature highlights the central role that teachers' beliefs play in influencing whether reforms happen as intended and in promoting long-lasting change (Brown, 1990; C. Burns,

2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 2008; J. C. Richards, et al., 2001). There has been much research in recent years in education generally and ELT in particular (S. Borg, 2006a; El-Okda, 2005; Fang, 1996; Richardson, 1994a; Sercu & John, 2007) which illustrates the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practices. Reflecting on the relation between curriculum change and maths teachers' beliefs, Handal & Herrington (2003) point out the potential impact of the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and the principles of the reform:

When teachers' beliefs are not congruent with the beliefs underpinning an educational reform, then the aftermath of such a mismatch can affect the degree of success of the innovation as well as the teachers' morale and willingness to implement further innovation.

(Handal & Herrington, 2003:60)

In Toledo in the US, Fetters et al (2002) investigated the influence of a two-week professional development programme on teachers' beliefs about their science content knowledge. They found that in order for change to take place, it is necessary to have professional development programmes which encourage teachers to reflect on their beliefs and make connections between their beliefs and the proposed change process. They concluded that:

It is difficult for staff leading the professional development program to fully understand how the participants are making sense of the experience without teacher reflections that give insight into how they are thinking about the change process.

(Fetters, et al., 2002:127)

Considering the importance of the role teachers' beliefs may play in influencing their practice in an era of reform, a whole part (consisting of three sections) in the questionnaire administered to teachers was devoted to exploring teachers' beliefs with regard to CPD. In addition, the follow-up interview stage also aimed at in-depth investigation of teachers' beliefs as well as Ministry officials' views on the possible reasons and consequences of those stated beliefs. Clearly the findings of this study highlight the ways through which teachers' beliefs may not necessarily correspond with

the proposed policy with reference to CPD in the education system in Oman; and the influence of teachers' beliefs on teachers' judgments and reactions to the CPD system. I will now discuss the findings which illustrate the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system. I will also discuss the possible reasons behind the stated beliefs and their potential impact on teachers' practice.

Generally speaking, the findings showed positive attitudes from the majority of teachers towards the reform in general and CPD in particular. Such attitudes were reflected in the data mainly in teachers' contributions to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. In these open-ended questions, teachers' descriptions of CPD reflect an enthusiasm for and willingness to participate in CPD. They also reflect an awareness of the varied CPD activities and commitment from teachers to improving through self-development.

The group of teachers involved in this study represent the most experienced teachers of English in the Omani education system. Some of the available literature shows the more experienced people are more likely to show resistance towards change than those with less experience. For example, Sikes (1992) reports that the most experienced group often tends to find difficulties accommodating change. Huberman (1988) also, in his study in a Swiss context where he classified the research participants according to their teaching experience, found that the more experienced teachers become less active and less engaged into school reform.

Despite the fact that they are the most experienced teachers in the system, the findings of this study suggest teachers' overall positive attitudes towards CPD. Such positive attitudes may be due to two reasons. One possible reason could be that Oman is a newly developed country in which the current education system is in need of teachers to occupy managerial and supervisory jobs. Therefore, teachers' positive attitude towards participating in CPD activities may be because they see it as means of job promotion

Another possible reason for teacher's enthusiasm towards CPD may also be that participants had all done the in-service BA course for a period of three years as described in Chapter 1. This unique experience which involved getting a qualification after gaining some practical teaching experience may have positively influenced teachers' attitudes towards CPD. A relevant small-scale study by Atkins et al (2005: 6), which investigated the impact of the BA course on the professional development among BA graduates in one region in Oman (Dakhiliya), concluded that "graduates are

overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the BA on their professional development”.

Despite the overall enthusiasm shown above, the patterns shown through the questionnaire data reveal some inconsistency between teachers’ stated beliefs and some of the principles of the CPD system introduced through the education reform. I shall now move to talk about the major points of mismatch.

6.3.1 Attitudes towards formal CPD

Despite teachers’ overall recognition of the value of varied CPD activities, the patterns of the quantitative data showed that the vast majority of teachers still see CPD in terms of formal training. The findings showed that “language training courses”, “methodology training courses” and “curriculum support workshops and seminars”, all of which relate to the formal-type training, were the most valued CPD activities among teachers. This attitude towards formal courses deviates from the principles suggested by the education reform which encourage teachers to go beyond the formal training courses which dominated professional development before the reform, and to consider the wide range of activities presented in Chapter 1 for professional development.

The fact that formal courses are more favoured than other types of CPD activities is not uncommon. This finding is broadly in line with the findings in the literature. For example, in their large-scale study which involved all staff in 250 primary, 100 secondary and 50 special schools throughout England, Hustler et al. (2003:13) found that despite teachers’ recognition of various possible CPD activities, they “were most likely to think of courses, conferences and workshops in connection with CPD activities”. A similar finding is also found in Harris et al. (2006:96) who found that “CPD still tends to be equated, by teachers in particular, with in-service courses” despite the fact that alternative models of CPD such as mentoring and professional discussions were promoted in schools. Within the Omani context, a similar attitude towards formal types of CPD was also reported by Al-Hinai (2003) who investigated the area of professional development for teachers from different subjects under the Omani education reform system.

While reaffirming the findings from the above studies, this study also explored teachers’ attitudes towards formal training through the follow-up interviews with both teachers and Ministry officials. Formal training is valued because it, as teachers’ interviews

suggest, dealt with both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical aspects of the curriculum. It also provided teachers with opportunities to practise their English language and exchange experiences with each other.

Besides these reasons from teachers, I also think that another possible explanation for teachers' positive attitudes towards formal training may also be that their previous experiences with training courses seem to have had an impact on their general appreciation of formal CPD activities. As shown in Chapter 1, formal courses used to be the main source of professional development for these teachers in the pre-reform period. The interviews showed that teachers, in general, were satisfied with the training courses they had taken. Such satisfaction may be regarded as an important factor which affects teachers' views on these courses. Similar overall satisfaction with the formal training courses was also reported by Al-Ghatrifi (2006) who investigated the attitudes towards a methodology course of 35 teachers from one region (Muscat) in Oman.

Moreover, positive attitudes to such courses may also be due to the explicit information available about these courses and to the fact that they are organised for teachers by the Ministry whereas many other CPD activities are neither clear (as illustrated earlier in this chapter) nor externally organised.

During the interviews, Ministry officials, however, attributed the appreciation of the formal courses to the lack of awareness among teachers of the importance and availability of the other CPD activities suggested by the reform. This lack of awareness may justify, therefore, the patterns reflected by the questionnaires which showed that among the least valued CPD activities are those promoted by the Ministry as part of the reform. Examples of these CPD activities are *preparing lessons jointly with colleagues* and *informal meetings with other teachers*. Valuing the formal courses on the one hand and the disregard of other alternatives on the other may be seen as being reciprocal, each influencing the other.

Reflecting the ambiguity of the overall CPD system presented earlier in Section 6.2, this section provides a more focused illustration which reflects the mismatch between the policy and teachers' beliefs with regard to CPD activities. It also shows how factors related to (a) various system-related issues and (b) personal backgrounds and experiences interact together to influence teachers' perceptions, and consequently

practices, with regard to the CPD activities. The next section presents another facet of the discrepancy between the teachers' beliefs and the CPD system.

6.3.2 Attitudes towards the status of language improvement in CPD

Another point of mismatch between teachers' views and the CPD system reflected in the findings of this study is related to the status of language improvement. I would like to stress highly, at this point, that "the need for improvement of English language competence" was emphasised greatly in this study by teachers and Ministry officials. Below, I highlight teachers' concerns regarding the status of language in the CPD system and link the language issue to the relationship between institutional needs and individual needs.

It was shown in Chapter 1 that while professional development prior to the reform focused mainly on the improvement of English language, it shifted with the introduction of the reform to being methodology-focused. Teachers' concerns about the disregard of the language component in the current CPD system were reflected in a number of places in the findings. The quantitative data showed that language training was ranked by teachers at the top of the most valued CPD activities. Language improvement was connected, in teachers' interviews, to teaching improvement and gaining confidence in the classroom. It was also regarded as both the subject matter and the medium of instruction. Ministry officials also agreed on the importance of language training for teachers of English and expressed their concern about the lack of the language input in the CPD system after the education reform was introduced (see Section 5.3.2 in Chapter 5 for related results).

I would argue here that the language component should not be neglected in language teacher training programmes. Improvement of the target language remains a concern for most teachers (Murdoch, 1994). Lange (1990) regarded language competence as the most essential characteristic of language teachers. However, the gap between the policy makers' vision and the practitioners' views is not uncommon in this respect. In China, for example, Berry (1990) reported some difficulties in the British Council-sponsored programme for Chinese teachers due to different conception of teacher training. While the British Council viewed teacher training as methodology development, Chinese teachers perceived it as language improvement.

Similarly, Murdoch (1994) investigated teacher trainees' perceptions on language provision in their training programme in Sri Lanka. The study concluded that participants expressed their desire to give more focus on language development in order to develop their ability and confidence in teaching the language. Murdoch (1994) claimed that language has been neglected and therefore he called for giving it the proper position. The results of the current study highlight similar patterns as teachers also associated developing language competence with gaining confidence particularly inside the classroom and consequently feeling more able to adopt the methodology.

In the current study, a further justification for the importance of language improvement provided in the interviews was that, within the education reform, English language was introduced at an earlier stage (Grade 1 instead of Grade 4) in the system and consequently the language level that the curriculum expects learners to achieve is more demanding and challenging. Teachers' own levels of competence need to be higher. Another study in a similar context to Oman, Al-Hazmi (2003) recognises the gap between the content of the curriculum and teachers' education programmes in the Saudi education system:

It is ironic that the Ministry of Education, which has done so much to improve and update English language curricula since 1991, has lagged behind in doing the same for EFL teacher education programs. The gap between the content of teacher education programs and the needs of the classroom widens.

(Al-Hazmi, 2003:342)

Within language development, teachers' main concern is improving their communicative skills. This is particularly true in contexts like Oman where teachers have limited opportunities to use the language outside the classroom. It was described in detail in Chapter 1 that the education reform in Oman gave special consideration to improving the teaching of English and as a result the new curriculum became ambitious to achieve the pre-set goals and at the same time became more demanding for teachers. Cullen (1994) argues that if the principles of communicative language teaching are to be implemented around the world, this necessitates increased focus on teachers' language training in ELT. Interestingly, Cullen (1994) also claims that in most contexts, the training of language teachers focuses on methodology as it is taken for granted that

language teachers are expected to be proficient. The situation in Oman is no exception in this regard.

Chapter 1 also showed that the intended overall goal behind the teaching of English language as a subject in the Omani context has shifted with the introduction of the reform from *recognition and appreciation of a foreign language* to *providing pupils with the skills, knowledge and attitudes that young Omanis will need to succeed in this rapidly changing society*. Therefore, the curriculum reform involved not only change of teaching methods but also raising the standard of the language. Teachers, as a result, need to raise their competence in English language.

Based on my awareness of the system, the formal training for teachers of English in the Omani system follows a general scheme which applies to other subject areas. In this scheme, formal training focuses mainly on how to teach the new curriculum introduced in the reform. Thus, this subject-based training of teachers of English focuses on the methodology but not language, while in actual fact they are both inter-connected with each other.

Considering methodology training as the most dominant CPD activity in the current reform, the data showed that one of the possible aims of the formal methodology courses could also be language improvement (See 4.3.3.2 for further aims). Merging the language component in methodology courses is encouraged in the literature. Lewis (2002), for example, stressed that it is important that content is combined with how to teach in the professional development. Within the ELT field, in a study which investigated ELT teachers' needs, Berry (1990) found that there is a real need for language improvement in any ELT training system and suggested that formal training courses can serve both areas: methodology and language. It is worth noting here as well that language development may also be achieved through different activities other than the formal language courses such as practising reading in English, watching English movies and interacting with native speakers of the language. Some of these activities may be system-led while some others can be practised by teachers themselves, individually or collaboratively.

This discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system with regard to the status of language improvement may be seen here more broadly from the perspective of the balance between the individual needs and institutional needs in reform innovations. This

study revealed that most teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that their individual needs are not being considered by the CPD system.

One common factor which may cause such gap is that in most top-down reforms policies are usually formed by outside experts and people at the upper level in the hierarchy of the ministry. Yet, as Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) argue, in order to achieve success in making changes on the policy guidelines of the professional development, change has to be constructed according to the needs of the teachers. This gap was also shown by Wedell (2009) who provided evidence (e.g: case studies) which shows that policy makers in top-down organisations tend to underestimate the contextual realities in their planning and therefore plan without necessarily considering teachers' needs.

