

**Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching  
and their Relationship to Classroom Practices:  
A hermeneutic study**

دراسة تفسيرية في تأثير معتقدات التعليم لمعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية من  
الإماراتيات وتأثيرها على ممارساتهم الصفية

by

**Jacqueline Soledad Valenzuela, M.Ed.**

**A thesis submitted in fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

at

**The British University in Dubai**

**June 2014**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research shows that teacher beliefs are central to understanding teacher behaviour. Studying teacher beliefs is crucial to understand and affect their practices. Research also shows that classroom practices are influenced and determined by contextual factors in the teaching environment. Hence, teacher beliefs and contextual circumstances influence teachers' instructional choices and decisions, revealing a relationship between teacher beliefs and contextual factors as variables affecting teaching practices. This study explores female Emirati teachers' beliefs about teaching and their contextual environment, examining the way in which they relate to classroom practices. The study focused on English language teachers in secondary schools in the Emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

To approach this research inquiry, a qualitative paradigm based on Gadamerian hermeneutics was adopted. The data-gathering process consisted of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Eight teachers participated in this study for a period of eight months. The data were analyzed using a meaning-based interpretive approach that sought understanding at idiographic and nomothetic levels.

The findings showed the predominance of a salient mother-sister image that described how the teachers viewed themselves and concurrently provided a lens to look into their professional world. Their understanding of the nature of teaching rested, rather than on notions of subject matter and methodologies, on the student-teacher relationship which was viewed as an integral part of the teaching-learning process. The holistic view of student development evidenced a strong emphasis on student social skills and values. Their classroom practices generally reflected consistency with teacher beliefs, although points of discrepancy were also found. Similarly, lack of student academic motivation and negative attitude towards English were identified as the most prevalent contextual factors affecting teaching practices. The nature of these teachers' beliefs and perceived contextual factors and their relationship to teaching practices are discussed as well as the implications, limitations and recommendations for further research.

## ملخص

تظهر البحوث ذات الصلة أن معتقدات المعلمات هي عامل محوري في فهم الإداء التربوي للمعلمة، نظراً لتأثيرها في مواقف المعلمة، وفي طريقة تطبيقها للمناهج، كما في قراراتها التعليمية. وعلى ذلك، تشكل دراسة معتقدات المعلمات جزءاً مهماً من عملية فهم كيفية رؤية المعلمات لعالمهم المهني، وهي خطوة حاسمة على طريق فهم مدى تأثير هذه المعتقدات على الإداء المهني للمعلمات، وتبين البحوث أيضاً أن الممارسات الصفية تتأثر وتتحدد بواسطة عدد كبير من العوامل السياقية التي تراها المعلمات في البيئة التعليمية. وهكذا، فإن خياراتهن وقراراتهن التعليمية تعتمد أحياناً على الظروف أو القيود السياقية في بيئتهن التعليمية ما كشف عن وجود علاقة بين وجهة نظر المعلمة والعوامل السياقية باعتبارها متغيرات تؤثر في الممارسات التعليمية. إنطلاقاً من ذلك، تبحث هذه الدراسة في معتقدات المعلمات الإماراتيات وتقلعهن مع الممارسات الصفية والسياقات التعليمية، مع استكشاف كيفية تأثير معتقدات المعلمات والعوامل السياقية على الممارسات الصفية. وتركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية العاملات في المدارس الثانوية في إمارتي دبي والشارقة في دولة الإمارات العربية.

ترتبط المعتقدات ارتباطاً وثيقاً بتجارب الأشخاص المعنيين، وبيئتهن، وخياراتهن اليومية، وهو ما تبني عليه رؤية المعلمات الشخصية لعالمهن المهني، بالإضافة إلى النظريات والأفكار الشخصية التي رسخت في أذهانهن حول ماهية التعليم وما يجب القيام به في الفصل الدراسي.

ولفهم هذا المنظور، تمّ بناء نموذج نوعي يتناسب مع طبيعة المعتقدات من خلال تطبيق منهج يعتمد النظرية التفسيرية للفيلسوف الماني غادامير مع أسس أثولوجية، جرى تطبيقه من خلال تصميم وتنفيذ دراسة متعددة الحالات. وقد تألفت عملية جمع البيانات من مقابلات شبه مقننة بهدف استكشاف معتقدات المعلمات، وتقارير ذاتية عن الممارسات الصفية للمعلمات ووجهة نظرهن حول السياق التعليمي، بالإضافة إلى المراقبة (الملاحظة) الصفية ومقابلات ما بعد المراقبة.

بلغ عدد المعلمات المشاركات في هذه الدراسة ثمانى معلمات، وقد تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام منهج تفسيري قائم على تحليل المعنى للحصول على الفهم المطلوب على المستويين الفردي والمقنن. وقد أظهرت النتائج هيمنة صورة الأم والأخت في كيفية رؤية المعلمات لأنفسهن، كما أتاحت للمعلمات إلقاء نظرة مقرّبة على عالمهن المهني.

كما أظهرت الدراسة أن فهم المعلمات لطبيعة التعليم يتصل بالعلاقة بين الطالبة والمعلمة، وليس فقط بالاستناد إلى الأفكار والمفاهيم والمقررات المنهجية، وهو ما يشير إلى دور قوي لمهارات الطلبة ونسجهم الاجتماعي. وقد بيّنت النتائج إتساق الممارسات التعليمية مع معتقدات المعلمات، رغم وجود فوارق فردية، في حين أ، نقص الدافعية لدى الطلبة هو أحد العوامل السياقية الأكثر شيوعاً.

كذلك أظهرت النتائج الحاجة إلى أبحاث إضافية استناداً إلى المعطيات والتوصيات التي تضمنتها هذه الدراسة.

## Dedication

To those whom I love,  
near and far,  
who give meaning to my life  
and inspire me to be a better person.



“We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant.”

(Sadler, 1979: 49)

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Few countries have experienced such imperative demand for a rapid modernization of its education system as the United Arab Emirates. Diverse reform strategies based on the concept of school effectiveness have emerged as paths for introducing innovation and improvement. The effective school model, implicit in the school improvement programmes currently under implementation in the UAE, operates under the assumption that school capacity is affected by a wide range of adaptable factors (Boyd, 1992; Marzano, 2003), thus by applying the effective school characteristics to all schools, they all can be effective (Townsend, 1997). Since education improvement often requires fundamental changes in instructional practices (Tatto, 1998), a key component of these reform efforts is improvement of teacher performance.

For this purpose, the extensive knowledge on effective teaching is recurrently used as frame of reference for teacher improvement since it is regarded as socio-culturally and politically neutral nature and thus presumably applicable in diverse teaching contexts. However, no two teaching settings are alike. Research on teacher change (e.g. Richards et al. 2001), school improvement (e.g. Reynolds et al. 1993) and cross-cultural studies (e.g. Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) provide evidence that dispute the universality of effective strategies and criticise their failure to consider practitioners' viewpoints and experiences and contextual influences. Teachers, schools and society characteristics are not universal. Therefore, teaching scenarios and teachers' worldviews vary widely.

The complexity of teaching and the variety of contextual influences leave teachers in a position that demands analysing situations and making decisions based on their own beliefs and theories about teaching and their perception of the teaching environment. Understanding the perspective upon which teachers act requires understanding their beliefs about teaching and how they perceive and interpret contextual factors affecting their work (Pajares, 2002). Richards et al. (2001) assert that studying teacher beliefs is an important part of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work. Thus, teachers' beliefs, contextual factors and practices should be addressed together as they

do not operate in isolation. It is the dynamic interplay of these variables that creates the unique conditions of specific teaching scenarios.

Considering the high priority the United Arab Emirates government has given to education and within it, the crucial responsibility placed on teachers to bring about improvement and the emphasis on raising English proficiency levels, this study focused on in-service female Emirati (IFE) English language (EL) teachers.

The main purpose of this study was to explore IFE-EL teachers' beliefs about teaching and examine their relationship to classroom practices and contextual factors. The main question guiding this exploratory study was:

What beliefs are held by IFE-EL teachers about teaching and how do they relate to teacher practices and contextual factors?

The aspects of teachers' beliefs that will be explored and documented are posed as sub-questions:

1. What beliefs do IFE-EL teachers hold about teaching?
2. What relationships can be established between IFE-EL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices?
3. What contextual factors, internal or external to the classroom, are perceived by IFE-EL teachers as affecting their classroom practices?
4. What links can be made between teacher beliefs and the teachers' cultural background?

A Gadamerian hermeneutic approach was used to guide this exploratory study of a small group of female Emirati teachers who worked in public secondary schools. In the following chapters, the rationale and contextualization of this study are described, followed by a review of the literature -concerning teacher beliefs in mainstream education and English language teaching- that provided the background of this research study; an explanation of the methodology used to guide it; and the presentation and discussion of findings and conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Rationale and Contextualization of the study**

Taking into account that beliefs and the act of teaching are deeply personal matters inextricably linked to personal experience and life story (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Carter and Doyle, 1996), gaining an understanding of the context is crucial for understanding teachers' beliefs and practices. This study focused on teacher beliefs held by Emirati English teachers in secondary schools and viewed these teachers as embedded in a historical and educational context. This section describes in broad terms the United Arab Emirates and its educational system, in terms of its history, structure and teaching workforce. Particular emphasis is given to female teachers and the priority given to the English language by government authorities.

#### **The United Arab Emirates**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is located in the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. It has an area of approx. 83,000 square kilometers, primarily desert, and a population of 8.2 million, of which expatriates make up more than 80% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). The rest are expatriates from different countries. Arabic is the official language and Islam its official religion. It was established as a federation in 1971 by the union of seven monarchical emirates: Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qwain, Ras Al Khaima, Fujairah and Abu Dhabi –the latter being the capital of the country. In terms of governance, it has a constitution that sets the political and constitutional organization of the country. Its economy, the second largest in the Arab World, used to be dependent mainly on oil and gas revenues, but in recent years it has diversified and grown considerably. Since its formation, the country has experienced a fast and profound transformation from desert Bedouin tribal communities to a modern state with high living standards (Al Ali, 2008).

#### **Education**

Formal Education started in the UAE in 1953, with the opening of the first school in Sharjah, which was followed by the opening of others across the country. These

schools were funded by neighboring countries (Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt) which provided the human and material resources (teachers, texts, and curricula). From its inception, the national education system has relied on an expatriate work force.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) was established in 1972, yet it was not until 1985 that a single Emirati curriculum was developed and put into practice (Farah and Ridge, 2009). The term ‘curriculum’ has been generally understood as equivalent to official textbooks which provide restrictive guidelines of what and how to teach in order to match the centralized examinations. The MoE, through the emirate-level education offices oversees all schools in the country, public as well as private, with the exception of Abu Dhabi, which has autonomy to implement its own curricula. In the case of public schools, the MoE is responsible for providing the curriculum, for approving textbooks which are the main source for curriculum delivery, and for preparing examinations and overseeing the overall assessment system.

The existing education system is structured into four tiers: Kindergarten (age 4 and 5 years old), Primary or Cycle I (6 years old onwards, Grade 1-5), Preparatory or Cycle II (Grades 6-9) and Secondary or Cycle 3 (Grades 10-12). Education is compulsory up to Grade 9. UAE nationals can attend government schools and tertiary-level institutions free of charge. All major public and private higher education institutions use English as their medium of instruction. Those students who wish to study in any of the three public tertiary education institutions (i.e., UAE University, Zayed University and The Higher Colleges of Technology) must pass the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) for English (applied in 12<sup>th</sup> Grade). This test determines if the students are college-ready or need to enter a foundation programme (for a year or two) to improve their English language skills prior to entering the university. In public schools, the medium of instruction is Arabic and English is treated as a subject. However, great emphasis is given to the learning of English as a second language since improving students’ English language proficiency has become a priority for the government and the responsibility to accomplish this goal is in the hands of school English language teachers.

The government school system employs a large number of teachers and most of them are not UAE nationals. The teachers' segmentation in public schools, as of 2008 for example, was 49% (11,620) expatriates and 51% (11,910) Emirati teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010). While in female teachers 29% were expatriates and 71% Emirati, the proportion was inversed in male teachers, 11% nationals and 89% non-nationals. Given this shortage, teachers from neighboring Arab nations (e.g., Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, etc.) are recruited to teach in public schools, primarily in Middle and High schools for boys. While in most countries teachers are assumed to be citizens of the country that they work for, this is not the case in the UAE whose education system strongly depends on a foreign workforce for providing public education.

The status as expatriates in the UAE involves a series of important issues (e.g. legal rights, terms of employment, healthcare, social security, living arrangements, work stability, etc.) that create significant differences in work conditions for expatriate and national teachers. Therefore, expatriate and Emirati teachers do not form a uniform workforce under one set of contractual conditions. Taking into account that one of the questions of this research study pertained to contextual factors affecting teaching practices and, considering the disparity of Emirati and non-Emirati teachers' working conditions, only national teachers were the target population of this study.

Due to the government's emiratisation policies introduced in the 1990s (Al Ali, 2008) which have included the nationalization of the teaching workforce (to ensure that Islamic values and traditions are maintained), the number of Emirati teachers in the school system has grown considerably, particularly the female contingent. An important factor having an impact on this increase is the creation of a gender-segregated work environment which serves as an incentive for Emirati women to become teachers (Ridge, 2010). In the year 2010, there were 11,070 (93%) female Emirati teachers and only 840 (7%) male teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010). In the academic year 2009-2010, for example, women comprised 100% of the undergraduate teacher education programme at the UAE University (Ridge, 2010). This indicates that women are the ones embracing the teaching profession and taking on the responsibility to educate the younger generations of Emirati children.