Certainly, there has to be a balance between the targeting the goals of the institutions on the one hand and considering the requirements of the teachers on the other. The consequences of the lack of such balance are widely recognised in the CPD reform literature as teachers may become frustrated and less motivated. Therefore, finding the right balance is important.

The gap between training provision and teachers' individual needs seems to be also applicable to the general professional development system of the Ministry. In her recent study which investigated the quality of the Education reform in Oman, Al-Nabhani (2007) concluded that the training provided by the Ministry under the education reform is unsystematic and sometimes does not meet the trainees' needs and responsibilities.

The literature also shows that this gap does not seem to be relevant solely to developing countries such as Oman. In fact, similar situations are also found in other contexts including developed countries which have longer history in education in general and education reform in particular such as the UK. For example, in an article which reviewed the impact of the changing policy towards CPD in England and Wales, Bolam (2000) claimed that the dominance of institutional needs (school and national levels) over individual needs in determining the emphasis of the CPD system is also found in Britain. He asserted that despite the continuing changes made to the CPD policy since 1980s, there is still much to be done to meet teachers' individual needs. He also concluded that besides the emphasis given to the CPD for individual teachers on the

policy documents, there needs to be a balance between the individual needs and institutional needs on the ground as well.

Another large-scale study of relevance here is that by Hustler et al. (2003), which investigated teachers' perceptions of CPD over a period of five years following the launch of a new CPD strategy. Hustler et al's (2003) study involved a total of 2514 teachers coming from 429 primary, secondary and special schools. One of the main findings of this study was that most teachers involved in the study reported that school and national needs dominated CPD at the expense of individual needs. These teachers asked for a balance between system needs and individual needs; and requested more opportunities for self-control over CPD.

The findings of this study are also congruent with those of Burns (2005), who focused on primary schools in rural areas in England. Burns (2005:359) found that there are "tensions between the teachers' individual professional needs and those of the school or system" with a great dominance of management control on the direction of CPD.

While the above studies reflect a common gap between the institutional aims and individual needs, Kelly & McDiarmid (2002) showed a different situation. They investigated the area of professional development under the Kentucky Education Reform Act. The majority of the teachers in their study stated that their professional development needs were identified in two main ways: direct solicitation from teachers or through the results of the Kentucky state-wide testing programme. The majority of teachers also stated that they were satisfied that their needs were taken into account in the professional development process.

The results of Kelly & McDiarmid's (2002) study provide an example of how teachers can be involved in the professional development process in large scale reforms. The variations between these results and the findings of the current study may be understood/justified in relation to socio-cultural backgrounds of the contexts of both studies and the impact such backgrounds may have in forming the relationships among people at various levels in the education system.

This section has shown that, generally speaking, there is a gap in the CPD reform in Oman between the institutional aims and the individual needs of teachers. It also illustrates how teachers' beliefs are influenced by various factors and how those beliefs

affect teachers' perceptions of the reform principles. The next section illustrates another area of mismatch between teachers' attitudes and the CPD system.

6.3.3 Attitudes towards teachers' involvement in decision-making on CPD

It was shown in Chapter 2 that previous studies on CPD gave limited attention to investigating teachers' involvement in making decisions related to content of the formal CPD as well as their participation in various CPD activities. I also argued in that chapter that professional development may become more meaningful and valuable to teachers if their views are considered in the processes of planning and implementation as it was the case in Kentucky Education Reform described in the previous section. As Sykes (1996:465) states, "teachers are frequently the targets of the reform, but they exert relatively little control over professional development".

In this study, therefore, the questionnaire used to investigate teachers beliefs and practices contained sections which aimed at exploring teachers' direct and indirect levels of participation in formal CPD generally and in the decisions related to the contents of the formal training courses in particular.

The results showed that the vast majority of the teachers who participated in the study expressed their desire for involvement in making decisions about their CPD and their dissatisfaction with the fact that their voices are not heard with regard to nominations of teachers for formal CPD opportunities. This passive role teachers play in CPD, as the follow-up interviews also showed, may result in frustration and disappointment amongst teachers.

These results are in line with a previous small-scale study in Oman by Alyfaee (2004), who focused particularly on teachers' perceptions about their involvement in making decisions related to the design of the formal courses they attended as one form of CPD. The majority of the 50 teachers who participated in this study reported a low level of involvement in making decisions in the formal courses, particularly the aims and content. The current study not only investigated teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to deciding on the contents of the formal courses; but it also sought their views and experiences on whether they are involved in making decisions about their participation on various CPD activities.

Outside the Omani context, Cheong's (2005) study in Hong Kong shared similar results. Cheong (2005) found that teachers expressed a strong view that they should participate in the planning of the overall CPD system instead of the school heads or government people. Yet, the actual situation, according to Cheong (2005), shows that there is not even a single teacher among the 15 members of the committee responsible for planning teachers' CPD.

In addition to teachers' desire for their personal involvement in making decisions related to CPD, the quantitative data in this study suggested that teachers' overall belief is that decisions may also validly be made by the people who work closely with them (i.e senior teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers). The justifications provided, in the interviews, were that this group of people are more likely to be aware of the needs, abilities and circumstances of teachers. The findings also, however, showed a wide range of variations with regard to the involvement of other Ministry and regional officers in the decision making process with regard the selection of participants for various CPD activities.

These above stated beliefs related to teachers' involvement in the CPD process seem, indeed, to contradict the overall top-down approach being followed in the management and delivery of the education system in general and the CPD system in particular in the Omani system.

In order to see a broader picture of the issue related to teachers' involvement in decision-making with regard to nominations for formal CPD, the views of the Ministry officials were also sought in this study. The interviews with Ministry officials revealed that the Ministry is aware of the fact that teachers are not involved in making decisions about their participation in the formal CPD. Two main justifications were provided. First, nomination of participants for various CPD activities is done in a top-down manner following the way things work in the whole system. Second, not all teachers are considered to be able to make decisions about CPD.

The first justification may seem reasonable, for the sake of argument, considering the cultural background of the society and the top-down approach common in the system as described earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, the second justification may raise a question related to the level of the expectations the Ministry have of teachers especially after considering their qualifications and the relatively long experience they have had in

the system. In fact, it may entail inconsistent thinking by encouraging autonomous teachers on the one hand but on the other not allowing them to make choices about CPD. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that, prior to the reform and to the BA project which aimed at upgrading of their qualifications, teachers themselves were satisfied with the top-down approach being followed in the CPD system. Such satisfaction was attributed to their limited skills and knowledge which may have not been sufficient to enable them to participate in making decisions about their CPD. After the reform, however, the situation has changed in terms of teachers' knowledge, abilities, skills and experience and as such they may, most probably, be able to be involved in decision making.

The consequences of the contradictory views between policy makers and teachers with regard to teachers' involvement in decision-making about CPD were also evident in teachers' reported practices. Both the quantitative and qualitative data on teachers' reflections on their actual involvement showed variations, contradictions, uncertainty and lack of awareness as to how the system works. Teachers, generally speaking, seem not to be aware of the criteria followed about how nominations for CPD are being made. Such lack of awareness may be attributed to firstly the lack of involvement of teachers' in the CPD process and secondly the ambiguity which characterises the CPD system as described earlier in Section 6.2 in this chapter.

The above shows that the neglect of teachers' roles and responsibilities of their own CPD may affect their motivation and confidence towards participating in CPD. It also contradicts some major principles of the proposed wider education reform which encourage independence as well as learner-centred teaching approaches. Principles related to student-centred teaching reinforced by the reform may become more meaningful if they are also implemented in the CPD system of teachers. Also, giving teachers active roles in the processes of planning the content of the formal CPD activities and nominations for various CPD opportunities may also make teachers more supportive to the CPD system and make the CPD system hopefully more useful, beneficial and effective.

The need for consistency between policy and practice has been widely commented on. Reflecting on the Swedish Educational experiences, Marklund (1980:115) asserts that "a change of Education in schools has to be co-ordinated with a parallel change in the central administration". Policies at the local level should go hand in hand with those at

the central level. Based on her extensive review of literature on teacher professional development, Villegas-Reimers (2003) stresses the importance of the alignment between CPD content and the way it is being delivered. Also, Sparks & Hirsh (1997:11) held a similar perspective: “Staff development must model constructivist practices for teachers if those teachers are expected to be convinced of the validity of those practices and to understand them sufficiently well to make them an integrated part of their classroom repertoires”.

In addition to the above described mismatch between the CPD system and teachers’ views, the findings of the study also show some contextual factors which appear to influence teachers’ attitudes towards the reform principles as well as their practices. I now move to discuss these contextual factors.

6.4 Contextual factors influencing beliefs and practices related to CPD

In the previous two sections (6.2 and 6.3), the discussion focused on two major issues arising from this study: policy dissemination and teachers’ beliefs. Besides the potential influence of these two issues on the CPD practices presented so far, the findings of the study also showed some contextual factors which seem to have an impact on teachers’ CPD. In this section, I will highlight two main factors which emerge from the data and discuss their relation to teachers’ beliefs and their potential impact on teachers’ practice.

6.4.1 Interaction with colleagues

One major factor which seems to have an impact on teachers’ beliefs and practices on CPD, and which occurs constantly throughout the data, is related to the interaction among teachers in the form of collaboration and exchange of experiences. Reflecting the growing importance of learning from practice, collaboration through interaction has become increasingly stressed in the education reform literature:

The degree of change was strongly related to the extent to which teachers interact with one another and to others providing technical help and peer support and pressure. Within the school, collegiality among teachers, as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, and so forth, was a strong indicator of implementation success (Fullan, 2008:138).

In Oman, despite the fact there is no overt statement available outlining the degree/type of collaboration that is expected as part of the education reform, some of the CPD activities promoted by MOE imply an element of collaboration. Examples of these activities are *senior teachers' observation, peer observation, preparing lessons jointly with colleagues* and *informal meetings with other teachers*. The findings of this study suggest that teachers, broadly speaking, recognise the importance of interacting and learning from each other. The findings also showed that exchange of ideas and experiences can be enhanced through a variety of CPD activities including *formal courses, conferences, classroom observations, meetings, reading professional materials and visits to other schools*.

Collaboration and interaction among teachers play important roles in teachers' willingness to change. Reporting on their Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) project, Adey et al (2004) concluded that teachers found it really difficult to change practice and become different from other teachers in school. They also stated that "schools which were most successful in taking on the innovation were ones in which there was much communication between teachers in the department about the new methods" (Adey, et al., 2004:166). Similarly, Wedell (2009) argues that in many cases the complexity of an educational reform, and the changes in behaviour and beliefs that it implies may entail a degree of what Fullan (2008) calls "reculturing" and that this may make teachers "feel uncomfortable and concerned about their professional identity"(Wedell, 2009:34). In such circumstances, he stresses that teachers who are encouraged to support each other through collaboration and team-teaching are more likely to become able to implement change.

Oman represents an example of a closely-knit society where interaction with others is part of the way of life. Within the context of education, therefore, such social connections are reinforced among teachers of English from all around Oman as they get to know and interact with each other during various stages of their pre-service training and then afterwards during their careers as teachers. Consequently, such social realities which can be expected to exist within the Omani professional community of teachers should be capitalised on/ made use of when introducing reform in education.

A possible way of making use of these social realities to support various aspects of the reform can be to identify the teachers who may be regarded as models/examples in

terms of understanding the reform principles. These teachers may then serve in some leading positions such being in a senior teacher's post. In this way, those model teachers can then be provided with support from the system so they can monitor teachers' interaction and direct the beliefs/practices which follow the reform principles. Goodson (2005) called this group of teachers the "elite" or the "vanguard" and emphasized their crucial role for successful implementation of reforms:

The elite group are the most creative and motivated group and often help define, articulate and extend the mission of teaching generally, and of a school in particular. Their commitment to change and reform is a prerequisite for successful implementation: their disenchantment and disengagement leave change and reform as a hollow rhetoric.

(Goodson, 2005:247)

Another important aspect related to collaboration is that CPD becomes more effective if it involves interaction among teachers. Such interaction provides opportunities to share and reflect upon real examples based on their daily practice. The findings showed that one of the justifications behind valuing *peer observation* as a CPD activity was the fact that some teaching techniques, particularly the new ones, cannot be learnt except through modelling and looking at concrete examples. Crowley (2002) claims that reflecting on such concrete examples allow for assumptions to be challenged by exploring each others' beliefs and knowledge in the form of group discussions and arguments.

However, I would also argue here that any interaction among teachers needs to be monitored and supervised, otherwise, it may lead to transfer or exchange of unfavourable beliefs and practices. Fullan (2008) warns that teachers' collaboration can be strongly bad or strongly good. In fact, collaboration is also regarded as being problematic and open to multiple interpretations (Andy Hargreaves, 1993). There may be, therefore, some teachers who may not be supportive of the reform principles. Having such teachers in the interactive environment of teachers may influence teachers' attitudes towards any suggested change especially if they are the majority. So, interaction becomes unfavourable in such situation.

Another important aspect which requires attention in order to move towards more effective collaboration is encouraging respect and honesty among teachers. Harris & Anthony (2001) stressed the importance of a relationship in which teachers build trust and also stated that teachers need to have common goals and vision. Besides the mutual admiration, teachers need to be made aware of the boundaries and limits of their interaction and the ways they can learn through from each other. It is a fact that teachers' interaction is unavoidable. It can happen anywhere and at any time. Therefore, it must not be neglected and it needs to be monitored closely and carefully.

An important observation in the findings which is worth noting at this stage is that despite teachers' appreciation of collaboration, the results also showed that teachers linked collaboration with certain CPD activities while neglecting those promoted by the Ministry which aim mainly at supporting teachers' interaction. Activities such as *preparing lessons jointly with their colleagues* and *informal meetings with other teachers* were among the least valued and the least practised CPD activities. A possible reason behind this could be the fact that such activities have been suggested through the top-down planning of the reform. In this case teachers may not be aware of the rationale behind such activities especially with the absence of the guiding document as discussed earlier in this chapter. Another possible reason is that some CPD activities may be regarded as part of the formalities of the system. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995), for example, found that professional development opportunities which encourage professional dialogues such as department meetings exist in reality but may not be used effectively as they are considered as an administrative burden as no time is allocated for them.

Taken as a whole, the above shows that interaction and collaboration among teachers can be useful to support the reform principles in general and the CPD reform in particular. The importance of interaction and collaboration becomes more relevant in certain cultures and communities like Oman. Yet, teachers' interaction needs to be monitored and supervised. I now move to talk about another contextual influence on teachers which relates to the support within the school context.

6.4.2 Support within the school context

It was shown in Section 1.4.3 in Chapter 1 that the education reform encourages school-based CPD in which teachers are expected to become reflective practitioners

with the help and guidance of supervisors and senior teachers. In order to achieve this, the school is expected to support school-based CPD. The results of this study highlight two main factors which interactively have an impact on teachers' CPD in this regard, namely, the roles of supervisors and senior teachers, and School system and infrastructure. I describe these two factors below.

6.4.2.1 The roles of supervisors and senior teachers

Two of the main changes in the CPD system within the education reform were the introduction of the post of senior teachers who were regarded as resident supervisors; and the change of the job title of inspectors to supervisors. Both the senior teacher and supervisor were expected to support teachers' CPD mainly through classroom observations. They were expected to help teachers reflect on their practices in order to improve their own classroom performances.

Generally speaking, the patterns of the responses in the questionnaires showed variations in teachers' attitudes towards different types of classroom observations. The interviews with teachers showed that the classroom observations done by supervisors and senior teachers may become less favoured if they are used for appraisal purposes (usually very judgementally) and if they involved writing formal reports on teachers' performances. In fact, using classroom observation for appraisal purposes is inconsistent with the principles of the reform which encourage reflection as described above. Teachers, however, preferred peer observation done by their colleagues for they are less formal, do not involve the formalities of the report writing and are helpful for improving teaching.

Previous small-scale investigations in the same context shared similar findings. The studies of Al-Ghafri (2002), Al-Kharbushi (2005), Al-Lamki (2002) and Al-Zedjali (2004) all noted that despite the structural changes, and the theoretical and rhetorical encouragement of reflection and teacher autonomy, the changes were not reflected in practice. In this study, the follow-up interviews with teachers and Ministry officials again revealed that the classroom observation is still linked with evaluation. Some teachers still seem to view the supervisors' job as being identical to their old role of inspection aiming at finding mistakes particularly those supervisors coming from the old system with no experience of the new curriculum or have insufficient training on it.

I think that in order for supervisors and senior teachers to encourage reflection and teacher autonomy, their roles should not be confined to classroom observation. They should be viewed as CPD coordinators or facilitators for teachers through CPD activities proposed by the system such as departmental meetings and workshops. In addition, given that the posts of senior teachers and supervisors are fairly new to the system, they need to be provided with sufficient support and training in order to be able to give assistance to teachers on CPD.

I would also argue that the notions of reflection and teacher autonomy are fairly new to the Omani system and they are actually not consistent with the Omani tradition. As I have stated earlier, the Omani society has historically accepted a top-down way of doing things. Therefore, change in this respect cannot be expected to happen quickly. Besides, in order for such change to happen it has to be preceded by strong commitment to similar change at the top. After that such change can consequently be modelled and then eventually be embraced by those lower down.

6.4.2.2 School system and infrastructure

Another factor influencing teachers' beliefs and experiences on CPD which emerge from the data is the influence of the school context. The influence of the realities of the context was demonstrated in the data through obstacles to CPD reported by teachers at the interview stage. The obstacles mentioned were lack of time, workload, lack of materials and facilities and some administrative problems. Wedell (2009) referred to these as the material conditions of the context. He regarded a consideration of how they, among other variables, would affect implementation as being necessary for a successful change.

In the British context, three studies share similar results. In Hustler et al's (2003) study which aimed at investigating teachers perceptions of CPD, financial cost and distance from training opportunities were identified as obstacles to CPD. Gray (2005) conducted a large-scale research which aimed to review the CPD opportunities and identify the gaps within the education system in England. She summarised the main obstacles to access to CPD as follows: travel difficulties, timetabling of CPD activities, willingness to sacrifice time and workload. Similarly, in Goodall et al's (2005) evaluation of the impact of CPD in schools, time, cost, transport and teaching duties were also identified

as barriers to CPD at school level. Similar situations are also found in other contexts such as Hong Kong for example (Cheong, 2005).

The above-mentioned obstacles represent examples of the realities of the Omani school context which do not seem, as is the case in almost all reforms (Wedell, 2009), to have been considered during the planning of the reform. The interviews showed that teachers believe that these obstacles apply to the CPD activities which can be practised in or outside the school premises. Also, the findings showed some examples of the impact of such difficulties on teachers' attitudes to/take up of CPD. For example, the questionnaire data showed that some of the activities were less favoured by teachers such as *preparing lessons jointly with other teachers* and *informal meetings with other teachers*. The justifications shown by the interview data were related to issues of practicalities of such activities and lack of suitable time. The findings also showed that some CPD activities such as training courses and conferences which are favoured by teachers are not among the most commonly practised ones. Teachers attributed such low level of practice to some practical reasons such as the fact that the opportunities are either not enough or not announced properly. Such examples reflect some dissatisfaction among teachers as well as frustration which seems to influence the status of CPD, as teachers do not find themselves being able to give consideration to their CPD.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the major findings of the analysis were discussed in light of the main research question, the research literature and the practicalities of the context. On the positive side, it is important to acknowledge here that a certain level of the intended change in the area of CPD in Oman was reflected on the teachers stated beliefs and on their reported practices. On the whole, teachers showed an awareness, recognition and commitment towards the intended CPD reform.

However, the complexity of the education reforms in general was highlighted in the discussion through the interaction of the inter-related factors which collectively influence teachers' beliefs and shape their CPD practices. Generally speaking, these factors relate to (1) policy dissemination and clarity, (2) relation between policy and teachers' existing beliefs and (3) various contextual considerations.

More specifically, the study showed a certain level of discrepancy between the hoped-for CPD system on the one hand and teachers' beliefs and practices on the other. Such discrepancy can be attributed to a range of mainly policy-related factors which I summarise as follows:

- Vagueness of the current CPD system and failure to communicate the system properly to the concerned people at various levels in the system: national, regional, school and individual.
- The absence of practical guidelines or a code of practice which explains the aims and the processes of various CPD activities for CPD coordinators and teachers.
- Lack of provision of awareness-raising programmes of the proposed CPD activities for various groups in the system.
- Lack of coordination amongst various departments participating in the delivery of the CPD for teachers.
- The existence of communication gaps throughout the various departments responsible for CPD activities.

These factors contributed to a situation characterised by the following:

- The mismatch between teachers' beliefs and certain elements of the suggested CPD system.
- The mismatch between teachers' needs and the aims of the suggested system.
- The lack of attention to teachers' involvement in making decisions with regard to the content of the formal CPD as well as their participation in various CPD activities.
- The lack of consideration of the influence of teachers' interaction with each other on their beliefs and practices of CPD.
- The lack of training, monitoring and support by the Ministry to CPD coordinators (particularly supervisors and senior teachers) to foster their positive impact on teachers' CPD through various formal CPD activities.
- The lack the appropriate environment and sufficient resources to support CPD in schools.

- The absence of an administrative system which encourages reflection and teachers' autonomy in relation to CPD.

The discussion in this chapter illustrated the interaction of all of the above factors, each influencing some of the others in complex ways. The study, therefore, widens our general understanding of the complex nature of imposed top-down large-scale education reforms. It highlights the impact of the interaction between various facets of the reform such as the overall policy system, teachers' beliefs and contextual factors on the actual implementation and practice of the proposed reform.

The study revealed a level of discrepancy between the CPD system and teachers' beliefs. It also provides evidence for the importance of considering teachers' existing beliefs when planning education reforms. It highlights the impact of the deeply held beliefs of teachers on their interpretation of the reform principles and eventually on their practices. The study also revealed the potential consequences of the lack of congruence between the CPD system and teachers' beliefs which may result in frustration and lack of confidence amongst teachers.

The significance of the results discussed in this chapter in relation to its contribution to research will be highlighted in the next chapter which will also contain some concluding remarks about the study.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter contains a review of the major findings in relation to the aims and the research questions of the study. It also discusses the substantive, methodological and educational contributions of this work along with some implications for the practice of CPD. The chapter then presents the limitations of the research and identifies some suggested areas for further work. It concludes with a presentation of the researcher's personal reflections on the research process.

7.2 Summary of the main findings

Taking into account the crucial role CPD plays in an era of a reform, the principal aim of this study was to investigate the area of CPD for teachers of English in the context of a large-scale top-down education reform. More specifically, the study aimed at identifying the CPD activities which teachers of English in Oman say they engage in and exploring their stated beliefs about CPD. It also aimed at investigating policy makers' plans and views with regard to CPD in order to examine their congruence with those perspectives held by teachers. Eventually, the ultimate purpose of these investigations was to develop a better understanding of the implications the findings may have for our general understandings of the relationship between educational innovation and teachers' practices in CPD.

Two types of data were collected in two different phases. In the first phase, a questionnaire was designed and implemented with the aim of exploring teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD. In this phase, 324 teachers responded to the questionnaire representing 70% of the target teachers. In the second phase, a qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews mainly for the purpose of expanding on the issues arising from the questionnaire data. In the second phase, 12 teachers and seven Ministry officials were involved.

Reflecting the aims of the study (See Section 3.2 in Chapter 3) and its research questions (see Section 3.3 in Chapter 3), the findings (presented in detail in Chapter 4

and Chapter 5) provided a broad picture and a detailed account of the status of the beliefs and practices related to CPD among teachers of English in Oman.

Overall, the major findings of the study (discussed in Chapter 6) highlighted the complexity of the inter-related factors which have an impact on the relationship between policy and practice in education reform in general and CPD in particular. The study also showed evidence of the divergence between policy makers and practitioners in a one-way top-down education reform context. The findings also showed how a wide range of factors contribute in shaping teachers' beliefs about the principles of the CPD reform; and the impact of teachers' deeply held beliefs of teachers on their interpretation of the reform principles and eventually on their practices.

The study suggested a degree of vagueness and ambiguity of the CPD system which resulted in a level of uncertainty about the goals and implementation of the CPD system among the practitioners on the ground (teachers, teacher trainers and supervisors). The study highlighted some of the consequences of the situation. Due to a number of inter-related factors which reflect the social, historical and cultural traditions of the system, the study showed that the hoped-for reform (as presented in Chapter 1) seemed not to have been communicated to the concerned people as initially conceived by the policy makers.

Taking into account the crucial role teachers' beliefs may play in shaping their practices, the findings of the study highlighted the influence of teachers' beliefs on their judgements and reaction to the changes in approach to CPD introduced through the education reform. Despite the overall positive attitudes towards the reform in general, the study illustrated a certain level of mismatch between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system.

One major mismatch between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system related to their attitudes towards the proposed CPD activities. The study showed that teachers still held the common belief of valuing formal training. Such an attitude deviates from the reform principles which encourage teachers to go beyond formal training which dominated the system prior to the reform and to consider other CPD activities.