All government schools are gender-segregated, creating boys' schools and girls' schools. Female teachers work primarily in girls' schools, at all levels, and in boys' schools at the primary level only. In preparatory and secondary schools, boys are taught by male teachers. Most women in the UAE, following Muslim traditions, wear abaya (long covering dress) and shaila (black head scar), so this is what they typically wear at school. Some more conservative women cover their faces, yet inside the classroom, they tend to remove the face cover and the shaila, and sometimes, even the abaya - unless there are male visitors in the school premises. As an Islamic country, Emirati people follow Islamic teachings and way of life. Islam addresses the totality of people's life, the inner dimension as well as the external aspect, namely the appearance (Haneef, 1995). In this regard, Muslim way of life calls for modesty in public and for women to cover themselves (abaya and shaila) when in the presence of men other than their husbands or immediate family.

### **Education Reform in the UAE**

In 2005, the Ministry of Education decided to start a radical reform initiative to modernize the nation's education system which was suffering from major problems that affected all areas: curriculum, school buildings, salaries, and funding (Macpherson et al., 2007). The reform agenda began in 2006 and since then, various initiatives have been spearheaded to bring about improvement through diverse strategies: defining educational policies, setting international standards for performance, improving school facilities, restructuring the education system and mobilizing resources (Macpherson et al., 2007). The country, at federal and local level, has initiated efforts to improve the performance of schools through inspection and accreditation mechanisms (e.g. the Dubai Inspection System and the federal School Accreditation Initiative for the Northern Emirates) and the implementation of school improvement programmes (e.g. the Abu Dhabi New School Model Programme and the Federal Schools of the Future Project). All these initiatives attempt to improve school performance by introducing best international educational practices into local schools, based on the 'effective school' model.

In all these initiatives (congruent with the school effectiveness model) teachers are the key element. They are involved in the implementation phase of the reform -but not in its development. Research from the school improvement field has shown that unless teachers share the views and support the changes, they become a negative force that undermines government improvement efforts. Yero (2002) contends that individual teachers have the power to undermine reform efforts because they shape the curriculum and operate their classrooms according to their own beliefs, personal values, and understandings of teaching/learning. Thus, understanding their beliefs and personal theories is the first step towards understanding how to affect the process of schooling (Brousseau et al., 1988; Eichler, 2006).

Most effectiveness-related theories and strategies available in the related literature are largely based on research with samples embedded in Western schooling systems and cultures (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997), rendering an ethnocentric tendency that evidences Western philosophies and values. There is a need to expand these ethnocentric views, explore other ethnic and cultural contexts and identify distinctions that define and describe other teachers' worldviews and teaching contexts in order to draw meanings of teaching which are culture-sensitive and context-specific.

Since research shows that classroom practices are influenced and determined by teacher beliefs as well as contextual factors, and taking into account the unique educational, cultural and historic moment the United Arab Emirates is going through, the issue of what Emirati teachers believe about teaching and how they view themselves and their teaching context gains relevance for researchers, educators and government authorities.

A close look at teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their instructional context helps gain an understanding of teachers' views of the system they work in and the role they play in it. This is particularly relevant in this country since teaching is 'the' main career choice for women moving into the work field. These findings may offer suggestions about how the interplay between teacher beliefs and contextual factors influence practices, while providing insight into the local education system and the Emirati educational context. Understanding the relationship between teacher beliefs and contextual factors and their influence on teaching practices is also important for

improving teacher quality and student learning as these findings may inform policy decisions related to professional development (PD) and project implementation that take into account practitioners' views and needs. They may stimulate the reconceptualisation of training programmes starting from the bottom up in order to design suitable PD interventions.

Similar qualitative studies (e.g. Simon-Maeda, 2004; Hayes, 2005; Niyozov, 2006) that explore teacher beliefs and experiences reveal teacher views about their teaching role, a form of identity that describes how they view themselves *as teachers*. Although these studies do not relate teachers' identity claims and teaching practices, since this sense of identity is formed on the basis of teachers' interpretations of their interactions with their context (Beijaard et al., 2004), gaining an understanding of this perceptions may be of considerable importance to identify features that may be unique and valued in the Emirati educational and cultural landscape.

It is hoped that the findings of this exploratory study can contribute to expand knowledge on the meanings and understandings of ideas and concepts that matter in Emirati English teachers' lives and practices. If we understand the nature and complexity of Emirati teachers' background experience and teaching perspectives, this knowledge may eventually be integrated into the curriculum of teacher education and be used as the starting point to introduce new concepts of teaching.

From a scholarly point of view, this research study and its findings can stimulate other studies and can serve as a source for deriving instruments to be used at a similar or a larger scale. This research study, since it is situated in a non-Western schooling system, contributes to lessen the prevailing ethnocentric tendency that currently dominates research and teaching theories and practices as well as contributing to better understand the teacher beliefs/context/practices relationship, while raising awareness about the significance of local context specificity.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Theoretical Framework

#### Theoretical Perspective

With the advent of cognitive psychology in the 1980s, research on teaching shifted its attention from teacher behaviours to thought processes, with particular emphasis on teachers' beliefs as a major influence on teacher perceptions, attitudes and practices (Borg, 2006; Clark and Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992). The aim of research on teacher thinking is to describe teachers' mental lives in order to understand how and why teaching works (Clark and Peterson, 1986).

Mainstream psychology on human thought and sense-making suggests that individuals develop internal ideas of reality in order to interpret the world around them. Kelly (1991) asserts that individuals psychologically organize the facts of their experience by developing an internal model of reality upon which knowledge is constructed and that the process of constructing this reality is influenced by the surrounding world in which individuals live. Thus, understanding teachers' views on teaching requires a humanistic perspective that, instead of solely focusing on internal processes, acknowledges the influence of the environment on people's experiences. Social psychologists posit that humans do not think in a vacuum; human cognition takes place in everyday environments and is part of social acts which allow individuals to participate in the social world through communication and other behaviours (Barone et al., 1997). Thus, from a sociological perspective, humans are social beings who negotiate meanings in their interactions with the social environment, guiding their behaviour.

This study views teacher beliefs in two key dimensions. On the one hand, beliefs are viewed as a deeply personal matter which is based on personal experiences and one's life story. On the other hand, beliefs are viewed as embedded in a social context. Teachers make sense of the world by engaging with established systems of shared beliefs and values of the culture at large (Bruner, 1996) and they are socialized into the collective life of the group as they become part of it, as they come to be and understand what it means to be a teacher. All these factors, at personal and social level, contribute

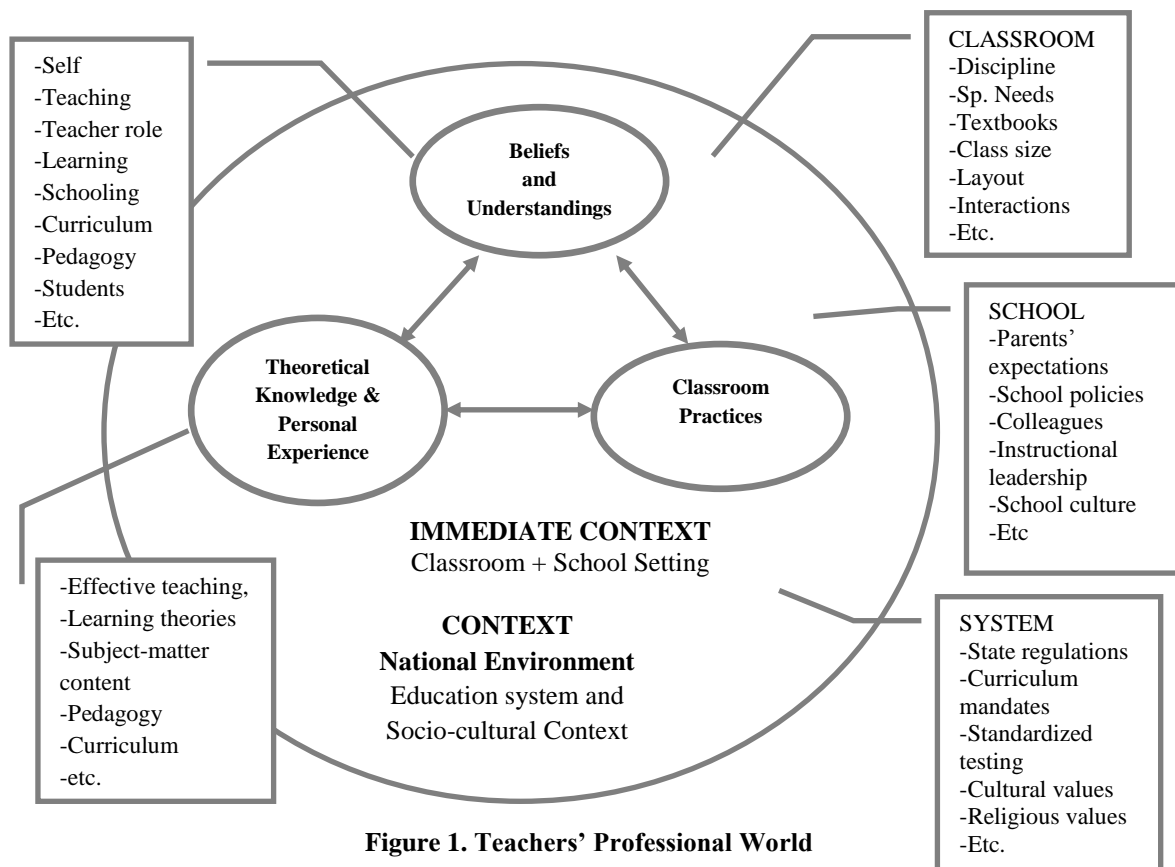
to the development of particular features in the teachers' beliefs systems which are specific to their surrounding context. The cognitive nature of beliefs is infused with social and cultural elements implicit in living contexts.

Given the purpose of this research study, there are two issues that require discussion: the process of understanding and the conceptualization of the phenomenon to be captured and understood. In order to capture and understand Emirati teachers' professional world, Gadamerian hermeneutics was used. An underlying assumption of this perspective is the subjectivity of reality constructions. Reality is apprehended by individuals in the form of mental constructions derived from their observations and interpretations of their experiences with the world, resulting in numerous constructions of reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The underlying ontological assumption is that there are multiple subjective realities characterized by complex behaviours (McMillan, 2004) involved in the phenomenon of teaching and thus, each teacher has her own experiences and worldviews, which can be interpreted in numerous ways.

For Gadamer (1975), humans are historical beings and understanding cannot be achieved without socio-historical influences (Gallagher, 1992). It is achieved with the engagement of the interpreter's concepts since one cannot free oneself from traditions and existing worldviews. Therefore, early presumptions or understandings are replaced by more suitable ones, creating a deeper understanding and expansion of the interpreter's horizon (Grassie, 2008).

Concerning the phenomenon to be understood, mental processes, practices and context are viewed as interrelated. Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the theoretical conceptualization of teachers' professional world, in which teacher beliefs are a critical component. Research (e.g. Ashton, 1990; Pajares, 1992) shows teachers hold beliefs and assumptions about all aspects of their professional world (students, learning, curriculum, pedagogy, roles and responsibilities, among others), including beliefs about contextual factors that affect their teaching practices (based on the subjective perception of their instructional environment).

Figure 1 indicates that teachers hold beliefs about themselves and about all aspects of their work: the students, the teaching process, the school, curriculum, etc.



**Figure 1. Teachers' Professional World**

It also illustrates the relationship between teacher beliefs, practices and theoretical knowledge as being mutually informing. Although this study did not explore influences on teacher belief formation, it acknowledged the reciprocal relationship of these elements that constitute the base of teaching.

Similarly, this figure also outlines variables suggested by mainstream education research -related to the classroom, school settings and government systems- operating as factors mediating classroom practices (from student-specific factors, e.g. learning needs, to more general factors, e.g. curriculum mandates). Teaching was viewed as embedded in a context that comprised the immediate context (the classroom and the school) and the larger context (the education system and the country's setting). This study, however, approached this teaching context through the practitioners' eyes and perceptions. In a broader perspective, this socio-cultural context provided the background for teachers' accounts and the framework that allowed making sense of teachers' views (Olson, 1988).

## **Literature Review**

In order to examine the literature concerning teacher beliefs about teaching, three major areas are considered. The first section focuses on the literature available regarding teachers beliefs in terms of nature and main features. The second section is centred on studies on teacher beliefs, including studies on English teachers' beliefs and research on Emirati teachers' beliefs. Third section focuses on the relationship between teacher beliefs, classroom practices and contextual factors.

It is important to mention that this review did not intend to be exhaustive but rather provide insight into the theoretical perspectives used to study beliefs on teaching and teaching contexts. The conceptual framework served an enabling role rather than a limiting one, which meant that it offered guidance rather than boundaries for the understanding of the perspective from where the teacher beliefs were being approached (Patterson & Williams, 2002). The goal was to benefit from insights from previous research while remaining open-minded. Taking into account the hermeneutic nature of this study, an open attitude to all plausible interpretations was needed considering the multilayered complexity of factors and elements involved in teaching, particularly in rather unexplored socio-cultural settings. This openness was needed to approach the phenomenon under study in the unique light of the new research context and the individuality of each case's perspective. Consequently, familiarity with the existing literature widened the pool of interpretation possibilities but did not define an interpretation framework, as teaching factors may be viewed differently or with varying degrees of relevance in this context-specific environment. In other words, no predefined interpretational model was used in this study. As a hermeneutic research, the ultimate goal was to develop a new organizing structure of understanding to view the phenomenon in this specific socio-cultural context.