Another mismatch shown by the study was related to the tension between institutional needs and teachers' needs. While the CPD system during the pre-reform period focused mainly on language improvement of teachers, the reform witnessed a shift towards focusing mainly on methodology improvement. Such a shift seemed to contradict teachers' views who expressed their concerns about the disregard of language improvement in the CPD system.

Another area of mismatch between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system related to teachers' involvement in making decisions about the content of CPD and about their participation in various CPD activities. The findings showed that teachers expressed their desire to play an active role in the CPD process. Yet, the CPD system is planned and delivered following a top-down approach in which teachers' involvement in making decision making about the CPD process seemed to be fairly limited. The findings illustrated how such mismatch may negatively affect teachers' confidence and motivation towards CPD.

The study also highlighted the possible factors which appear to have an impact on teachers' beliefs which consequently result in the above described areas of discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system. Some of these factors as discussed in detail in Section 6.3 are teachers' background experiences, availability of incentives in the system (e.g. job promotion), teachers' expectations and needs, clarity of the CPD system, relevance to teaching improvement, realities of the socio-cultural context and compatibility with the overall education reform principles as well as the principles and level of the curriculum which has become too challenging for teachers in terms of the language level.

The study also showed the potential consequences of the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and the CPD system which may result in teachers' frustration, disappointment, lack of confidence and neglect of the principles of the suggested CPD reform.

In addition to the above factors, the study revealed some contextual factors which seem to have relevance to teachers' beliefs and practices related to CPD. One of these factors is the interaction with colleagues through collaboration and exchange of experiences. Despite the fact that such a factor has internationally been recognised to be important in the context of education reform, it may be regarded as of particular relevance to the

context of the current study due to the cultural and social backgrounds of the Omani community.

Another contextual factor which seems to influence teachers' beliefs and practices is related to the support teachers get within the school context. Such support may be seen in the form of the people surrounding the teacher; these are mainly the senior teachers and the supervisors who are expected to provide continuous assistance to teachers. They are also regarded as a link between the Ministry and the teachers and as such they may transfer the reform policies onto the ground. Considering the crucial role such people may have in transforming/reflecting the education reform principles to teachers, it is important that they themselves understand and follow those principles. Otherwise, such people may serve as a hindrance to the reform process.

A further contextual factor which may affect teachers' beliefs and practices is the school system and infrastructure. The school context in this sense refers to, for example, the school facilities, teachers' workload, availability of time and the administrative procedures required in order to engage in CPD activities. The study showed that such factors are vital for either supporting or hindering CPD. Therefore, they need to be taken into consideration at the time of the reform.

Having summarised the main findings of the study which reflect the complexity of the reform process, I now move to consider the contributions and implications of the study.

7.3 Contribution and implications (revisiting the general research question)

On the whole, the study was guided principally by the main research question presented in Section 3.3 in Chapter 3. Therefore, the study considers the extent to which teachers' beliefs are congruent with the CPD system in the context of a large-scale education reform; and the implications such level of congruence may have in the general understanding between education reform and teachers' practices in relation to CPD. Based on this, the following represent the contributions and implications of the study.

7.3.1 Substantive contribution

Reflecting on the findings summarised in the previous section, this study highlights the interaction between a range of inter-related factors which collectively shape teachers' beliefs about continuing professional development and those which influence their

practices. The factors shown by the study relate to teachers' background experiences, availability of incentives in the education system, teachers' expectations and needs, clarity of the CPD system, relevance of CPD to teaching improvement, realities of the soci-cultural context, compatibility of the CPD activities with the overall reform principles, support from CPD coordinators and finally the school infrastructure and resources. The study highlighted the relevance of these factors to teachers' interpretations of the reform principles and their reactions to the practices related to their CPD.

In addition, the study highlights the importance of clarity in the form of policy dissemination of CPD reform through outlining the intended principles and guidelines to the concerned people at various levels.

As a result of the above collective factors, the study revealed a level of discrepancy between the CPD system on the one hand and teachers' beliefs and practices on the other. The study also revealed some potential consequences of such lack of congruence such as frustration and lack of confidence amongst teachers.

7.3.2 Methodological contribution

In terms of the methodological contribution, the study has confirmed the value of an established strategy of using questionnaires and interviews in the investigation of practitioners' beliefs and practices related to education reform in general and continuous professional development in particular.

Two innovative aspects were shown in the design of this study. The first one is that the study was not limited to the involvement of teachers of English but it also involved Ministry officials both at regional and at national levels which helped in providing a wider insight to the investigation. The second innovative aspect is related to the scope of the investigation which targeted teachers' stated beliefs as well as their reported practices about a wide range of elements of the CPD system. Therefore, the study was not limited to one element of the CPD system such as the CPD activities but it covered other relevant elements as well.

7.3.3 Educational contribution and implications

The findings of the study are also of value in relation to the context of the study. I claimed in Chapter 2 that little research has been done in the area of professional development of teachers in Oman. I also presented a summary and a critique of the research on continuous professional development in Oman. The present study represents a continuation of the line of research which started along with the education reform. While previous studies focused on investigating one aspect or activity in the CPD system, this study looked at the continuous professional development from a broader perspective. It aimed at investigating the beliefs and practices of teachers of English with regard to various aspects such as CPD activities and CPD aims. It is, therefore, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind in the Omani context. The educational significance of the study lies in the provision of an overview of the current status of continuous professional development as seen through the eyes of the practitioners, mainly the teachers. Hence, I highlight the following potential implications for the Ministry of Education in Oman:

- It is important that education reform principles in general and CPD reform principles in particular are communicated clearly to the concerned people at various levels in the system.
- It is vital that documentation relevant to the reform is made accessible, as appropriate, to the people in charge, the stakeholders and the practitioners.
- More specifically, documents which contain the practical guidelines or codes of practice and explain the aims and the processes of various CPD activities need to be produced and made available to the CPD coordinators and teachers.
- It is necessary that programmes of awareness-raising on the proposed CPD system are organised for teachers and other relevant groups concerned with the professional development in the system.
- The system must encourage coordination and communication at the managerial level and amongst the various departments participating in the planning and delivery of the CPD for teachers.

- It is important to recognise the crucial role professional development plays towards achieving a successful implementation of the intended reform. Such recognition should not be merely stated on paper but it also has to be reflected in reality.
- It is vital to recognise the significance of teachers' beliefs in influencing their practices. Therefore, any change in the CPD system needs to take into account teachers' attitudes and perceptions. Lack of such consideration is likely to lead to a discrepancy between the system and teachers' beliefs.
- As teachers are the target of the CPD system, it is important that the CPD system accounts for their needs and requirements.
- It is important to consider alignment and compatibility among various aspects of the reform. If teachers are encouraged to follow certain approaches in teaching such as learning by doing and learner-centred approaches, it may seem more meaningful to them if their professional development is planned on the basis of similar principles.
- A certain level of involvement of teachers in the planning and nominations for various CPD activities may encourage teachers to learn to take responsibility of their own learning, encourage them to do more professional development activities and help raise their self-confidence.
- At school level, it is important that teachers are provided with the appropriate support from their senior teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers.
- CPD coordinators (senior teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers) need to be provided with proper training, monitoring and support in order to be able to foster their positive impact on teachers' CPD.
- If professional development activities aim at encouraging reflection of teachers' own teaching, it is important that they do not involve evaluative judgements on teachers' performance and writing of formal reports.
- It is vital that an appropriate environment and sufficient resources which support CPD are made available in schools.

- The administrative system in the MOE, regions and schools should encourage teacher autonomy and individual initiatives in relation to continuous professional development which may mean that they have to become more flexible and autonomous too.

Having stated the significance of the study in terms of contribution and implication, the next section sheds light on the inadequacies of the study.

7.4 Limitations of the research

On the whole, the present study was valuable in providing a picture which reflects the interaction between education reform policies and teachers' practices related to CPD, and the factors which influence teachers' beliefs and practices about CPD. However, this study is not without limitations some of which are acknowledged below.

- **Representativeness:** Teachers of English in Oman can be classified into four main groups. This study investigated the beliefs and practices of only one group which is considered to be the most experienced in the system. Participants in the study were representative of this group only and, therefore, the results obtained are not necessarily true of the remaining groups of teachers of English. However, the relatively long experience the teachers studied here have in teaching English and consequently the influential role they may have on other teachers in their schools may give a certain level of relevance of the findings of the study to other groups of teachers. In other words, if these are the most experienced teachers, it is then likely that others will find the current CPD even more perplexing.
- **The scope of the investigation:** The study was limited to investigating the views of teachers and other practitioners involved directly in the management and delivery of CPD. The study did not involve the policy makers who are at the top of the hierarchy of the education system. Nor did it consider the impact of the CPD inside the classroom. Both of these elements would have provided further insight into the study.
- **Generalisability:** The study described, in various places, the influence of issues related to the social, economic and cultural realities of the Omani society on the

education system. Hence, the study is context-bound. Bearing this in mind, the results apply to the education system in Oman and they may also be of interest and relevance to the educational systems in the Arabian Gulf countries which share similar social, economic, historical and cultural conditions.

- **Data collection methods:** This study used two types of research methods: questionnaire and interviews. Each of these methods has its own strengths and weaknesses as described in Chapter 3 in this study. By using both methods it was intended they would complement each other. However, I recognize that both of these research methods share the limitation of collecting data on a “one-off” basis. A longitudinal study may, therefore, help in generating additional perspectives. The data are entirely self-reported too.
- **The use of English language:** I argued in Chapter 3 (Section 3.7.1) for conducting interviews in English language which is regarded as a foreign language to teachers. Yet, I must acknowledge that the use of Arabic, which is the native language of the participants, may have avoided any potential difficulties teachers may face in expressing themselves. Thus, the language of the interview may have influenced teachers’ responses to a certain extent. Nonetheless, the use of English also has the advantage of avoiding translation and possible misinterpretations of the original text.

Despite these limitations, it is my personal belief that the study has generated rich data which have contributed to the knowledge of the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices on CPD at an era of reform. Having considered that, a number of areas for further research are suggested in the following section.

7.5 Suggested areas for further work

Based on the overall findings of the study, further work may be carried out in a number of areas. Below, I make suggestions for further research within the Omani context. However, the suggestions may also apply to other contexts.

Before getting into the details of the suggested areas, I would stress at this stage the importance of coordinating and systematising research in the ELT context in Oman. The review of previous research presented in Chapter 2 showed that research is not being

coordinated properly. It also showed that each study is carried out in isolation of the rest and with no reference to the previous studies conducted in Oman. The findings of the studies may become more informative if they relate to the results of each other.

One possible area of research could be to investigate the day-to-day CPD practice of teachers through longitudinal research. Such investigation may help provide more concrete evidence and examples which reflect the realities of the context such as the level of practice and the difficulties encountered. It may potentially provide more depth as well as more focus on the individual behaviour of teachers.

As the ultimate goal for professional development is to promote better teaching and learning, another research possibility is to look at the impact of continuous professional development on teaching and learning inside the classroom. Such investigation may focus on the impact of continuous professional development on the performance of teachers in the classroom as well as its influence on the achievements of students. It must be acknowledged, though, that linking CPD, classroom practice and learning is a very challenging task.

In this study, I claimed to have involved a relatively homogeneous group of teachers of English. Other studies may consider looking at other groups of teachers of English in the system. In addition, comparisons among teachers may also be made according to a number of aspects such as years of experience, qualifications, gender and region.

This study looked into the broad area of continuous professional development. Chapter 2 showed that previous studies on professional development in Oman focused on a very limited number of professional development activities. Therefore, in-depth investigations of each individual CPD activity are highly recommended in order to develop a more focused view of the extent at which each individual activity is (a) being practised by teachers and (b) beneficial to teachers' professional development.

7.6 Reflections on the personal development of the researcher

The relatively long journey of this research process has really been a mixture of learning, frustration and enjoyment. The process of carrying out the research consisted of a number of major stages which contained varied experiences. Examples of these

stages were deciding on the research topic, developing the design of the study, collecting data, analysing the data and interpreting the results.

During the course of the research period, I learned a wide range of things. Most importantly, I learned much about social science research and the research culture and environment. I learned the skills of searching, reading, paraphrasing, summarising, expressing opinions and making judgements and critiquing. I also learned many skills related to IT, time management, problem-solving, working within a group and decision-making. I learned a great deal about other cultures firstly through communication with the British environment and people; and secondly through interaction with other international research students. On the practical side, the research period helped me step back from my work environment for a while, look at it critically through the eyes of scientific research enquiry; this provided insights and understanding which may hopefully help me broaden my way of thinking about my job. It has truly been a significant period of reflection on the work which I have been engaged in since the start of my career at the Ministry of Education in Oman.

However, the process has also been one of frustration and difficulties. Each phase of the research process has had its own difficulties. The nature of the difficulties included lack of confidence, boredom, anxiety, stress, uncertainty and confusion. Sharing such feelings with supervisors and other research students and finding ways of tackling them helped in maintaining interest to continue the work on the study.

Despite the difficulties, there have also been some great and enjoyable moments. Good feelings were there whenever certain aims were achieved, missions were accomplished, some work was handed in and a stage was finished. There have also been some wonderful moments of joy and delightfulness through the interaction with other students which have undoubtedly helped in reducing the pressure caused by the demands of the study.

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Appendix one: The questionnaire



School of Education

Dear Teacher of English,

I am doing research on *the Professional Development of teachers of English in Oman* as part of my PhD degree. I appreciate your time and effort in answering this questionnaire. It should take around 30 minutes to complete.

Before filling in the questionnaire, I would like you to consider the following:

- This questionnaire consists of four parts as follows:
 - Part one: Personal details
 - Part two: Teachers' beliefs about professional development
 - Part three: Professional development in practice
 - Part four: Open-ended questions
- Names are not required and all information gained from this questionnaire will be used confidentially and for research purposes only.
- Your participation is valuable to this study. However, you have the right not to participate if you do not wish to.

Thank you for your co-operation,

Nabhan Al-Lamki, algazeera@hotmail.com

PART ONE: PERSONAL DETAILS:

Please tick (✓) :

Gender:

Male

Female

School Type:

General Education

Basic Education (Cycle1)

Basic Education (Cycle2)

Region:

Batinah South

Sharqiya South

Dhahira South

Muscat

Dakhiliya

Batinah North

Sharqiya North

Dhahira North

Dhofar

Musandum

Experience in teaching English:

0-4 years

5-9 years

10-14 years

15-19 years

20 & above

PART TWO: YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Section 2A: Different types of professional development activities Here is a list of activities which teachers of English can do to develop professionally. Tick [✓] one box for each to say how important you feel these activities are in helping teachers develop professionally.		Very important	Important	Not sure	Not important	Not important at all
1	Language training courses					
2	Curriculum support workshops and seminars					
3	Attending regional ELT conferences					
4	Attending national ELT conferences					
5	Attending international ELT conferences					
6	Giving a presentation or workshop					
7	Observing other teachers' lessons					
8	Methodology training courses					
9	Professional visits to other schools					
10	Supervisors' visits and observation					
11	Reading professional material (e.g: methodology books & articles)					
12	Teacher trainers' visits and observation					
13	Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues					
14	Senior teachers' visits and observation					
15	Joint teaching and discussion of lessons					
16	Upgrading degrees and qualifications (e.g :BA, MA)					
17	Informal meetings with other teachers					
18	Travelling to English speaking countries					
Do you feel there are any other activities which teachers of English can do to develop professionally? (Tick ONE)						
YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>						
If YES, please write these activities here:						

Section 2B: Benefits of professional development Here is a list of possible benefits of professional development. For each item, tick [✓] one box to say how important you feel these benefits are in the professional development of teachers of English.		Very important	Important	Not sure	Not important	Not important at all
<i>Through professional development, teachers of English can:</i>						
1	Improve their language skills					
2	Become better at teaching English					
3	Learn about how their colleagues teach English					
4	Develop their time management skills					
5	Learn about how to assess students					
6	Develop their skills at planning lessons					
7	Improve their computer skills					
8	Increase their chance of finding a better job					
9	Get a qualification that leads to promotion					
10	Develop professional study skills					
11	Improve their communication skills in English					
12	Become more confident in the classroom					
Do you feel there are other benefits of professional development for teachers of English ? (Tick ONE)						
YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>						
If YES, write them here.						

Section 2C: Decision making about professional development Who should be involved in making decisions about whether teachers participate in professional development activities? Tick [✓] one box for each item below to give your opinion about who should be making decisions and to what extent.		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	The teacher					
2	Senior teachers					
3	Supervisors					
4	Teacher trainers					
5	Officials from the regional office					
6	Central authorities from the ministry					
7	Head teachers					
8	Other colleagues					
<p>Are there other individuals who you feel should be involved in making decisions about whether teachers participate in professional development activities? ? (Tick ONE)</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, write down who.</p>						

PART THREE: YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Section 3A: Your professional development activities Here is a list of professional development activities for teachers of English. Tick [✓] a box to say how often you do each activity.		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Language training courses				
2	Curriculum support workshops and seminars				
3	Attending regional ELT conferences				
4	Attending national ELT conferences				
5	Attending international ELT conferences				
6	Giving a presentation or workshop				
7	Observing other teachers' lessons				
8	Methodology training courses				
9	Professional visits to other schools				
10	Supervisors' visits and observation				
11	Reading professional material (e.g. methodology books & articles)				
12	Teacher trainers' visits and observation				
13	Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues				
14	Senior teachers' visits and observation				
15	Joint teaching and discussion of lessons				
16	Informal meetings with other teachers				
17	Travelling to English speaking countries				
<p>Are there any other professional development activities which you participate in? ? (Tick ONE)</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, write down those activities.</p>					

Section 3B: Your achievements (benefits) from professional development Think about the professional development activities (NOT including the BA course) you have participated in and about how you have benefited from them. For each possible benefit, tick [✓] a box to say to what extent you have experienced it. <i>Professional development activities have been of great benefit to me in terms of:</i>		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Improving my language skills					
2	Becoming better at teaching English					
3	Learning about how my colleagues teach English					
4	Developing my time management skills					
5	Learning about how to assess students					
6	Developing my skills at planning lessons					
7	Improving my computer skills					
8	Increasing my chance of finding a better job					
9	Getting a qualification that leads to promotion					
10	Developing my professional study skills					
11	Improving my communication skills in English					
12	Becoming more confident in the classroom					
<p>Are there any other ways in which you have benefited from the professional development activities that you have practised? ? (Tick ONE)</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, write them here.</p>						

Section 3C: Decision making related to your professional development Thinking about your own experience, who has been involved in making decisions about whether you participate in professional development activities? Tick [✓] one box for each item below to explain who has been involved and to what extent		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Myself					
2	My senior teacher					
3	My supervisor					
4	My teacher trainer					
5	Officials from the regional office					
6	Officials from the ministry					
7	My head teacher					
8	Other colleagues					
<p>Are there other individuals who have been involved in making decisions about your participation in professional development activities? ? (Tick ONE)</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, write down who.</p>						

PART FOUR: OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

1) One of the goals of this study is to understand what 'professional development' means for teachers of English. What does the term 'professional development' mean for you?

2) Do you think that professional development is important for you as an English teacher? Why? Why not?

3) Please tick [✓] one statement that best reflects your opinion:

- I am involved in making decisions about the content of training courses offered to me and I am happy with this
- I am not involved in making decisions about the content of training courses offered to me and I am happy with this.
- I am involved in making decisions about the content of training courses offered to me and I am not happy with this.
- I am not involved in making decisions about the content of training courses offered to me and I am not happy with this.

Please explain your answer below:

Further participation:

I would also like to interview teachers and to discuss the issues covered here in more detail. Would you be interested in being interviewed?

YES NO

If YES, please provide your details below:

Name:.....

Email address:

Phone Number:

This completes the survey. Thank you.

Appendix two: Questions for interviews

(A) Questions for teachers:

Some questions for each individual teacher will be drawn from their responses to the questionnaire. However, here are some questions to be presented to all participants:

- Could you describe very briefly the major aspects/stages of your professional development as an English teacher?
- Based on your answers to the questionnaire, why are some CPD activities more important to you than others?
- What factors influence your decision about whether to become involved in the CPD activities offered from the ministry?
- Could you expand on your definition of CPD (in the questionnaire) and its relevance to your professional lives?
- Could you describe the availability of CPD opportunities in your school/area?
- What kinds of CPD do you feel that you most need?
- Based on your experience, what do you think about the way MOE perceives CPD for English teachers?
- What else could the Ministry do differently to support your CPD?

(B) Questions for trainers and supervisors

- Could you describe professional development in terms of meaning, its importance, aims and types?
- From your experience, generally speaking, how do teachers of English perceive professional development?
- How frequent are the CPD activities provided by the ministry?
- How these CPD activities/opportunities are offered to teachers?
- To what extent the ministry's policy regarding CPD (importance, types, aims, and availability) is conveyed to teachers? Why? How?
- On the one hand, it can be argued that teachers should take care of their own CPD. On the other, CPD also needs to be managed by the system, i.e: ministry. What are your views on this?

(c) Questions for training and supervision personnel

- Could you describe professional development in terms of meaning, its importance, aims and types?
- From your experience, generally speaking, how do teachers of English perceive professional development?
- How does this affect the planning process?
- How are CPD activities planned, evaluated and improved? Teachers' contribution/input?
- How is the content of the training courses/ themes of the workshops decided upon? Who is involved? Teachers' contribution/input? Are teachers aware of this? Why? Why not? If yes, how this is conveyed to them?

Appendix three: Basic information about interviews

	Interviewee	Sex	Experience	Date	Venue	Length	words
Teachers' interviews	Teacher 1	F	16	19.06.07	Ministry	41.44 min	2033
	Teacher 2	F	18	19.06.07	Ministry	44.31 min	2156
	Teacher 3	M	17	25.06.07	Muscat	47.46 min	2103
	Teacher 4	F	16	28.06.07	School	38.47 min	1698
	Teacher 5	M	16	28.06.07	School	42.36 min	1480
	Teacher 6	F	17	28.06.07	Muscat	40.46 min	2228
	Teacher 7	M	17	29.06.07	Muscat	50.51 min	1553
	Teacher 8	M	12	29.06.07	Muscat	43.37 min	1653
	Teacher 9	M	17	01.07.07	Muscat	55.01 min	2492
	Teacher 10	M	16	01.07.07	Muscat	45.09 min	2628
	Teacher 11	M	13	09.07.07	School	46.29 min	1797
	Teacher 12	M	14	09.07.07	School	34.09 min	1615
Officials' interviews	Senior Supervisor	F	-	27.08.07	Muscat	42.10 min	2119
	Senior Supervisor	M	-	27.08.07	School	31.00 min	1259
	Trainer (Omani)	F	-	10.07.07	Ministry	49.52 min	2171
	Trainer (Omani)	F	-	14.07.07	Ministry	36.31 min	1922
	Trainer(Expatriate)	F	-	10.07.07	Ministry	47.46 min	2831
	Trainer(Expatriate)	M	-	11.07.07	Ministry	57.16 min	1552
	Trainer advisor	F	-	15.07.07	Ministry	01:19:16	4374

Appendix four: Tables of frequency

Teachers' beliefs about CPD activities

	not important at all		not important		not sure		important		very important		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Language training courses			1	.3	4	1.3	91	28.4	224	70.0	320	100
Curriculum Support workshops and seminars			1	.3	16	5.0	150	46.7	154	48.0	321	100
Observing other teachers lessons	2	.6	12	3.7	48	14.9	207	64.3	53	16.5	322	100
Methodology training courses	1	.3	10	3.1	65	20.4	173	54.2	70	21.9	319	100
Reading professional material	1	.3	20	6.4	66	21.2	142	45.7	82	26.4	311	100
Upgrading degrees and qualifications			27	8.7	52	16.8	154	49.8	76	24.6	309	100
Supervisors visits and observation			10	3.2	15	4.7	155	48.9	137	43.2	317	100
Joint teaching and discussion of lessons			2	.6	29	9.0	164	50.9	127	39.4	322	100
Travelling to English speaking countries			23	7.3	45	14.2	179	56.5	70	22.1	317	100
Attending national ELT conferences	4	1.3	14	4.4	41	13.0	179	56.8	77	24.4	315	100
Professional visits to other schools			9	2.8	22	6.9	177	55.3	112	35.0	320	100
attending regional ELT conferences	1	.3	27	8.4	72	22.5	167	52.2	53	16.6	320	100
Attending international ELT conferences	2	.6	54	17.1	96	30.4	129	40.8	35	11.1	316	100
Senior teachers visits and observation	1	.3	24	7.6	50	15.8	171	54.1	70	22.2	316	100
giving a presentation or workshop	1	.3	15	4.9	52	16.9	158	51.5	81	26.4	307	100
Informal meetings with other teachers	2	.6	16	5.0	38	11.9	115	36.2	147	46.2	318	100
Teacher trainers visits and observation	4	1.3	19	6.0	65	20.4	181	56.9	49	15.4	318	100
Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues	7	2.2	30	9.4	52	16.3	111	34.7	120	37.5	320	100