### ***Teacher Beliefs***

Teachers' personal theories and beliefs have received significant interest given their considerable influence on teacher perceptions, attitudes and practices (e.g. Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). It is generally acknowledged that the instructional decisions

teachers make are influenced by the teacher's prior experiences and related beliefs which form a belief system that affect their perception, judgment and behaviour (Kagan, 1992). These beliefs and assumptions can have great influence as they can be widely *shared* among teachers within and across school settings, creating cultures and subcultures of teaching (Hargreaves, 1991) and thus having powerful implications upon how teaching is done. Whether at the individual level or collectively, belief systems bear significant importance as teachers bring teaching to life one classroom at a time.

Beliefs are known for being particularly difficult to define. They have been understood and used in various ways with similar meanings in these 30 years of research in the field. Pajares (1992) asserted that defining beliefs is 'a game of player's choice' and listed recurrent labels found in the related literature which have been used with similar meanings: "attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy" (p. 309).

Given this ambiguity around the concept and based on the findings from the extant literature which highlight some of their most distinctive features, beliefs were understood and used in this study as "consciously or unconsciously held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are thought to be true (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986); that stem from personal experience, experience with school, and experience with formal knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987) that guide intentions and actions" (Hahn, 1973). In this sense, holding a belief entails exhibiting a disposition to behaviour which is symbolic of that belief (Hahn, 1973).

Several authors (e.g. Pajares, 1992; Verloop et al., 2001) have underlined the inextricably intertwined relationship between beliefs and knowledge and the impossibility of teachers to discern between what they know and what they believe. Inherent to the theories of teaching is the purpose of developing empirically-based explanations of how teaching works, which create frameworks of meanings that affect teachers' conceptions and assumptions. By contrast, Shulman (1986) argues that some

of the teachers' understandings about *good teaching* derive from classroom practice, suggesting that this theoretical knowledge is redefined by teaching experiences and contextual conditions. Richards (1996) goes on to suggest that knowledge of subject matter and curricular issues, together with teachers' understanding of what constitute good teaching, are the factors that influence teacher practices the most. Regardless of whether these beliefs stem from subjective assumptions originated in experience of collective belief systems or they have a solid theoretical knowledge foundation, they have become part of the teacher's personal theories that are informing their actions, decisions, intentions and disposition.

Since teachers do not discern between what they know and what they believe for acting or decision-making, this research study explored teacher beliefs understood as propositions held as true by the teachers. Hence, it did not engage in a technical discussion about what may or may not constitute a belief nor did it immerse itself in the deep and complicated task of differentiating beliefs from knowledge or discerning whether they have a foundation on prior student experience, on teaching practice or on theoretical knowledge. In other words, this study, although guided by previous findings and research, adopted a stand in which teacher's understandings and views were considered as beliefs, regardless of their root.

Nespor (1987), through her theory-based model of belief systems, provides useful insights into the structure of beliefs, their functions and the role they play in teaching. Regarding belief structure, she underlines the existential presumption of beliefs as they represent deeply-held indisputable personal truths which require less validation, as they are highly subjective. She also asserts that beliefs reify ambiguous attributes into distinct entities; have a strong affective and evaluative component based on subjective judgments and are stored in episodes based on personal experience. Thus, belief systems are characterized by the disputability of the propositions and concepts that form part of it and the uncertain linkages to situations and knowledge systems.

Literature on teacher beliefs states that they can be implicit and explicit (Kagan, 1992; Freeman, 1993; Borg, 2003). Common terms used are stated/reported/ professed and espoused/acted/enacted beliefs to distinguish between those assumptions that teachers

report on, which may or may not be manifested in their behaviour, and those underlying assumptions which are much less accessible, even to teachers themselves as they may be held consciously or unconsciously. The espoused/reported beliefs dichotomy is relevant to this study since verbal commentaries and observed behaviours were taken into account to draw conclusions about each teacher's beliefs on teaching. Whether or not the stated beliefs had a behavioural manifestation, they were all included in the description of each teacher's perspective.

One controversial issue in belief research is whether beliefs are stable or dynamic. Studies in this field have reported findings that are contradictory in terms supporting both positions. On one side, beliefs change over time due to diverse experiences and interactions with different teaching contexts, leading to a reappraisal and consequent progressive modification of exiting beliefs (Nespor, 1987; Ainscough, 1997). The other side emphasizes the resilient nature of beliefs which keeps them basically unaffected. Studies on pre-service teachers, for example, have provided evidence of belief stability, suggesting that the impact of teacher education on teachers' prior beliefs is minimal. Research findings also suggest that those beliefs that are more resistant to change are core beliefs which are formed or acquired early in life while peripheral beliefs are more prone to be affected.

An important characteristic of beliefs is their personal and their social/cultural nature. Some researchers (e.g. Borg, 2003; Kagan, 1992) emphasize the personal aspect because teacher understanding of particular situations is unique and relates to their personal experience. Beliefs are primarily shaped by an individual's life experiences. Teacher beliefs are shaped by their personal experience, with school, with formal education and with cumulative teaching experience. "The process of learning to teach, the act of teaching and teacher's experiences and choices are deeply personal matters, inexorably linked to their identity and life story" (Carter and Doyle, 1996:120). Thus, teacher beliefs become more meaningful when interpreted under the light of the teachers' experience and life story.

Other researchers (e.g. Bruner, 1996) emphasize the role that social, cultural and contextual influences play in shaping teacher beliefs about teaching. Important

influences are the teacher's school experience (through what Lortie (1975) calls 'apprenticeship of observation'), their teaching context and the theories they learn through professional education (Borg, 2003; Freeman, 1993). This belief formation process does not occur in a cultural void. It is generally accepted that teacher beliefs, like beliefs in general, have a cultural aspect. They are formed through enculturation and social construction processes. Through these processes, individuals assimilate all the cultural elements present in established systems of meaning and cultural features operating in the larger context. Cuban (1987) asserts that in every society there are deep-seated traditions of teaching and learning which carry implicit definitions of what it means to be a teacher and what is considered appropriate classroom behaviour and that these traditions mould individuals' conceptions and beliefs.

This socio-cultural perspective suggests that contextual influences shape teachers' life experiences in distinctive ways and create unique and distinguishable ways of thinking and conceiving their personal world, resulting in a pressing need to do research that leads to understanding these perspectives through which particular groups of teachers view their professional life.

### ***Research on Teacher Beliefs***

Pajares (1992) argues that belief systems are composed of beliefs which are connected to one another in complex and intricate ways. Teachers' beliefs about the educational process are part of a broader belief system that includes beliefs about other matters beyond their profession. Research suggests that teacher beliefs are grouped around themes which is congruent with the claim that cognitive structures are organized in some form of pattern or system, a network that serves to guide teachers' actions (O'Loughlin, 1989). Nespor (1987) states that teachers hold beliefs in four main areas: their *role as teachers*, their *students*, the *subject matter* they teach and *the school* where they work. From an epistemological perspective, Bondy et al. (2007) suggested the categories *teaching*, *learning* and *students*.

Research studies about teacher beliefs often classify them into behaviourist or constructivist (e.g. Clements and Battista, 1990; Knapp, 1992). Prawat (1992), for



example, argues that teacher beliefs constitute the major obstacle to successful reform efforts because teachers adhere to outmoded forms of instruction which conflict with constructivist approaches which current teaching trends endorse for being more effective. The behaviouristic and the constructivist approaches describe the components of the teaching/learning process in markedly dissimilar ways. According to behaviouristic principles, *learning* occurs as a result of environmental stimuli through the passive one-way transmission of information from *teacher* to *students*, resulting in teacher-centred *teaching strategies*. In the constructivist approach, *learning* is constructed and the *learner* is actively involved in building new knowledge upon previous *learning*. *Teaching* strategies rely upon an interactive process between *teachers* and *students* in which the *teacher* is a facilitator of learning (Prawat, 1992). Research (e.g. Klein, 1996; Cheng et al. 2009) shows that behaviourist and constructivist principles are not exclusive and both paradigms are often present in teachers' conceptions and beliefs about teaching/learning.

Calderhead (1996), in his review of literature on teacher beliefs and knowledge, uses mainly one element for his categorization, *teaching*. He classifies teachers into those that view *teaching* as knowledge transmission and those who view *teaching* as a process of guiding students in their learning. Fox (1983) uses a similar, yet more comprehensive approach. He uses four metaphors to categorise teachers' personal theories of teaching: the transfer theory (transferring knowledge); the shaping theory (moulding students into a predetermined pattern); the travelling theory (knowledge is a road to be explored and the teacher is the expert guide); and the growing theory (developing the learner intellectually and emotionally). For each theory, teachers have concomitant conceptualisations of subject matter, student, teacher, teaching methods, and assessment/monitoring strategies.

These studies show that intertwined in their teaching theories, teachers have networks of beliefs that comprise various components involved in the teaching/learning process: learning, learner/student, teacher role, student-teacher interaction, subject, materials, teaching strategies, etc. As it is shown in this small sample of studies, teacher beliefs about teaching (with its various components) have been explored, yet they have not

frequently been explored in conjunction with the teaching context and more rarely in the specific context in which this present study was inserted.

### ***Research on English Language Teachers' Beliefs***

In the last 25 years, there has been a growing interest to study teachers' subject-specific beliefs. Science, Mathematics, and English language have received particular attention, with the first two subjects leading teacher belief research (e.g. Simmons et al., 1999; Raymond, 1997; Clements and Battista, 1990). English language teaching, however, has received particular attention in the last 2 decades, especially as a foreign or second language (e.g. Johnson, 1992; Golombek, 1998; Mangubhai, 2004). A key factor that has caused a surge of interest in language teachers' beliefs is the globalization phenomenon that has positioned the language in a unique role for international communication and for dissemination of knowledge. More and more countries are giving priority to English language learning, with the consequent emphasis on language teaching. Currently, there is an extensive body of work and literature based on in-service and pre-service teachers' beliefs, regarding the beliefs they hold, their relationship to practices and research methods used (Borg, 2006).

An important and frequent focus in pre-service teachers has been teacher education and its impact on teacher beliefs, with divergent findings as to the extent teacher education affects prior teacher beliefs (e.g. Tatto, 1998; Tatto and Coupland, 2003; Zheng, 2009). In the case of in-service or practicing teachers, the primary emphasis has been on beliefs that teachers hold and their influence on classroom practices, with findings supporting relations of consistency (e.g. Johnson, 1992) and inconsistency (e.g. Khonamri and Salimi, 2010). Studies have focused on specific curriculum areas, for example, grammar (Farrell and Lim, 2005; Borg, 1998) and reading (e.g. Richardson and Anders, 1991; Kuzborska, 2011); on the degree of congruency between teacher beliefs and underlying principles imbedded in curriculum or in instructional approaches (Konting, 1998; Zhang and Liu, 2014) and specific topics, like use of L1 and use of textbooks (e.g. Lee and Bathmaker, 2007).

In methodological terms, a wide range of research methods have been used to study English teacher beliefs depending on the approach, rationale and purpose of the studies

(Borg, 2006), among them, self-reported instruments (e.g. questionnaires and surveys) use of strategies to elicit verbal commentaries (e.g. semi-structured and stimulated recall interviews and repertory grids), classroom observation and reflective writing (e.g. journal writing, autobiography).

Research on L2 teacher beliefs has also focused on the nature and characteristics of beliefs and the factors that affect their formation. In this regard, the findings support those in mainstream education which show that teachers do hold beliefs about various elements of their profession and that these beliefs are shaped by the teachers' experience. Researchers (e.g. Borg, 2006) also ascertain that an area that is less known is the complex interaction between teacher beliefs and situational factors, both inside and outside the classroom, which are the specific area of interest of this study.

### ***Research on Emirati Teachers' Beliefs***

Despite the geographical spread of the English language, teacher belief research has remained rather circumscribed to a few countries, with the majority concentrated in the United States (Borg, 2006). Research in the Arab countries is incipient, although significant contributions have been made in the last decade in several countries, mainly Iran, Egypt and Turkey, and fewer from Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. In the case of the UAE, there is scarce published literature (mostly unpublished dissertations) on teacher beliefs; although research is growing in quantity and diversity. Given the scarcity of the research field, the scope for the literature review for this study was broadened to include teacher perceptions and conceptions. The majority of the reviewed studies were theoretically based on literature emanating from Western countries.

Teacher belief research in the UAE expands among various subject domains, including Science (e.g. Haidar, 1999), Special Education (e.g. Dukmak, 2013), Information Technology (e.g. Almekhlafi and Almeqdadi, 2010), and English. In the case of English, research on teacher beliefs has included non-Emirati Arab English teachers (e.g. Constantinou, 2009) as well as Emirati English teachers at pre-service (e.g. Dickson et al., 2013) and in-service level (e.g. Al Hassani, 2012). In terms of research goals, the studies have aimed at gaining insight into specific educational phenomena,

for example, curriculum change (e.g. Troudi and Alwan, 2010), reflective practice, or professional development (Gardiner-Hyland, 2014); as well as curriculum-specific areas, such as grammar and writing. As seen on this sample, a variety of topics have been researched through teacher beliefs and perceptions. Most of the findings have contributed to the understanding of the topic under investigation, by revealing clusters of domain-specific beliefs or perceptions held by Emirati teachers; however the contribution to understanding the nature of teacher beliefs is limited.