Teachers' beliefs about benefits of CPD

	not important at all		not important		not sure		important		very important		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Improve their language skills			1	.3	8	2.5	92	28.5	222	68.7	323	100
Become better at teaching English			3	.9	11	3.4	116	36.0	192	59.6	322	100
Become more confident in the classroom			15	4.7	45	14.0	187	58.3	74	23.1	321	100
Improve their communication skills	1	.3	13	4.0	55	17.0	157	48.6	97	30.0	323	100
Learn about how to assess students	1	.3	16	5.0	33	10.3	155	48.4	115	35.9	320	100
Develop professional study skills	2	.6	17	5.3	46	14.4	151	47.2	104	32.5	320	100
Develop their skills at planning lessons	3	.9	36	11.4	96	30.4	125	39.6	56	17.7	316	100
Develop their time management skills	14	4.4	34	10.7	126	39.6	92	28.9	52	16.4	318	100
Learn about how their colleagues teach English	3	.9	19	6.0	89	28.1	133	42.0	73	23.0	317	100
Get a qualification that leads to promotion			7	2.2	33	10.3	191	59.5	90	28.0	321	100
Improve their computer skills			4	1.2	14	4.4	137	42.7	166	51.7	321	100
Increase their chance of finding a better job	2	.6	8	2.5	14	4.3	109	33.9	189	58.7	322	100

Teachers' beliefs about who should be involved in making decisions related to CPD

	strongly disagree		disagree		neither agree nor disagree		agree		strongly agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher	1	.3	3	.9	17	5.3	93	29.1	206	64.4	320	100
senior teachers	3	.9	6	1.9	15	4.7	139	43.3	158	49.2	321	100
Supervisors	3	.9	10	3.1	33	10.3	128	39.9	147	45.8	321	100
Teacher trainers	4	1.2	28	8.7	89	27.6	134	41.6	67	20.8	322	100
Head teachers	11	3.4	66	20.7	86	27.0	107	33.5	49	15.4	319	100
Officials from the regional office	20	6.4	62	19.8	80	25.6	103	32.9	48	15.3	313	100
Central authorities from the ministry	9	2.9	31	9.9	91	29.1	139	44.4	43	13.7	313	100
Other colleagues	29	9.2	78	24.8	106	33.7	82	26.0	20	6.3	315	100

Teachers' practices about CPD activities

	never		rarely		sometimes		often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Observing other teachers lessons	16	5.0	101	31.4	158	49.1	47	14.6	322	100
Supervisors visits and observation	12	3.7	92	28.7	158	49.2	59	18.4	321	100
Senior teachers visits and observation	26	8.2	90	28.5	134	42.4	66	20.9	316	100
Reading professional material	122	38.2	110	34.5	60	18.8	27	8.5	319	100
Informal meetings with other teachers	196	62.2	60	19.0	41	13.0	18	5.7	315	100
Joint teaching and discussion of lessons	39	12.2	84	26.3	138	43.1	59	18.4	320	100
Curriculum Support workshops and seminars	4	1.2	29	9.0	108	33.4	182	56.3	323	100
attending regional ELT conferences	26	8.2	109	34.3	151	47.5	32	10.1	318	100
Language training courses	43	13.4	113	35.2	132	41.1	33	10.3	321	100
giving a presentation or workshop	11	3.4	23	7.2	124	38.8	162	50.6	320	100
Methodology training courses	5	1.6	51	15.8	171	53.1	95	29.5	322	100
Teacher trainers visits and observation	43	13.3	106	32.8	138	42.7	36	11.1	323	100
Professional visits to other schools	50	15.7	133	41.7	104	32.6	32	10.0	319	100
Preparing lessons jointly with colleagues	11	3.5	40	12.7	121	38.3	144	45.6	316	100
Travelling to English speaking countries	18	5.6	77	24.1	131	41.1	93	29.2	319	100
Attending national ELT conferences	20	6.4	63	20.1	127	40.4	104	33.1	314	100
Attending international ELT conferences	63	19.7	176	55.2	55	17.2	25	7.8	319	100

Teachers' practices about benefits of CPD

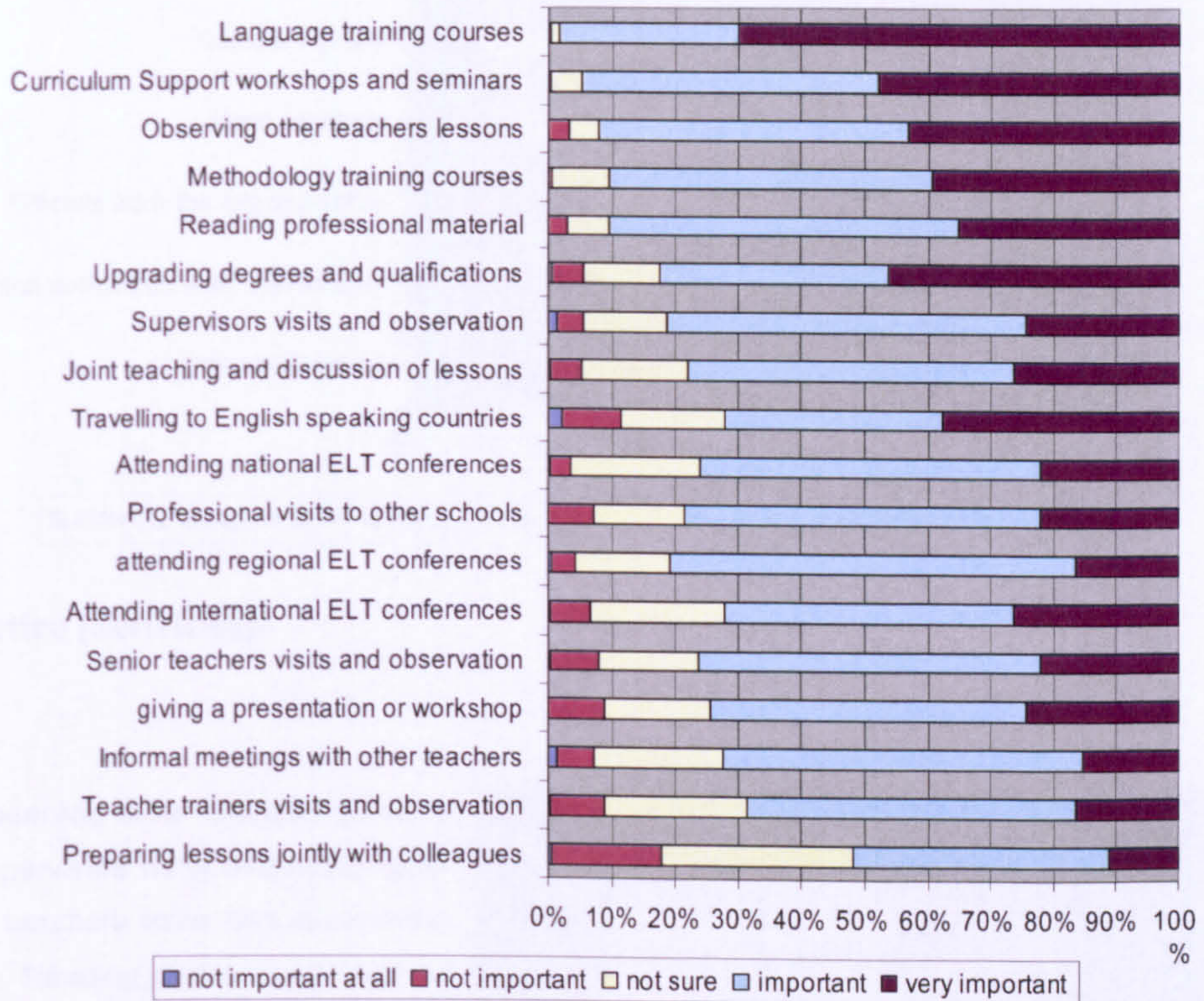
	strongly disagree		disagree		neither agree nor disagree		agree		strongly agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Become better at teaching English	6	1.9	10	3.1	16	5.0	121	37.7	168	52.3	321	100
Improve their language skills	2	.6	7	2.2	16	5.0	136	42.1	162	50.2	323	100
Become more confident in the classroom	1	.3	19	5.9	58	18.1	177	55.3	65	20.3	320	100
Improve their communication skills	5	1.6	15	4.7	59	18.4	168	52.5	73	22.8	320	100
Learn about how to assess students	5	1.5	12	3.7	50	15.5	165	51.1	91	28.2	323	100
Develop professional study skills	5	1.6	18	5.6	61	19.1	155	48.4	81	25.3	320	100
Develop their time management skills	14	4.3	51	15.8	90	28.0	117	36.3	50	15.5	322	100
Develop their skills at planning lessons	31	9.8	72	22.7	104	32.8	77	24.3	33	10.4	317	100
Learn about how their colleagues teach English	18	5.7	66	20.8	80	25.2	105	33.1	48	15.1	317	100
Improve their computer skills	7	2.2	23	7.1	41	12.7	166	51.6	85	26.4	322	100
Get a qualification that leads to promotion	4	1.2	11	3.4	29	9.0	159	49.5	118	36.8	321	100
Increase their chance of finding a better job	3	.9	14	4.4	31	9.7	127	39.6	146	45.5	321	100

Teachers' practices about who should be involved in making decisions related to CPD

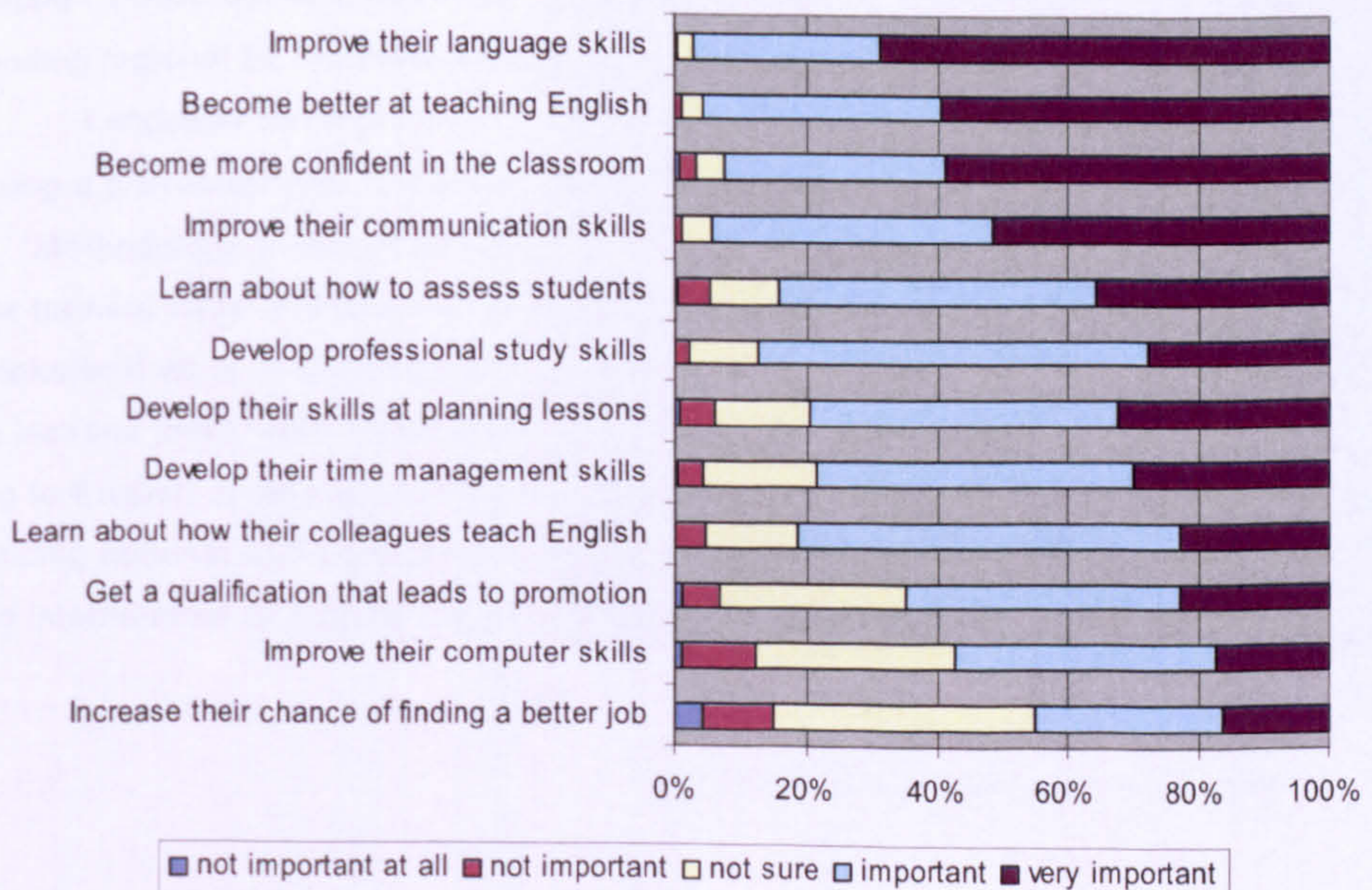
	never		rarely		sometimes		usually		always		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Myself	22	6.9	25	7.8	44	13.8	76	23.8	153	47.8	320	100
My supervisor	32	10.7	35	11.7	95	31.8	97	32.4	40	13.4	299	100
My senior teacher	12	3.9	29	9.3	96	30.9	106	34.1	68	21.9	311	100
Officials from the regional office	60	19.7	77	25.3	93	30.6	51	16.8	23	7.6	304	100
Central authorities from the ministry	50	16.0	73	23.3	79	25.2	61	19.5	50	16.0	313	100
My head teachers	69	22.4	79	25.6	72	23.4	46	14.9	42	13.6	308	100
My teacher trainer	53	17.2	80	25.9	101	32.7	55	17.8	20	6.5	309	100
Other colleagues	111	35.1	68	21.5	91	28.8	34	10.8	12	3.8	316	100

Appendix five: Bar charts

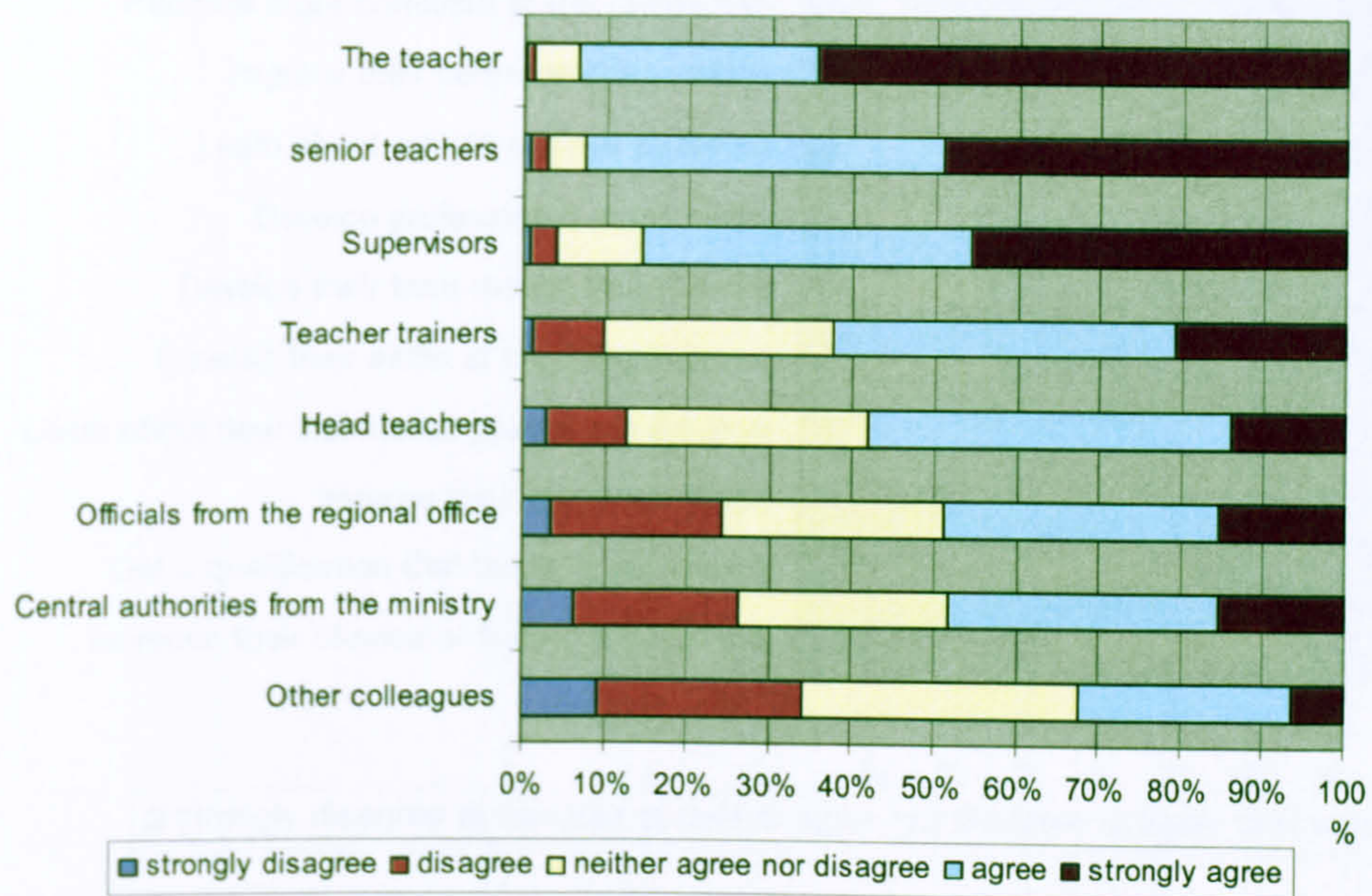
(A) Beliefs (activities):



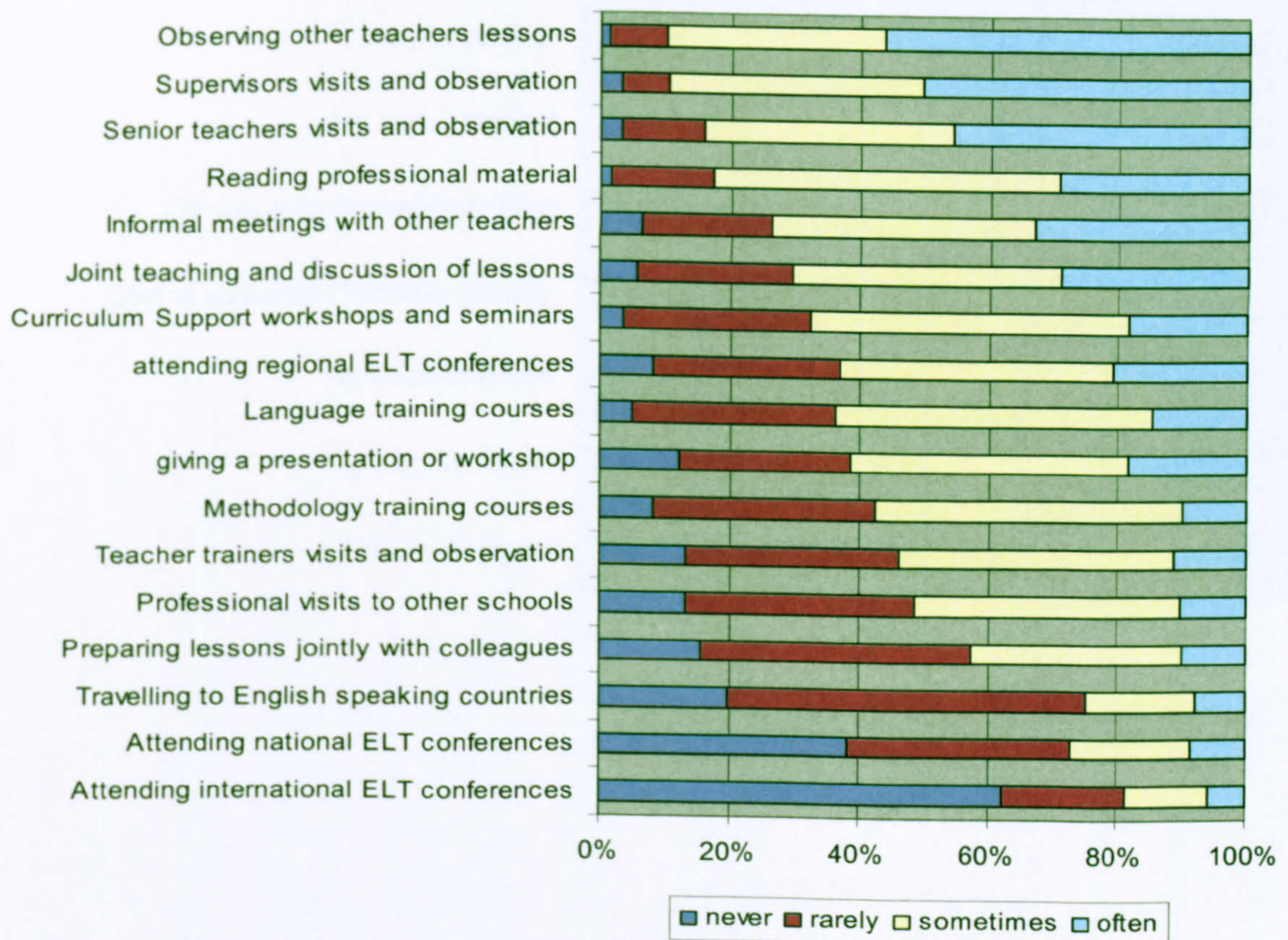
(B) Beliefs (benefits):



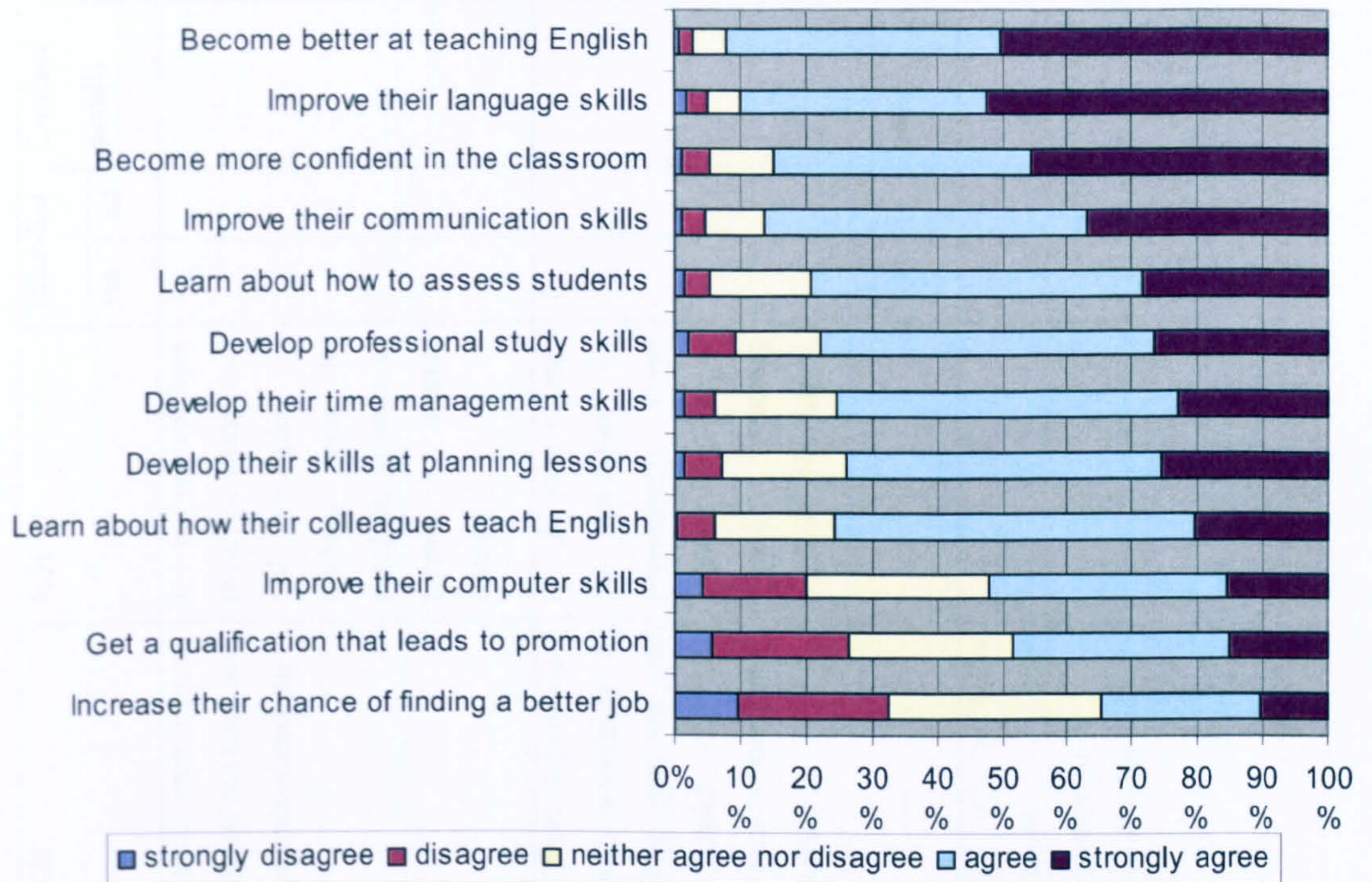
(C) Beliefs (people):