Studies focused on teachers' beliefs about the different elements related to teaching and learning (e.g., the concept of *knowledge*, i.e. epistemological beliefs) are less common, and so are studies focused on teachers' general beliefs about schooling or teaching or specifically related to the concrete process of teaching and learning. Similarly, most studies focused exclusively on teacher cognition and did not include observation of teachers in action, thus no linkages were established with actual teaching.

Methodologically speaking, the majority of the studies adopted a quantitative approach using existing (sometimes adapted) questionnaires and surveys with large samples intended to generalize results. Studies with a qualitative approach were fewer and commonly used focus-group and semi-structured interviews as data-gathering techniques. In-depth studies focused on individual teachers' personal views, like the one described for this study, were not found. A common factor to all these teacher belief studies was the absence of viewing beliefs in relation to the teachers' personal experiences and contextual characteristics.

### ***Teaching Practices and Contextual Factors***

Most teacher belief research focuses on the interrelation between teacher beliefs and teacher practices, asserting that teachers' actions are strongly linked to teacher belief systems. However, research (e.g. Kinzer, 1988; Fang, 1996; Borg, 2003) also shows that often teacher beliefs are not consistent with implemented practices due to a wide range of factors present in the teaching context which are conditioning teacher performance and constraining the enactment of their beliefs. The teaching context is

understood in this study as the multitude of factors that teachers perceive as affecting their instructional decisions and hence, their teaching practices, which encompass from those in the immediate instructional setting of the classroom to those in the larger context of the education system and society. While teachers are widely recognized as the most important in-school factor to student achievement and well-being, the usual focus of education improvement efforts has been on teachers' characteristics (knowledge, abilities, care, etc.) instead of the situation in which teachers find themselves (Cuban, 2013). As Cuban (2013) emphasizes, context matters (p.12).

Numerous factors have been identified as mediators that prevent teachers from implementing practices congruent with their beliefs about teaching: parents, school requirements and policies, curriculum mandates, classroom layout, colleagues, standardised tests and resource availability (Borg, 2003); difficult work conditions, time constraints imposed by syllabus demands and administration and/or parent pressure (Farrell and Lim, 2005); classroom management and routines, mixed-ability students, textbooks (Ashton, 1990); state and local district mandates, school climate (Davis et al., 1993); nature of school instructional leadership (Rosenholtz, 1989 in Kagan, 1992); among others. In the specific field of English language teaching, studies have added other factors which are language-specific, for example, diversity of learners, teachers, schools, cultures, and countries (Candlin and Mercer, 2001).

These studies prove that teaching does not occur in a context void, that teaching is significantly affected by, and dependent on, contextual factors which are related to the instructional setting in which instruction occurs. In other words, they show that there is an environment that influences teachers' doing, but little do they say about contextual factors as perceived by the teachers. Almost 30 years ago, Nespor (1987) stated that there is an interplay or interaction between beliefs, context and practices by suggesting that teachers make sense of practices and context through their personal beliefs. Similarly, Pajares (1992) noted that the beliefs teachers hold affect their perceptions and judgments, hence they influence their view of the teaching context. The present research study does not refute or question these findings, yet it takes a different approach to gaining insight into this topic, by understanding how teachers interpret

their professional context since it is their construction of their world, with its propositions and stories, that gives meaning to what they do, how they do it and why they do it.

Therefore, this study is also informed by teachers' perceptions of the vast range of internal and external factors surrounding classroom settings; features related to the classroom, the school, the education system as well as the political and socio-economic national context. In this regard, one focus of this study is teacher beliefs and their relationship to classroom practices. The other, given the reciprocity and mutual influence among the components related to teachers' professional world, is the teacher's perception of their instructional environment (at classroom, school, or system level) having an impact on their instructional practices.

This extant research on teacher beliefs and their relationship to teacher practices is mostly within Western schooling systems. Evidence abounds from different fields that people, school settings and society define different teaching contexts and emphasize the idiosyncratic, multi-dimensional, and context-specific nature of teaching. Yet, little attention has been given to understanding the interrelation between these three elements (Freeman, 1993; Borg, 2006). The particular connections between teacher beliefs, teaching practices and contextual factors provide a useful perspective to gain a holistic picture of teaching in a specific educational environment, while raising awareness about the significance of local context specificity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Methodology**

To fully understand the methodological decisions made for undertaking this research study, it is of primary importance to present the rationale for framing this research study within the Gadamerian Hermeneutic paradigm and to discuss the philosophical principles underlying this particular approach to inquiry, particularly because they bear great significance for the entirely qualitative perspective adopted to carry it out and the philosophical justification for its methodological components.

#### ***Hermeneutics as Approach to Inquiry***

Hermeneutics has been used as a research approach in various fields, from organizational studies (e.g. Prasad, 2002) to information systems (e.g. Webb and Pollard, 2006), and from nursing (e.g. Harrison, 2006) to education (e.g. Trowler and Turner, 2002). The main purpose of hermeneutics is to unveil meaning in order to achieve understanding (Benner, 1985). Hence, it was viewed as essential to discover the meaning that actions have for the teachers who perform them and to interpret those meanings in terms of intentions and beliefs.

Hermeneutics is solidly rooted within the qualitative research paradigm, understanding the qualitative-quantitative distinction as one that goes beyond methodological principles into ontological and epistemological views of reality and knowledge. Considering the scarce literature available in the specific context where this study was situated, a qualitative approach was viewed as best suited to explore and gain in-depth understanding of this social human phenomenon (Emirati teachers' beliefs about teaching) by building a complex, holistic picture that reports on detailed views of the participants based upon fieldwork conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994). Thus, 'understanding' is a central concept in qualitative inquiry, particularly when the purpose is to gain a firm grasp of individuals' personal systems of meanings constructed upon what they regard as meaningful in their worlds.

Learning about people's beliefs also required an interpretive approach, a feature that is inherently implicit in hermeneutics. Interpretation entails discovering "the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them and the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher" (Hoepfl, 1997:3). The qualitative researcher relies greatly on interpretation of events and experiences (Stake, 2009) which the researcher must comprehend from the perspective of the actor's intent in order to understand a particular action, experience or phenomenon. This notion entails considerable significance for this study first because it is the purpose of this project to describe teachers' beliefs concerning their understandings of teaching and secondly, because beliefs constitute motivation underlying actions which are not subject to direct observation.

Since meaning-based understanding and interpretation are essential to this research study, Gadamerian hermeneutics was selected as the approach to inquiry because it provides a framework for the process of interpretation leading to understanding. It clarifies the conditions in which interpretation happens (Gadamer, 1976) in terms of the researcher's role as interpreter and the act of interpretation which emerges from the negotiation of meaning between interpreter and the object of interpretation (Schwandt, 2000).

Based on ontological and epistemological principles, Patterson and Williams (2002) explain the main principles that characterize the hermeneutic paradigm which are relevant for this study. Ontology deals with the nature of reality and the nature of human experience. In Hermeneutics philosophy, "there are multiple realities that vary across time, cultures, and individuals" (Patterson and Williams, 2002: 14), hence an underlying assumption of this perspective is the subjectivity of reality constructions. Reality is apprehended by individuals in the form of mental constructions derived from their observations and interpretations of their experiences with the world, resulting in numerous constructions of reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The underlying ontological assumption is that there are multiple subjective realities characterized by complex behaviours (McMillan, 2004) involved in the phenomenon of teaching and thus each teacher has her own experiences and worldviews which can be interpreted in numerous ways. However, this position must not be viewed as absolute relativism. In



fact, such degree of relativism is not congruent with hermeneutic ontology which postulates that structure does exist in the world and it recognizes the role it plays in human experience. However, the meanings that individuals construct on the basis of how they experience this structure (and thus, how they construct their world) are not an inherent property of objects but rather they are assembled in unique ways by different individuals (Patterson and William, 2002). In other words, human experience is not fully determined by the environment nor is it completely based on personal freedom (Valle et al., 1989). In summary, the hermeneutic paradigm has a constructivist, meaning-based ontological philosophy.

From an epistemological standpoint, it is essential to fully understand that hermeneutics as a scientific paradigm of inquiry holds specific assumptions about the process of interpretation, in terms of the relationship of the researcher to the phenomenon under study, the type of knowledge that is generated, and the overall research process (Patterson and Williams, 2002).

First of all, hermeneutic epistemology maintains that unbiased observation is not possible; that all observation is dependent upon prior conceptions. This bears significant importance for the role that the researcher/observer's background and prior knowledge plays in the process of interpretation. For Gadamer, humans are historical beings and thus, understanding cannot be achieved without socio-historical influences (Gallagher, 1992); it is achieved with the engagement of the interpreter's concepts and worldviews since one cannot free oneself from traditions and existing concepts. One's past experiences, culture and prior professional knowledge are factors that play a role in scientific interpretation (Chalmers, 1982 in Patterson and Williams, 2002).

Unless the phenomenon is completely unknown, we approach it with a preliminary understanding. Although some interpretive approaches (e.g. phenomenology) suggest bracketing these prior conceptions, Gadamer (2000) conceives prior concepts as having a positive function; they constitute a positive possibility for interpretation as they are the scaffolding upon which understanding is developed. Therefore, the bracketing technique was not used in this study.

This concept of fusion of horizons has significant epistemological implications regarding the role of the interpreter in the process of data collection and analysis and for the data-collection strategies employed within this paradigm. More traditional approaches regard knowledge as an object or entity as independent from social and situation-specific contexts and the data as independent from the instruments used to collect them (Patterson and Williams, 2002). Hermeneutic epistemology, in contrast, holds a constructivist perspective in which the *researcher* and the *research context* play an essential role in the production of data. As for the data-collection strategies, while more traditional paradigms strive for achieving objective judgments, the hermeneutic approach advocates for the employment of data-collection strategies that allow researchers to control and take advantage of the role they play in the production of data, for example, in-depth interviews and participant observation (Patterson and Williams, 2002). In fact, the hermeneutic approach questions those attempts that seek standardization and objectivity as they impose the researcher's concepts on the respondents and allow little or no consideration of the respondents' interpretation of the questions (Kvale, 1983).

While positivist approaches seek to produce context-free generalizable and universal knowledge on the bases of aggregate data which is subjected to statistical analysis, considered the only viable route conducive to making general theoretical claims (Danziger, 1985), hermeneutic research focuses on individual cases or on single occurrences of a phenomenon, thus the type of knowledge generated is contextual and time-specific –rather than universal (Patterson and Williams, 2002). These authors provide two reasons for this particular interest or emphasis. Firstly, it is congruent with its ontological concepts (a context-dependent reality) that suggest that meaning changes from culture to culture, from individual to individual and from a period of time to another; and congruent with its view of human experience (individuals may respond to phenomena in unique and sometimes particular ways). Therefore, hermeneutic researchers do not seek to develop universal theories or laws but rather generate knowledge that is applicable to specific situations (Arnould & Fischer, 1994 in Patterson & Williams, 2002).

The second reason provided by Patterson & Williams (2002) relates to the use of what they call an ‘aggregate approach’ to the formulation of universal statements about an individual’s experience. In their view, this approach assumes that there is an isomorphic structure inherent in the individuals’ psychological processes, which is comparable to the structure of group data (Danziger, 1985). According to Danziger (1985), there are no a priori reasons to assume with certainty that such assumptions are always present. Hermeneutics acknowledges the existence of a structure in the world and endorses a concept of shared meanings (a characteristic that differentiates it from absolute relativism); therefore, commonalities among individuals and/or situations can be expected. Terwee (1990) asserts that if individuals are put together in groups before examining their individual behaviour, nothing will ever be learnt about individual behaviour since the results will be restricted to group averages or a nonexistent average individual. Given its interest on the individual, the hermeneutic approach to the analysis starts with each individual case first and then, at a later stage, across individuals (Terwee, 1990). However, the hermeneutic paradigm acknowledges the possibility of encountering unique cases in which it is not possible to gain nomothetic level insights; only the kind pertaining to the specific case.

Gadamerian hermeneutics metaphorically represents the research process as a circular motion, called the hermeneutic circle. This basic tenet refers to the relationship between the parts and the whole and has several connotations. In its broadest sense, it describes “the way interpretive understanding is achieved” (Gadamer, 2004: 269). In order to understand the whole, one must understand its parts and viceversa (Polit & Beck, 2003). In other words, phenomena are conceived as composed of parts that depend on a larger whole, hence the understanding of the parts is based on prior conceptions of the whole (Terwee, 1990).

The hermeneutic circle also refers to the dialogical interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon under study. The back and forth movement between researcher and the phenomenon and its context is essential for the interpretive process whereby early preconception or understandings are replaced for more suitable ones, creating a deeper understanding and expansion of the interpreter’s horizon (Grassie, 2008; Kvale, 1983). Then, this global understanding is used to examine the individual part. In turn,

the re-examination of the parts may result in modifying the understanding of the totality (Kvale, 1983). This circular process describes a distinctive characteristic of hermeneutics as an approach to inquiry, it seeks to keep the discussion and understanding of phenomena open over time (Packer and Addison, 1989) since its interpretation may change as cultural and historical understandings change and new insights appear. Therefore, the conclusions that hermeneutic researchers draw represent their understanding at the moment.

### ***Research Approach***

For any approach to inquiry to be successful, the methodological decisions need to match the underlying foundations of the selected paradigm. With the purpose of gaining deeper understanding of the phenomenon and congruent with the main tenets of the hermeneutic approach described in the previous section, in-depth investigations of a limited number of entities was considered most befitting to undertake this study as the exploration of single cases provided the possibility to gain comprehensive knowledge of thoughts, perceptions, actions, intentions and environmental conditions, and the multiple cases allowed for comparisons and contrasts of issues emerging in one case to those emerging in another.