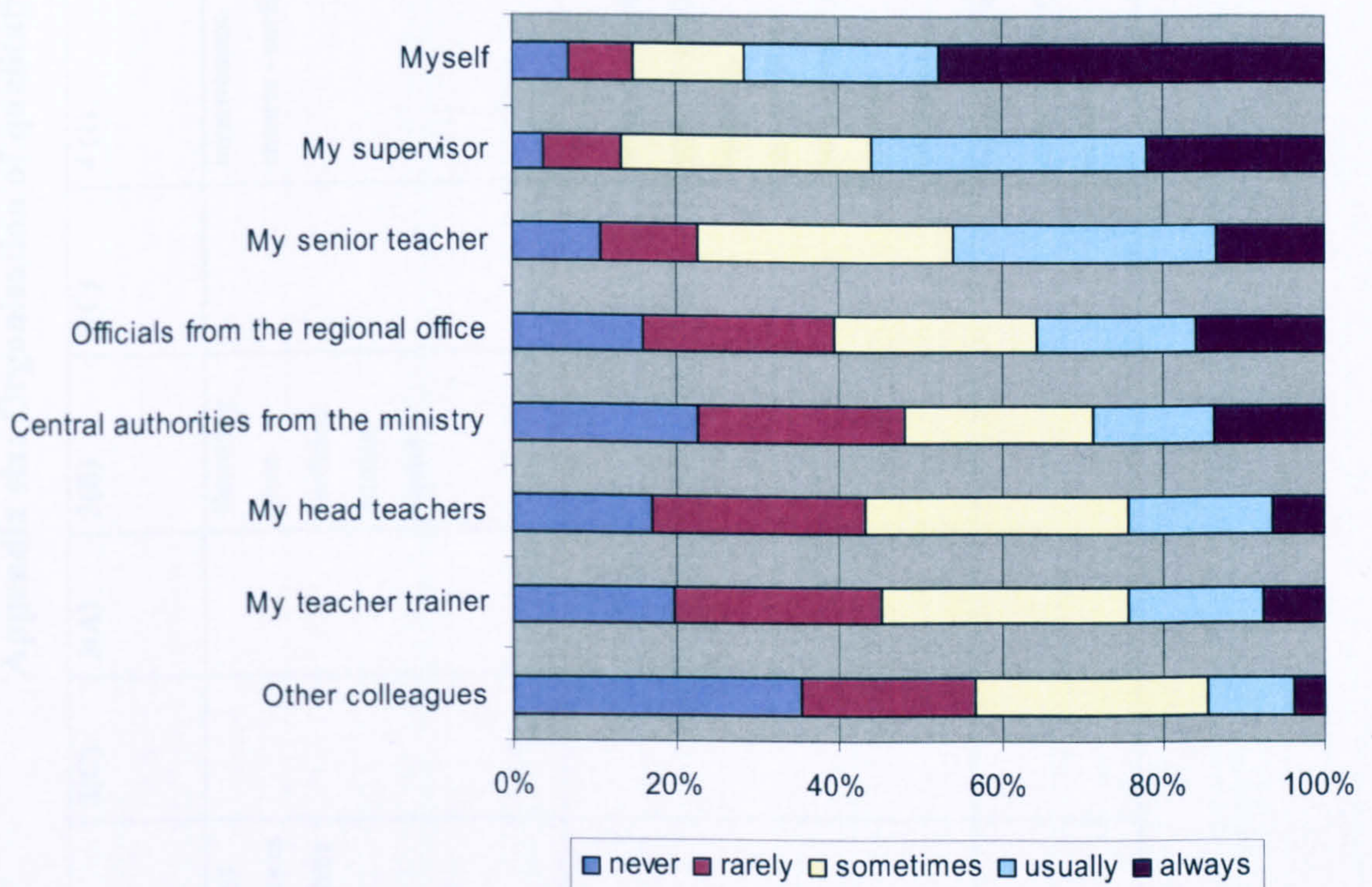
(D) Practice (activities):



(E) Practice (benefits):



(F) Practice (people):



Appendix six: Organisation of qualitative data from questionnaires

ID	2(A)	2(B)	2(C)	3(A)	3(B)	3(C)	4 (1)	4(2)	4(3)	interview		Contact details
										yes	no	
1	English friends	exchange experiences with others			Becoming more confident outside school		Improvement- better chances - confidence	Yes cos must improve himself and learn new methods of teaching	4 - cos our opinions about our weaknesses and strengths in teaching must be asked for in order to prepare suitable courses	1		
2	Personal motivating in developing professional ly (not clear)						To improve certain elements according to your needs as speaking, management or personality through courses or conferences	Yes cos it gives me a great opportunity to listen, speak and read in English. Also it is a chance to meet native speakers	2 - as those courses are developed by professionals. These courses are relevant to English teaching needs. So, I am happy	1		
3							Develop skills that make us do our best in our job	Yes cos it helps achieve high performance				

4							It is the development Ts gain from courses, visits, meetings and conferences. It makes us more confident and effective in our job	Yes cos I need to be more skilful in teaching				
5	Preparing own workshops and get feedback from seniors	Becoming more confident in planning ot re- teaching lessons to weak ps and discovering the needs of the ps		internet	Dealing with weak ps + dealing with the gifted ones		Improving ot adding to my teaching experiences in relation to the language skills and methodology	Yes cos it keeps me we-informed and updated about the teaching/learning experiences. I improves the quality of teaching and help to do further studies	Not clear	1		
6	Listening to English programmes											
7			Teachers from		Teachers from leads		Developing my way of teaching		4 - I think that with my experience, I can			

Appendix seven: Organisation of qualitative data from interviews

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6
PD practised so far	<p>I did not attend any courses for 5 years. After that, basic education was introduced. The ministry started to give <u>basic education courses</u>. The course took 2 years. That was the first course for me.</p> <p>The course helped me to improve my language.</p> <p>Then I attended a language course called <u>PET</u>. At that time, I had diploma. But then I joined <u>Leeds BA</u> course. After that, I attended various <u>workshops</u> at the English department. I also attended some <u>local</u></p>	<p>PD started from the first year of teaching. I started to seek <u>support from inspectors</u>. I attended <u>language improvement courses</u>. After, I had a chance to do my <u>BA</u>. I then completed my <u>MA</u>. I also did some <u>action research</u>.</p>	<p>I did a course called <u>HOTDC</u> which was both a language and a methodology course though the focus was more on methodology. I was then invited to do another course on <u>methodology</u> at the ministry followed by a third course at the British Council which was called <u>PET</u> and focused on language improvement. Through such courses, I was able to do some <u>research</u>. This was the last course my region (BS). I then moved to Muscat in 2000. I had more chance to improve myself there</p>	<p>I started my PD with a language course called <u>RELIC</u> and then I attended a methodology course called <u>PICOT</u>. Then I didn't do any course for around 5 years. After, I attended a basic education course. After this course, I took the <u>BA</u>. In the last three years, I attended several workshops in some schools and I attended a local conference here in my region.</p>	<p>In 1993, I took <u>RELIC</u>. It focused on improving language. In 1995 I had a course called <u>PICOT</u>. It focused on language and teaching methods for prep level. In 1999 I joined <u>Leeds BA</u>. I learned a lot from this course. Also, I was an English teacher and then a senior English teacher. I am also a <u>member of the focus group</u> at the ministry which is responsible for design of books. I attended some <u>workshops</u> in my region. I attended workshops and I also did some workshops. This also helped me to present and</p>	<p>I attended <u>RELIC</u> course for language improvement. I attended <u>PICOT</u> course which is a methodology course and then I attended a <u>PRIT</u> course which is a basic education course which focuses on methodology. I have attended some <u>conferences at the ministry and in my region</u>. I have also attended some <u>meetings and SETIMs</u>. I have conducted some <u>workshops</u> in my school. We also usually do <u>peer observation</u>. We also do <u>peer teaching</u>. We started doing this peer teaching this semester. I</p>

	<p><u>conferences</u> for English teachers.</p>		<p>by joining some committees and doing some new commitments. We were invited to attend <u>lectures by some university people</u> visiting the ministry. Some courses were also offered to us but were optional. I attended three of them. I attended recently a course at the British Council called <u>TKT</u>. The ministry is involved but not formally. The ministry informs teachers about these courses or lectures organised by outside organisation. It also allows us to be released for some courses if the situation in our school permits. I used to teach in a PM school while</p>		<p>to find materials to be used for teaching. It was a chance to share ideas with other teachers. We also have <u>meetings</u> with teachers. We also deal with other teachers from different nationalities which gave me some experience. I have also done some presentations in some other schools and in the <u>regional conference</u>.</p>	<p>read about it in a book. I found it useful to exchange experiences and different ways of teaching. I felt that teachers felt happy about this. For example, some teachers do not teach a certain level, they will have the chance to teach this grade with the help of their colleagues at the same time. We plan the lesson together and then we teach it. I did this not because it's required by the system but because I read about it in this book. I <u>presented some of these workshops</u> and sometimes there are some other teachers involved. Sometimes we are invited to attend workshops in other</p>
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			<p>this particular course was held in the morning. So, I was able to attend.</p>		<p>schools. <u>The workshops cover topics like improving handwriting skills in grades 1 to 4, the importance of displaying students work inside the classroom, the techniques used in assessing children in cycle one schools, using games to teach children and using story in teaching. The SETIMs were useful 3 years back because we organised it in turns. Every time, a group of teachers from one Wilayat work together to present various topics. It used to contain different workshops presented by teachers from the same Wilayat. We benefited a lot of ideas from</u></p>
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							teachers. they were useful because they contained useful topics related to the teaching .. how children learn .. Different methods of teaching .. how to deal with children.
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Appendix Eight: T-Tests

Interpretation of the output from independent-sample t-test: The following tables compare the responses of males and females for two sections of the questionnaire. They show that there were no significant differences as the *p* value in the Sig. (2-tailed) column (which appears under the section labelled t-test for equality of means) is above .05 for the statements.

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Improve their language skills (practice)	Male	191	4.35	.933	.068
	Female	130	4.36	.747	.066
Become better at teaching English (practice)	Male	192	4.38	.756	.055
	Female	131	4.40	.710	.062
Get a qualification that leads to promotion (practice)	Male	190	3.24	1.155	.084
	Female	127	3.43	1.088	.097
Develop professional study skills (practice)	Male	193	3.92	.915	.066
	Female	129	3.95	.963	.085
Improve their communication skills (practice)	Male	192	4.18	.850	.061
	Female	129	4.16	.788	.069
Become more confident in the classroom (practice)	Male	192	4.18	.900	.065
	Female	129	4.33	.813	.072

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Improve their language skills (practice)	3.410	.066	-.110	319	.913	-.011	.098	-.204	.182	
Become better at teaching English (practice)	.008	.927	-.114	310.631	.909	-.011	.094	-.196	.174	
Get a qualification that leads to promotion (practice)	.483	.487	-.291	321	.771	-.024	.084	-.189	.140	
Develop professional study skills (practice)	.504	.478	-.270	320	.788	-.029	.106	-.238	.180	
Improve their communication skills (practice)	.434	.510	.152	319	.879	.014	.094	-.171	.199	
Become more confident in the classroom (practice)	.090	.764	-1.532	319	.127	-.151	.099	-.345	.043	

Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
My senior teacher (practice)	Male	182	3.20	1.084	.080
	Female	117	3.36	1.263	.117
My supervisor (practice)	Male	186	3.58	1.043	.076
	Female	125	3.65	1.057	.095
Central authorities from the ministry (practice)	Male	184	2.73	1.375	.101
	Female	124	2.69	1.270	.114
Other colleagues (practice)	Male	190	2.26	1.202	.087
	Female	126	2.27	1.098	.098

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
My senior teacher (practice)	5.474	.020	-1.175	297	.241	-.161	.137	-.431	.109	
My supervisor (practice)	.000	.996	-1.137	220.359	.257	-.161	.142	-.440	.118	
Central authorities from the ministry (practice)	1.267	.261	-.554	263.730	.580	-.067	.122	-.307	.172	
Other colleagues (practice)	1.304	.254	-.050	314	.960	-.007	.133	-.269	.256	