For this purpose, a small number of teachers were selected to look closely into how they understood teaching and their teaching context. Each teacher contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon of teaching and was instrumental to understand this particular teacher as well as to gain an understanding of the phenomenon across teachers. Since teaching perspectives and contexts may vary widely, every teacher was studied as a single case. Thus, the unit of analysis was each teacher and their context of teaching as perceived by the participant.

### ***Participant Selection***

Since expectations of student proficiency in English are more pressing at secondary level prior to tertiary education and, taking into account that the majority of Emirati

teachers in public schools are women, in-service female Emirati (IFE) English Language (EL) teachers at secondary schools were the target population of this study. Initially, teachers from the entire country were viewed as potential participants. However, though the emirates are within 1-3 hour drive from the researcher's place of residence, Dubai and Sharjah were selected because of their availability, proximity and accessibility that made the frequency of research meetings with every participant plausible. Thus, a geographical convenience sampling criterion was used. A second criterion for the selection was related to the requirement of obtaining an authorization to access schools which was granted by these two emirates. Since the purpose of this study was not to make generalizations to the whole Emirati female teaching population but to understand types of teacher perspectives that may exist in the population, this convenience element was considered of no relevance for the research outcomes.

Although initially a snowballing or networking sampling strategy had been designed, it proved unfruitful because classroom observation required access to the schools and that was only facilitated through a government- issued written authorization. Therefore, the teacher recruitment was done by approaching schools rather than by recommendation; however the participant inclusion criteria was still used. Schools were selected randomly. It must be noted that none of the schools visited placed any objection to the request to do research (the MoE-issued letter of authorization was shown in every school). No principal showed unwillingness or concerns; on the contrary, they expressed interest and support. It must be noted that not all secondary schools had Emirati English teachers in their teaching staff.

The first eligibility criteria for participant selection were being willing to take part in this study and make a commitment for the length of time required. Varied circumstances were cited by teachers which prevented them from participating: being a novice or beginning teacher, maternity leave, health issues. In fact, one teacher who had initially agreed to participate withdrew after two interviews due to health reasons. The second criterion was having a minimum of three years of experience since teachers needed to have an understanding of teaching and of their teaching context; in others words, be information-rich data sources (Polit and Beck, 2003). Finally, the third criterion was being able to articulate their thoughts and ideas in English. This criterion

did not present a challenge, as initially expected. Most English teachers that were approached had a good command of the English language and spoke fluently.

Since the focus was the individual teacher not the school, teachers from different schools were intended to be selected. However, exceptions had to be made in two schools (that had more than one teacher) since the teachers agreed to participate provided they were both included. Of the eight participating teachers, two sets of teachers worked at the same school and both participated. In one school, when one teacher refused to participate in the classroom observation phase and withdrew (T7i), despite efforts to retain the other, she withdrew too (T6i). In the other school, one was a novice teacher (Tn) who expressed interest in participating and given her closeness with the other Emirati teacher, she was included as a special case (although she withdrew prior to the classroom observations).

Similar exploratory studies of this nature (e.g. Janesick, 1979; Bolin, 1988; Davis et al., 1993; Golombek, 1998) considered two to three key participants adequate for gaining in-depth understanding into their worldviews. Since the probabilities of teachers withdrawing from the study always exists, and the teachers working in any given school may or may not meet the inclusion criteria described above, a 'big net' approach (Polit and Beck, 2003) was utilized. Therefore, the initial pool of potential participants included 8 teachers, of which 4 withdrew prior to the classroom observation phase. The information from these teachers, collected during the background interviews, was only utilized for the nomothetic analysis. Consequently, the remaining four participants generated the core data for this study.

Taking into account the overall goal of hermeneutic studies (which is not generalization but understanding) and the purposeful sampling principle used for this study in particular, the target of this sampling approach was not randomness but identifying and describing 'representative types' (Bellah et al., 1985 in Patterson and Williams, 2002). This implied that each account of experiences and beliefs described in this study represented that of an actual teacher, rather than an aggregate characterization of an average teacher that does not exist. In other words, the data represented a possible type of teaching experience and perspective that exists in the population, not a statistically

generalizable result (Patterson and Williams, 2002). Consequently, representativeness in this study was understood as representative types, not a representative sample that resembled the larger phenomenon within the total population.

As mentioned earlier, hermeneutic research focuses on individual cases or on single occurrences of a phenomenon, thus the type of knowledge generated is contextual and time-specific –rather than universal. This allowed for a small sample and an emphasis on in-depth exploration in which all participants' comments and actions were treated as relevant, not only those made by or observed in several participants. An isolated comment may have been significant on its own when viewed from the overall teachers' perspective.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Although hermeneutic research does not advocate for the use of any particular data collection approach (Patterson and Williams, 2002) and studies of teacher beliefs have been carried out using qualitative and quantitative methods, the selection of methods for gathering empirical material was guided by the ontological and epistemological foundation of the hermeneutic paradigm described above which were directly related to the exploratory nature of the research study, the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the type of information required.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into teachers' beliefs and practices in order to understand what they think in relation to what they do as well as study the relationship between the two. Since beliefs do not lend themselves easily to empirical observation, inferences needed to be made on the basis of pragmatic material gathered through the ways that teachers give evidence of their beliefs, namely what they say (verbal commentaries) and what they do (behaviour). Given this non-directly observable nature of beliefs, a key issue was identifying data collection strategies that allowed this phenomenon to be elicited. However, local cultural norms were also taken into consideration to assess feasibility of implementation. From a methodological point of view, although some techniques (e.g. video-recording) are frequently used in studies

of this nature given their data-gathering power, in this specific socio-cultural context they were unsuitable and non-viable.

Considering the arguments presented above and, following similar in-depth styles of research studies (e.g. Briscoe, 1991; Farrel and Lim, 2005), a combination of interviews and observation methods was used.

### ***1. Directed Conversations***

Getting teachers to talk about their beliefs, thoughts and similar mental constructs is a widely used strategy in the study of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006) and interviews are one of the most common ways to elicit verbal commentaries. It is important to highlight that in the hermeneutic interview, data collection is not viewed as a process of ‘discovery,’ i.e., knowledge of phenomena is not viewed as an independent substance that exists in the minds of others (Nespor and Barylske, 1991) ready to be uncovered (objectivist ontology) but rather it is constructed in the process. Mishler (1986) points out that this knowledge is affected by the interview process, first, by the way that the interviewer initiates topics, listens, attends and participate in emergent dialogue which is central to the respondent’s account, and secondly by the fact that the respondents present themselves in a specific way in front of the interviewer. In the hermeneutic paradigm, the researcher is not only instrumental in the data collection process but is an instrument her/himself.

Given the interpretive nature of this study with a small number of participants, semi-structured interviews were considered more suitable and appropriate since they have the potential to promote more profound conversations and generate data that is qualitatively richer than those produced by structured or closed questions (Anderson and Burns, 1989). Structured interviews were not considered at all because this type of interview is characterized by a predetermined agenda that follows a pre-set course in a standardized and rigorous manner which is incongruent with the hermeneutic approach adopted in this study. Given the nature of the researcher/participant interaction in terms of knowledge construction, these interviews were regarded as ‘directed conversations’ (Charmaz, 1991) which were used to elicit verbal comments. The term semi-structured interview was used in this study with that connotation.



In this study, the directed conversations were guided by a flexible set of questions that covered specific topics, namely the major domains that play an integral role and are essential to the teaching-learning process: teacher, student, and teaching. These topics were approached through questions geared towards eliciting teachers' comments on what they think and do. These questions were not always asked in the same manner in order to encourage the participant to talk openly about topics and add any other issue that they considered relevant to the main subject under discussion (Borg, 2006). Thus, this set of questions was flexible in sequence and in wording. The purpose was to stimulate the discussion of certain topics but without guiding them to express specific meanings (Kvale, 1983). Congruent with hermeneutic interviewing, prompts and follow-up probes were used to seek clarification and follow up on teachers' comments and remarks, inviting them to elaborate freely without the restrictions imposed by a rigid set of invariant questions (Mangubhai et al., 2004).

The verbal elaborations and contributions that the participants made to the discussion sometimes made specific questions redundant as they emerged spontaneously in the conversation. In those cases, the question was not asked again to prevent making the participant believe her comments were not the ones expected. Sometimes questions let to explore unanticipated themes about aspects that were relevant to each teacher's experience; therefore, some topics were discussed only with the participant that raised them. From this perspective, each conversation was unique; however, being systematic and keeping the conversations on-target was also required to cover the relevant topics and gain comparable information across interviews. Thus, an interview guide was used to facilitate and ensure that equivalent information was explored with each participant. Since the idiographic level analysis was the foundation of the nomothetic analysis, this variation was acceptable (Patterson and Williams, 2002).

This conversational style of questions enabled the researcher to establish rapport and develop a relationship with the participants which was necessary to sustain the prolonged period of data collection and the longer conversations required to reach deeper levels of discussion. This rapport and relationship was instrumental for effective field relationships (Glesne, 2006) and for the quality of the inquiry (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Similarly, this type of interviews allowed the researcher to interpret the teachers'

experiences from their point of view, giving prominence to the teachers' voice and fidelity of the teachers' descriptions of their views and practices (Mangubhai, 2004). This study did not intend to take a stand about the truth or accuracy of the teachers' beliefs and understandings but to describe their views concerning their professional world as they viewed it. Whether there was or there was not truth in their perceptions rendered irrelevant as they themselves held them as true.

### **Types of Directed Conversations**

Multiple interviews were held with each teacher over a period of approximately four months to discuss their views, classroom practices and their teaching context.

Interviews were carried out simultaneously with all the participants and were held in a one-to-one manner, including the participants working in the same school. They were treated as separate cases.

Two types of guided conversations were used in this study: background interviews (Borg, 2006), which were held prior to the classroom observation (Phase I of the data collection process) and post-observation interviews (Phase III) which were conducted after teaching had been observed. For this purpose, interview guides were developed to ensure that the conversations were held in a systematic manner in order to discuss the same core topics with each teacher, allowing the researcher to obtain comparable information. As already mentioned, the fact that it was a guide also emphasized its flexibility. Both, background and post-observation interviews were tape-recorded.

#### **a) Background Interviews**

A list of questions was developed for these background interviews. They included literature-based open-ended questions that were organized into three sections. Section 1 was an orientation/introductory conversation to provide general information about the research project (including purpose and significance), answer queries and get familiar with the teachers' background (degree, years of experience, teaching load, school information, etc.). An important purpose of this section was for the researcher and participant to familiarize with each other and establish rapport conducive to achieving a level of comfort and easiness required to facilitate the discussion. Teachers were

invited, through the use of questions, to share details of their past school experiences. The type of questions included in this section was instrumental for conveying to the teachers a clear message of the non-judgmental nature of this study and for gaining acceptance and access to their professional world (See Appendix D, Conversation 1).

Congruent with the existing literature on the areas that teachers hold significant beliefs, section 2 included questions that fell within 3 related domains: teaching (including teaching English as a subject matter), the teacher and the student in the process of teaching (See Appendix D, Conversation 2). To elaborate these questions, existing instruments were used as guide (e.g. Borg's (1998) semi-structured interview schedule). The third section included questions primarily concerning their teaching practices and their teaching context (See Appendix D, Conversation 3).

Follow-up and probing questions were introduced in the course of the conversation which sought clarification and depth of elaboration. These follow-up questions were also literature-based (e.g. Clarke, 1999; Boyce and Neale, 2006) to enhance the quality of the data (Richards, 2006) and ensure they were congruent with the nature of the hermeneutic interview. Because the question guides were flexible, sometimes questions that were scheduled later in the list were asked earlier, depending on the flow of the topics that emerged in the course of the unfolding discussion. Similarly, not exactly the same questions were asked to all the participants. The follow-up questions depended on the topics that emerged in the course of the unfolding discussion and were specific to the teacher who raised them. Some questions were not included in the guide; they were added in the course of the conversation. These questions were intended to seek clarification and thus, facilitate the interpretation process and assist in the task of understanding teachers' experiences from their viewpoint (Kvale, 1996).

### **Preparatory Stage**

This study, as a hermeneutic inquiry, relies heavily on drawing information through researcher-participant interaction. To explore individuals' beliefs, perceptions and experiences requires eliciting rich empirical data. Similarly, interviewing, to be an effective data-gathering tool to elicit verbal comments, requires skills that may not

emerge naturally or spontaneously in the novice researcher. Therefore, mock interviews were incorporated into the research design with the purpose of enhancing the researcher's interviewing skills, specifically, to reflect on the complexities and challenges of conducting hermeneutic interviews, to engage herself in the research process in a culturally-appropriate manner and to get familiar with using herself to elicit information and search for meaning. A secondary purpose was to modify the questions, if deemed necessary (Kim, 2010).

Consequently, prior to starting the data gathering process, mock interviews were implemented with two Emirati English teachers working in secondary schools. These conversations were also transcribed (but neither analysed nor included in the dataset) to review the content generated and to search for possible leading questions and researcher's opinions which needed to be avoided. Researchers (e.g. Pea, 2012) argue that sometime what teachers mean by using certain language when discussing teaching practices may be ambiguous to outsiders; therefore, particular emphasis was given to the language used in the interview guides and throughout the conversations, since unsuitable or unfamiliar words could be ambiguous or lead to misunderstanding or disengagement of the participants.

Similarly, in order to anchor the language (used in the interview guides) in the context of the teachers, the interview guides were discussed with three fluent-speaking Emirati teachers in terms of the meaning of the questions (what was understood by the questions) and word choices (how certain words were used in the local environment and the possible ways in which they could be understood). This feedback was used to improve the questions and it was also valuable for the researcher to keep in mind during the conversations.

#### **b) Post-Observation Interviews**

The post-observation interviews took place after each observation, in most of the cases right after each lesson observed following the commonly accepted premise that more valid data is generated when time between the observation and interview is minimum (Borg, 2006). Unfortunately, in two occasions teachers did not have the time to hold the

post-observation conversation right after the lesson since they had their own class schedule to follow, so the interviews had to be accommodated at a later time. In these cases, the post-observation interview generally took place within a week maximum from the day of the observation. A recount of the lesson was done with the teachers at the beginning of the conversation in order to refresh the teacher's memory and maximize her recall of events in order to facilitate the discussion. It must be noted, however, that the level of discussion in these two instances was shorter in duration and less rich in elaboration since the teachers' capacity to recall events clearly was affected by the time gap between the observation and the post-observation interview.

The main purpose of these interviews was to facilitate and generate further dialogue about teachers' beliefs and understandings under the light of the observed lesson and discuss in retrospect specific episodes of the lesson observed. Having this goal in mind, teachers were invited to discuss their views and elaborate on their impressions regarding the overall lesson, the students' performance and their own, and on specific actions and activities that happened during the lesson (see Appendix E). The information gathered was used to better grasp the teacher's perspective about teaching and enlighten the relationship between the teachers' stated views and opinions derived from the interviews and those derived from classroom practice.

The conversation guide used for these post-observation interviews had two sections: one that included a list of flexible questions to be approached with each participant (e.g. How do you feel about the lesson?, What do you think about the students' performance? etc.) and an open-ended section used to add post-observation questions related to specific features of the lesson observed (e.g. an event or an activity) that stood out as important. In this latter case, it must be clarified that the objective was not to find out what exactly the teacher was thinking at the moment when the episode occurred but rather to use this concrete moment of the lesson to elicit comments and verbalize thoughts about teaching in general (Woods, 1986). In some of the conversations teachers drew from previous experiences to elaborate on their perspectives, beliefs and understandings, not only from the lesson observed. This feature of the post-observation dialogue was acceptable since one of the purposes was to generate further discussion that would shed light on their teaching perspectives.

Previous information collected through conversations and classroom observations were used as ancillary material for these reflection-oriented conversations when needed. The location to hold the conversations was selected by the participants to ensure they felt at ease, safe and confident. They were all, however, held within the school premises (in classrooms, meeting rooms, teachers' rooms, libraries and offices).

Walking interviews were also considered, yet the participants did not volunteer a tour during the first Phase of the data collection process. After the first observation, they felt more comfortable and one teacher offered a tour of the school as we held some informal conversation. Another teacher even made a more exhaustive tour that included rooms and labs for other subjects.

## ***2. Informal conversations***

These were conversations that were spontaneously initiated usually by the teacher, during visits intended to do either interviews or observations. They were more like casual conversations between acquaintances (De Walt and De Walt, 2002) which some teachers were more inclined to get involved in than others. Those conversations that related to the central topics of interest were transcribed and analysed, while those that were unrelated to the study were discarded.

These conversations provided the researcher an opportunity to get involved in a naturally unfolding situation following the teacher's lead, and letting the conversation flow with minimum interruptions. Teachers appeared more comfortable and at ease to speak without the use of the tape recorder. Since these conversations were not recorded, notes had to be taken, if possible, during the conversation or as soon as time permitted. If notes were taken at the time, they were expanded with further details within two to three hours of the occurrence to ensure maximum recall.

## ***3. Classroom Observation***

Classrooms are the location where teacher beliefs are expected to manifest themselves. The interviews revealed the teachers' stated beliefs and intentions, but on their own

they were not enough to fully grasp their teaching perspective and did not allow drawing conclusions about what they actually do inside the classroom. Therefore, the interviews were combined with classroom observations (Borg, 2006).

Congruent with her hermeneutic paradigm, an ethnographic perspective was used to approach classroom observations. The ethnographic element provided the exposure to the participants' professional world that enabled the researcher to learn about each teacher's job and work environment (Fairhurst and Good, 1991). Spradley (1980) asserts that in studies that use an ethnographic research approach, inferences are made on the bases of what people say, the way they act and the artifacts they use (Spradley, 1979), a premise that is compatible with belief inference and hermeneutic interpretation in which theories and concepts are derived inductively.

Observational methods involve the detailed observation of behaviour and interactions by recording what people do and say (Mays and Pope, 1995). Hence, the main purpose was to observe teachers' classroom practices in terms of their behaviours and interactions and, in doing so, gain insight into their acted beliefs which, together with the stated beliefs would allow deriving the teachers' perspective on teaching, both individually and collectively. The second purpose was to establish a relationship between the teachers' beliefs and understandings and their teaching practices and determine the extent to which the teachers' beliefs and reported practices corresponded to what they actually did inside the classroom. Since it is impossible to record everything and important details may be overlooked, a total of three observations were carried out with each participant. The second and third observations were also intended to gather further details.

Although it is well recognized that observation may stimulate modifications in the behaviour of the subject(s) observed, the observational method was still considered a viable choice well-suited for this study because it offered the important advantage of allowing the researcher to look into what teachers do in the classroom and relate it to what they said and, in doing so, circumvent possible biases imbedded in the teachers' accounts caused by a desire to give a good impression or by the influence of other factors (Mays and Pope, 1995).

## **Observer role**

During the classroom observations, a passive-to-moderate participatory observer role (Spradley, 1980) was adopted. According to Spradley (1980), in the passive participation the researcher is present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with the actors. I took a spectator role whereby I took notes and recorded what was going on inside the classroom. In the moderate participation, I reached some degree of participation which provided a better insider/outsider balance that gained me acceptance among teachers and students. This participation depended greatly on the teacher's and the students' openness and on the activities they were set to do.

The teachers and the students knew my identity and what I was doing, namely that I was a doctorate applicant and I was observing English language lessons. Initially I was detached from the classroom activities and the actors involved in them but over time, I became more active as teachers and students acknowledged my presence by interacting with me and showing me what they were doing and, in some cases, by inviting me to participate in some activities (mostly in a student-like role). As my presence and participation increased in the classroom, so did it outside the classroom. Students often greeted me and approached me to have a conversation in English. By the time the observation phase started, I had already visited the school and the teacher at least four times –during the pre-observation phase.

## **Observation Guide**

Similar to the interview approach, multiple classroom observations were carried out over a period of four months. A preparatory session was implemented prior to the actual observation which had as a main goal to get familiar with the teachers' prior experiences in classroom observation, and thus become aware of possible concerns or negative attitude towards observations and minimize them by providing as much information as required and answering questions. A second purpose was for the researcher to get familiar with the observation setting and learn some basic background information about the students in order to envision possible situations that could emerge during the observation.



Taking into account these purposes, descriptive observations (Spradley, 1980) were carried out. The descriptive observation was based on Spradley's (1980) ethnographic approach which, congruent with the hermeneutic paradigm, allows for a more holistic approach to observation. Within this context, teaching was viewed as a *social situation* that involves *actors* doing *actions* and *activities* in a particular location (Spradley, 1980); hence these four components (*actors, place, acts* and *activities*) were considered as central elements for the observations. Similarly, considering that teaching is commonly viewed as a *sequence* of activities, usually involving some instructional *material, intended* to produce or facilitate learning, *objects, time* and *goals* were also included as inherent features of the teaching process. Although most of these elements are self-explanatory in meaning, it must be clarified that Spradley's (1980) concept of *time* referred to the sequence of activities rather than the duration while an *act* referred to a single action and an *activity* to a set of related acts. These elements served as guidance to carry out the descriptive observations (See Appendix G).

Since observation relies heavily on the observer as research instrument to document the phenomenon as he/she observes it, the use of the elements described above allowed for the observations to be recorded systematically using the note-taking technique during and right after the lesson (Mays and Pope, 1995). Video-recording technique was not used since the use of cameras (for video or photographs) is a highly sensitive issue in this socio-cultural environment. The use of tape-recording was deemed non viable as it would not capture conversations with clarity, particularly in group-work dynamics when there were simultaneous interactions occurring in the classroom. Thus, extensive field notes were taken, first in a condensed version, which immediately after the observation were extended into an expanded account of what occurred in the classroom (Spradley, 1980). It is important to mention that to the extent possible, actual teachers' words and utterances were recorded during the condensed field-note taking in order to grasp a sense of the word choices and the terms used by the teachers.

It must be pointed out that the intention of these observations was not to bring out to light any negative implications regarding teacher practices or to assess the effectiveness of those practices on student learning. The purpose was to describe classroom teaching and establish possible connections between stated beliefs and practices.

## ***Interpretive Analysis***

The process used for the data analysis was congruent with the hermeneutic interpretive approach and consistent with the methodological choices described above. Following the continuous whole-to-part/part-to-whole movement of the hermeneutic circle, the analytic process entailed three broad actions: gaining an in-depth understanding of the whole; using this preliminary understanding to explore the parts and modifying the understanding of the whole on the basis of the understanding of its parts.

Terwee (1990) states that hermeneutics seeks understanding by exploring individual cases rather than by examining statistical relations across cases. The search for commonalities and general insights are secondary. Consequently, in order to gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon, the analytic process was done at an idiographic level (per teacher) and at a nomothetic level (across teachers). The idiographic analysis permitted to grasp an in-depth understanding of each teacher's perspective on teaching while the nomothetic analysis allowed grasping an understanding of the phenomenon across individuals.

At a more specific level, the following steps were followed to carry out the interpretive analysis. The first four steps are described in this section (Interpretive Analysis) while the remaining three are the core of the subsequent section (Results). Based on the last step, an understanding of the phenomenon in this particular context is sought and discussed in the last section (Discussion and Conclusions).

- Transcribe conversations and classroom observations (verbatim).
- Develop an index system to reference the location of specific units of text. (This step entailed making a decision on the unit of reference/analysis)
- Identify and mark meaning units in the transcripts (including segmenting).
- Identify themes under which to group the individual meaning units.
- Explain the interrelations among themes.
- Write a discussion of the interpretation that incorporates the empirical evidence that serves as warrant or justification for the interpretation.

- Seek an understanding of each individual (idiographic level analysis), then identify and interpret themes across individuals (nomothetic level analysis).

Following the criterion for trustworthiness (confirmability), the stages and steps followed to do the hermeneutic analysis are made explicit in this section, available to readers and other researchers so they can make their own judgment about the analytic process and the conclusions reached (Clarke, 1999).

### ***Transcription and Segmenting***

Prior to the analysis, the audio-recorded conversations were transcribed verbatim, which is essential for the dialogue with the data dictated by the hermeneutic analysis. For this purpose, a recording system was developed to transcribe the conversations, based on conventional forms of punctuation and symbols used to represent pauses, unfinished or overlapped sentences, added information, and other features present in oral conversation (See Appendix H). The transcriptions also incorporated, apart from the words, the silences, the ‘yeah,’ ‘you know’ and ‘yani’ (‘it means’ in Arabic) phrases used by the teacher.

The first immersed reading that allowed getting a general feeling of the content -as dictated by the hermeneutic dialogue with the data- was done at this stage. Considering that this analysis was not focused on language as communication but on meaning, the transcription in verbatim form in the strictest sense was not essential. Therefore the text was cleaned from these external verbalizations that had no relevance from the standpoint of content (Patterson and Williams, 2002). However, if some of these verbalizations, e.g. repeated words, had meaning (denoting emphasis or importance) they were kept in the text. Since the transcription, the cleaning process and the interviews were carried out by the same researcher, proofing was not needed.

The next step was to create a reference or index system that would facilitate the recording and retrieving of information for the purpose of analysis and presentation of empirical evidence. The development of this system was linked to the process of segmentation, both done without the use of a software programme. Hermeneutic

analysis is based on interpretation for which the segmentation of the text into manageable parts was needed (Tesch, 1990). The segmenting process required making a decision about the meaning units that would allow breaking the text into smaller segments. Taking into account the hermeneutic nature of the analysis, the focus was in the comprehension of the meaning of text in order to interpret underlying conceptions and meaning of actions, not in the discovery of regularities and patterns or in the characteristics of linguistic features. Hence, a *meaning unit* was understood in this study as a segment of text that was comprehensible by itself, which contained one main idea or piece of information and whose phrases required each other to convey its meaning (Tesch, 1990). The meaning units needed to be identified and segmented in such way that they retained their meaning (Tesch, 1990), otherwise they rendered incomplete. This is an example of a meaning unit from Teacher 2 data set,

I admit that teachers are a source of information. We provide information but not like before, just giving and they are just listening. They are not passive now. They are active. They can provide information (T2-A23).

In order to understand the meaning and the context fully, the segment was considered as a whole and not broken down into smaller parts. In some cases, the interview question was included as part of the unit to complete its meaning. Some meaning units consisted of sentences that substantiated more than one theme; hence they were used as evidence for all of them. In the example above, the meaning unit was used and quoted in its full form as empirical evidence for two themes ‘student role’ (active participation) as well as ‘teacher role’ (source of information). The latter domain was supported by the first part of the meaning unit. However, it was not extracted or isolated from its context. It was just identified and coded for both (SV: St Role/Active + SV: Tr Role/Source). Similarly, the meaning units were not extracted from the whole text into a list or inventory, but rather kept within the overall conversation in order to grasp the context in which the segment was imbedded and the context in which the sentences were used.

The meaning units throughout an entire text were identified and coded with consecutive numbers, one data set at a time. The transcripts of interviews and observational notes

pertaining to one teacher were treated as one single data set coded using the teacher's allocated number (for example, teacher 1 = T1; teacher 2 = T2; etc.). For referencing purposes, the different sources of data for every teacher were coded separately. The background conversations were coded as Data Source A; classroom observations as Data Source B, post-observation conversations as C and informal conversations as D. For example, a segment coded as T2, B14 meant that it belonged to data set from teacher 2; source B: classroom observation; segment 14. The numbers facilitated the process of coding and served as a referent for locating and quoting pieces of text (Patterson and Williams, 2002), yet they had no meaning.

### ***Idiographic analysis***

Congruent with the hermeneutic 'whole-to parts and parts to whole' approach, the interpretation process started with the idiographic-level analysis which involved an in-depth exploration of each teacher's narratives<sup>1</sup> to gain a firm understanding of her professional world. The unit of analysis was the text from each teacher's data set which stemmed from the directed conversations, informal conversations as well as classroom observations and field notes pertaining to each particular teacher. In other words, the data derived from the interviews, observation guides and field notes regarding each particular teacher was considered as a whole unit and subjected to independent analysis, treating the data from each teacher as separate units and hence, individual cases. This stage of the analysis served as the foundation for the across-individuals (nomothetic level) analysis that followed.

The final goal of the idiographic analysis was to develop an organizing system whereby each participant's teaching perspective could be organized, interpreted and presented (Tesch, 1990). A distinct feature of hermeneutic analysis is that it offers a holistic and more insightful representation that emerges from the data themselves. Therefore, this study did not use prior notions about how to organize and present the data in order to prevent preconceived expectations influencing what was seen in each teacher's narrative. In other words, each organizing system was unique to each teacher and was

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'narrative' is used in its conventional meaning (a written account), not in reference to the narrative approach to inquiry.

based on what was seen in each narrative rather than what was expected. Given the hermeneutic nature of this interpretive study, the process of developing an organizing system required a holistic rather than a reductionist approach to analysis in which the process of deriving the system constituted the analysis and, at the same time, the organizing system was the product of the analysis (Patterson and Williams, 2002).

The first step of the analysis was to read the text several times as a whole. The purpose of this reading was to grasp a general understanding of the teacher's case in its entirety and gain an initial sense of the main theme(s) running through the texts. Through this initial reading, it was noticed that all the teachers identified or related to an image of themselves that represented how they saw themselves as teachers and concomitantly offered a perspective from where they viewed their professional world. This image was salient and comprehensive, so it was treated as a cultural domain (Spradley, 1980) that comprised a network of concepts and meanings related to other terms and relationships. Each teacher's narrative was first interpreted by the identification of this image, a form of self-representation (Mishler, 1986) of what the teacher conceived her role to be.

Grasping the meaning of this teaching role provided a platform to better comprehend how the teacher viewed *teaching* and grasp personal meanings attached to its various related terms and connections (Spradley, 1980). Identifying this perspective served as the foundation for the deeper exploration of the parts while maintaining a more holistic approach to the analysis, making the meaning of the teacher's related views more apparent and cohesive. The image of this *teacher role* and the central concept of *teaching* served as the main cultural domains for the development of the organizing system that enabled the researcher to present each teacher's teaching perspective.

Once this more prominent theme or image was identified, a deeper exploration of the data followed. For this more detailed analytic stage, two avenues were combined and used for the identification of topics. The research questions guiding the study were used as the starting point, providing the more comprehensive dimension for classifying the teachers' comments into statements that described views or beliefs, teaching practice or contextual factors. The questions used by the researcher to elicit the teacher's comments were considered within the text to derive the topic. The example below

illustrates this first step. Segment (b) shows that the first two lines describe a contextual factor (student English proficiency) while the last 2 lines (in italics) describe a teaching practice utilized in the classroom which were uttered as part of one single commentary.

Text	Dimension
(a) I keep saying to them, “I don’t care about your marks; the most important thing here is your manners because this is what will be remembered.” (T3-A33)	Teacher Views (TV)
(b) Some students are very good in writing but in speaking they are far behind. So it depends. Some of them are useless in all four skills. <i>Like I told you last time, my very good students I let them run the class; they explain everything. Then after I come and re-explain.</i> (T3-A105/106).	Description of Contextual Factor (CF) <i>Description of Teaching Practice (TP)</i>

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the main source for deriving the themes for the development of the organizing system was the data themselves, by using an inductive analytic process. Considering the little extant literature on this phenomenon in the UAE, it was deemed appropriate to abstract all the themes and concepts from the data themselves as a way to represent the meanings that were significant to these teachers and establish the relationships which are specific to this context.

For the development of the themes, headings were written in the margin of the text identifying the topic that text segments talked about (see Appendix A). Using the same example above, the statement (a) ‘*I keep saying to them, “I don’t care about your marks, the most important thing here is your manners because this is what will be remembered”*’ expressed the teacher’s views on what matters to her in terms of ‘goals’ to be achieved and developed in the students. Similarly, statement (b) ‘*Some students are very good in writing but in speaking they are far behind. (...) Some of them are useless in all four skills*’ described a contextual factor that she needs to take into consideration for her teaching practices, more specifically ‘student performance.’ Thus, ‘teaching goals’ and ‘student performance’ emerged as themes. Below there is an example that illustrates with further detail the process of extracting themes from the

text. In order to keep in line with the broad dimensions of teacher beliefs, teaching practices and contextual factors, themes were kept under these broad categories, e.g. TV: Teacher Traits (which means that the text segment described a teacher's view (TV) on 'teacher traits'). For the derivation of the themes, attention was given to the topics and the shifting from one topic to the next, not the content. That was the focus of the subsequent step (Tesch, 1990).

Identification of Themes	Theme (what the text is about)
<b>Q: Describe yourself as a teacher.</b>	
T: <i>I don't like to be too flexible or too strict. I like to be in the middle. // I all the time listen to them, even if sometimes they are annoyed and they don't want the class. (...) I stop the class and sit with them. I try to make them pleased but, like I said, not over. I listen to them; I advise them. It's not all about teaching.</i>	TV: Teacher traits
<i>// I just want them to have a concept in their life that 'I want to learn this language' because in the future, they are the ones who will take over, so all the time I try to teach them this. // If</i>	TV: Teacher Role
it comes to language, we have to make an effort to learn because it is mostly practice, even if there are some personal problems, especially teenagers.	TV: Teaching Goal  TV: Student Responsibility

Once all the main themes were identified, a list of themes was developed for every teacher, called the Theme Inventory Sheet, which included themes from all the data sources pertaining to one single data set (See Appendix C). Each theme that emerged from the text was treated as a cultural domain (for example, *teaching goal, student responsibility, teacher role*, etc.) with imbedded related terms and semantic relationships (Spradley, 1980).

Themes that appeared unrelated to the categories of teacher views (TV), teaching practices (TP) and contextual factors (CF) or appeared to be irrelevant to the questions guiding this study were also labeled (according to what the text was about) and listed under an additional fourth category named 'Others' which was also included in the



Theme Inventory Sheet as they could become relevant when analysing the participant's or other participants' narratives, within the idiographic analysis, or at a later stage during the nomothetic analysis. In such a case, they were incorporated within the final organizing system.

To find relationships among themes and terms within each theme, attention was paid to the content and meaning imbedded in the whole narrative as well as in its specific parts (segments). The latter allowed discovering the specific categories or related terms within each theme which were identified and coded in the data. Abbreviations were used to denote specific content categories. For example, TV: St Role/Act Part stands for 'Teacher Views on Student Role, Active Participation' and CF: St Perf/Poor stands for 'Contextual Factor: Student Performance, Poor.' These content features were then listed under each theme. For example, under the domain of Teacher Traits, one of the participants included the following features:

- The teacher is nice and friendly. (A3-A4)
- The teacher is fair and treats students equally. (A3-A6-A7-A8)
- The teacher is neither too flexible nor too strict. (A79-A81)

Each belief statement was accompanied by the referent number(s) that provided the empirical evidence (in the data) that supported each proposition, which could have been openly stated or inferred. In the case of the first statement in this example, both segments 3 and 4 stemmed from Data Source A: Background Interviews.

The meanings conveyed by the whole narrative allowed capturing the relationship among themes. As explained above, the identification of a self-image that illustrated the teacher's understandings of her role served as the lens to view their professional world.

### ***Nomothetic Analysis***

Although the nomothetic analysis is generally associated with the natural sciences and thus, used in quantitative studies with a statistical orientation, the purpose of the nomothetic analysis in this study was to grasp a deeper understanding of the

phenomenon of teaching by finding commonalities and differences across cases; to find aspects of teacher thinking that were shared among teachers but also identify those that were unique to specific teachers. Attention was given to commonalities and differences by listing all the themes that emerged in each teacher perspective and by comparing them in terms of similarities. In order to judge these similarities or differences, the statements related to each theme were compared in order to capture its meaning, prominence and relationships with other themes. On the basis of this comparison, an organizing system was developed that allowed interpreting and presenting the themes in a gestalt. It is important to highlight that the commonalities did not render themes and concepts that emerged at individual level unimportant or irrelevant for drawing conclusions. The uniqueness of themes, concepts and views contributed to gain a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

### ***Trustworthiness of the study***

Research studies are generally evaluated in terms of the procedures used to generate trustworthy findings. In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is usually evaluated in terms of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Polit and Beck, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and the interpretation of them (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), i.e, it pertains to how well the data and the processes for data analysis address the focus of the study. In this regard, special emphasis was given to the analytic process: to the selection of suitable meaning units -a critical issue that contributes to credibility (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004)-, to the themes derived from the data to ensure no relevant data was excluded and to discerning similarities and differences between themes (using representative quotations from the text). Seeking agreement with experts was not considered congruent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this study.

Common procedures used to achieve credibility are triangulation and peer auditing or debriefing (Polit and Beck, 2003). Arnould and Fischer (1994, in Patterson and

Williams, 2002) argue that in hermeneutics, procedures for establishing validity are not possible because there is no one single interpretation of phenomena; no single interpretation can capture all the elements of experience and all possible meanings, thus the possibility for multiple interpretations always exists. Patterson and Williams (2002) argue that peer auditing, triangulation and respondent audits are incompatible with hermeneutic epistemology as they rely on second interpretations which are equally biased and do not guarantee consistent interpretations.

Another evaluative criterion is dependability which refers to changes in the data over time and researcher decisions (alterations) made during the research process. In this study, the data collection process extended for six months, and to reduce risks of inconsistency, interview guides were used to ensure the same topics for discussion were addressed with each participant. However, these guides were flexible and accommodated emerging themes. For the classroom observations, a guide was used to reduce risks of narrowing the focus of the observation. The decisions made during the research process are described in this document (which mainly affected the sampling strategy and the number of participants).

Regarding transferability (the applicability of the findings to other settings and contexts), a rich description is provided regarding the cultural and educational context of the study, the characteristics of the participants, the data-gathering and analysis processes and a detailed account of the findings to facilitate readers' decision of whether or not the findings are applicable to another context. In this regard, it must be borne in mind that the purpose of this study was not generalization but understanding.

In terms of confirmability of the findings, a clear qualitative trail describing every step of the research process is provided, which includes how the data were gathered, transcribed and segmented, how the themes and categories were derived, how similarities and differences were identified, and how the conclusions were reached. Examples and samples of data recording and analysis (e.g. quotations supporting the interpretations) are included in the document as well as in the Appendices section.

These criteria described above essentially referred to the common procedures used to ensure trustworthy findings. Patterson and Williams (2002) ascertain that hermeneutics

defines its own criteria rather than relying on existing procedures and present three evaluative criteria which assess the findings of the study: persuasiveness, insightfulness and practical utility. Persuasiveness, understood within the context of scientific reasoning, refers to the warrants of the researcher's interpretations, i.e., whether or not the reader, if he/she adopts the point-of-view articulated by the researcher, sees what the researcher saw (Giorgi, 1975). In this regard, as stated under the transferability and confirmability criteria, enough access is provided to the reader to make an assessment of his/her own regarding the interpretation and the conclusion. The interpretations are documented with pertinent examples from the data and thick descriptions of the findings were provided at the idiographic and the nomothetic level.

Insightfulness refers to the research contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon by providing the data in a 'coherent pattern or gestalt' (Thompson, 1990, in Patterson and Williams, 2002). Giorgi (1985) relied on the researcher's insights, who worked with all the data, to get a sense of the whole. The use in this study of Tech's (1990) organizing system allowed the interpretation and representation of each teacher's perspective based on the understanding of the relationship between concepts and themes. The thick descriptions also made reference to the relations and links between concepts.

The third criterion in hermeneutics is practical utility. An implicit assumption of this criterion is that a useful interpretation is one that uncovers an answer to the research inquiry -which represents a shift from the 'truth' of knowledge to the usefulness of knowledge to enhance understanding (Patterson and Williams, 2002). Mishler (1990) describes this criterion as the degree to which other researchers rely on the methods, approach and tradition of inquiry used in the study for their theorizing and research. Detailed descriptions of the ontological and epistemological principles governing the hermeneutic paradigm selected for this study were provided as well as their relationship to the nature of the phenomenon to be studied so readers can make their own judgment regarding the practical utility of the knowledge acquired through this research study.

### ***Ethical Practices***

The endeavour to uncover teachers' beliefs may be considered a sensitive topic since individuals are often unwilling to reveal their true thoughts (Rokeach, 1968). The ethical measures adopted in this study intended to maximise positive outcomes and minimise the possibilities of causing harm or wrong-doing (Sieber, 1992).

The main measure adopted in this study pertained to the protection of the research participants' confidentiality and anonymity which encompassed the use of pseudonyms and the exclusion of any personal information, included in the transcripts and interpretations, that might lead to the identification of the participants. Research participants were also provided with a detailed description of the research study specifying clearly the purpose and the nature of the data to be collected and their rights as participants (including their right to withdraw if desired), so they were fully informed and voluntarily consented to take part in the research study. These rights were clearly stated in the Informed Consent Form which was discussed with and signed by each participant (See Appendix K).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings

The hermeneutic analysis started with an in-depth exploration of each individual teacher's narratives, the idiographic analysis. The purpose was to develop an organizing system which allowed organizing, interpreting, and representing (Tesch, 1990) each teacher's perspective in a meaningful way. The central building blocks around which the organizing system was built were the *teacher role*, used as a lens to look into the teachers' professional world, and the teachers' *understanding of teaching*, which constituted the central or main domain of this study.

#### Teacher 1: Samah

Samah was a High School English teacher who had a non-teaching degree; therefore she had no formal pre-service pedagogical preparation. Although, she never planned to be a teacher, when the opportunity presented itself, she accepted the invitation. Since she had no formal teaching preparation, she learned on the job and expressed being comfortable and content as a teacher. She had been offered promotions within the school system as well other jobs which she had persistently turned down because she felt she had discovered what she wanted to do and to be. She had 11 years of teaching experience teaching all levels from Grade 9 to 12, most of which she had spent in the school where she was currently working, teaching Grades 10 and 11, Art section.

#### *Samah's Organizing System*

##### *Teaching Role*

The significant image that stood out in Samah's perspective was how she perceived her teaching role. It was this role that allowed grasping how she viewed herself and her world. Figure 2 shows the organizing system that presets the main concepts and relationships embedded in her perspective of teaching. Samah viewed herself as a teacher, yet with a personal connotation attached to this role: that of a 'mother,

grandmother or older sister’ who had a close relationship with the students. In her words, “Accept me as your older sister, your mother, your grandmother, accept me and come to talk to me if you want anything’ (T2-A88).

Apart from this statement, other comments provided further insight into her personal understanding of the teaching role and the meaning of being a teacher. In her view, she was a teacher/mother-older sister for her students, playing a role that was much broader than teaching; one that was closer to a family-member who took care of the students, listened to them, and advised them in life-related matters and academic studies.

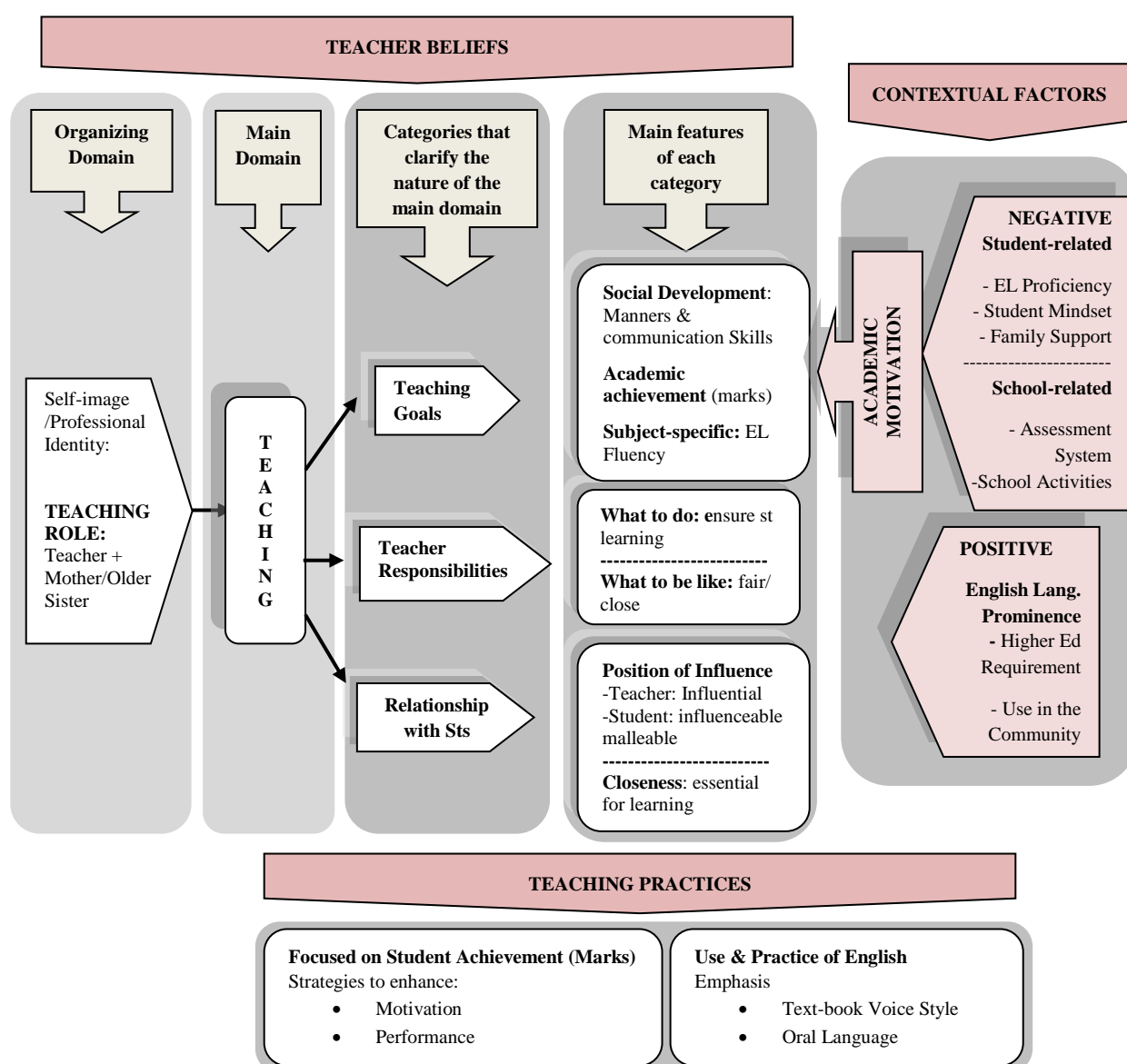


Figure 2: T1 Samah's Organizing System

Her understanding of this teacher/mother role is substantiated by her perception of the setting where she worked. For her, the school was like a family where teachers cared about the students and look after them (see Table 2, Theme 7). This excerpt of a student-related situation illustrates this view:

Like today, this morning. I gave exams a couple of days ago (...). Till today I have two students who did not come. (...) I kept asking them to come, "There is an exam to do. You have your exam." Today this morning, I went to the assembly and I took them from there. I said, "Now you'll come for the exam." This type of thing you will get at the university. Once you are absent, nobody will come after you. I'm not saying only me. All the teachers here are the same, running after them. (T1-A41)

This image of the caring adult who is a teacher/family member seemed to impact Samah's views about being a teacher as well as her perception of teaching and how to bring this role to practice.

### ***Understanding of Teaching***

Closely related to Samah's beliefs about her teaching role was her understanding of *teaching* (See Table 1). Her perception of what teaching was about is congruent with how she viewed her teaching role. For her, teaching was about the more experienced and knowledgeable person guiding the young and immature student. Samah's understanding of the concepts of *teacher* and *student* contributes to grasp this perspective. For her, the teacher was experienced and knowledgeable while the student was young and inexperienced (See Table 2). She viewed the student as malleable and influenceable, and the teacher as being in a position of influence. Hence, the student learns and benefits from the teacher's knowledge and experience. Underlying this view is the assumption that knowledge 'goes from the teacher to the student' which the student receives and accepts.

Samah's view of her teaching role and her understanding of teaching were the main building blocks used for the development of the organizing system presented in Figure 2. The domain of teaching (including the related terms of *teacher* and *student*) was



linked to three other main themes running through Samah's narrative which clarified the nature of the role: teacher responsibilities, teaching goals, and teacher-student relationship. The role that these themes played was threefold. They helped grasp the meaning of *teaching* for this participant; they clarified the nature of her understanding in terms of its conceptualization and practice and they served as the basis for understanding how she perceived and responded to the context.

T1 BELIEFS STATEMENTS: Teaching / Learning	
THEMES	STATEMENTS
<b>1. Teaching</b>	Students learn from the teacher. (A14-A15-A18 ) Knowledge goes from the teacher to the students. (A11-A14) Teaching is more than a teaching role; it is knowledge, communication with the students and having a relationship with them. (A11-A12)
<b>2. Teaching Goals</b>	Developing communication skills and manners is a priority. (A18-A20-A2-A24-A25-C77) Learning to communicate with others, esp. older people, is essential. (A20-A23-A24) Marks are secondary. (A24-A25)  Speak English fluently. (A48 -A49 -A65 -A96) <b>EL Goals</b> Guide the students towards wanting to learn English. (A82)
<b>3. Teaching &amp; Learning</b>	Instructional flexibility promotes student participation/learning. (A46-A47-A50-A73-A74) Extra marks motivate students to participate and learn. (A68 -A69) Socializing with the students improves their disposition to learn. (A54) Simplifying tasks increases self-confidence in weak-language students. (A62 -A73) Weak-language students are more successful at smaller tasks. (A46-A73) Student participation is an indicator of a successful lesson. (A44-A46-A47-A51-A71-A72-A102-C60) In homogenous grouping, the students are at the same level so they work better. (A65-A66)  English is easy to learn. (A35) Fluency is achieved by speaking. (A48-A49) <b>EL</b> <b>Learning</b> Disregard students' errors when speaking improves fluency.(A48-A62-A63) English is learnt primarily through practice. (A35-A36-A63-A83-A124-C25) Vocabulary and grammar rules need to be memorized. (A61) Grammar and vocabulary are important elements in EL learning. (A45) Not allowing the use of L1 facilitates the learning and use of EL. (A75-A77-A78)

**Table 1. T1 BELIEF STATEMENTS - Teaching and Learning**

### ***Teacher Responsibilities and Traits***

Linked to this teacher's perception of her teaching role were her beliefs about her teaching responsibilities, which comprised views about 'what a teacher does' and 'what

a teacher is like' (see Table 2). A key feature that stands out in this participant's perspective is her belief that the latter is more important than the former, i.e., a teacher's personality is more important than her teaching. This belief is made evident by various verbal comments made by the participant.

#### *Her description of herself as a teacher*

I don't like to be too flexible or too strict. (...) I all the time listen to them, even if sometimes they are annoyed and they don't want the class, I don't quite have the time but I stop the class and sit with them. I listen to them. I advise them. I try to make them be pleased but, like I said, not over. It's not all about teaching. (T1-A116/117)

#### *Special characteristics of her favourite teachers*

Their personality, mostly their personality and the way they used to ... It's not about teaching, mostly the way they were dealing with us. They were fair. They were nice with us. This is the things that I was mostly looking at. (T1-A3)

#### *Her favourite teachers' personality*

They were very nice. It's not about the teaching; it's most about the way they used to talk to us. (T1-A7/8)

For this participant there are skills and capacities in a teacher's repertoire of competencies that are more significant for student learning and wellbeing than *teaching*. Within the context of this particular view, the teacher used the term *teaching* to refer specifically to *teaching academic content*. As observed in these responses and others (for example, her description of a good teacher as 'one who can be close to the students and can advise'), the teacher's social skills emerge as a prominent theme. For Samah, a teacher 'is a fair and friendly person who is close to the students; knows how to deal with them and how to communicate with them; listens to them and advises them.' All these features highlighted the importance of a teacher's socio-emotional competences which, for this participant, played a crucial role in the success of the educational endeavour.

Regarding ‘What a teacher does,’ the other component of the Teacher Responsibilities domain, Samah believed that the main responsibility of the teacher is to ensure that students are learning from her. This core belief was congruent with her view of teaching as a transmission process that flows from the teacher to the student and with her view of the teacher as being in a position of influence. This belief also suggested a sense of responsibility for student learning; a responsibility that, according to Samah, does not rest solely with the teacher. In her view, the student should study and learn, should make an effort to learn, even if they have personal problems, and pass the subject, even if they don’t like it (See Table 2). Congruently, her conceptualization of a good student was one that likes studying and learning. Hence, both the teacher and the student have a role to play in the learning process.

Although Samah’s understanding of student responsibility entailed an active involvement on the part of the student, it also entailed compliance and acceptance: to accept and absorb what the teacher offers and to comply with what they are told. As Samah explained, she ‘likes teaching because [the students] are young and they can accept it from [her].’ This view of the teacher as responsible for student learning became more apparent when linked to her teaching practices, especially in relation to weak-language students’ learning. Most of her instructional choices and decisions were based on the belief that they promote learning and maximize weak-language students’ probabilities for success (See Table 3). With that purpose in mind she made decisions and implemented strategies (e.g., provide extra marks, simplify task complexity, and lower expectations).

T1 BELIEF STATEMENTS: Teacher – Student – School	
THEME	STATEMENTS
<b>1. Teacher Role</b>	<p>The teacher is like an older sister or a mother to the students. (A88)</p> <p>The teacher is in a position of influence. (A14-A15-A19-A22-A23-A92)</p> <p>The teacher supports students in all aspects of their development. (A22-A32-A85-A86-A88)</p> <p>The teacher advises students on different aspects of life, not only schoolwork. (A29-A49-A80-A84-A85-A86-A89-A90)</p> <p>The teacher listens to students. (A80)</p> <p>The teacher role is good because she is older than the students. (A19)</p>
	<p>The teacher's personality matters more than her teaching. (A3-A4-A6-A81)</p> <p>The teacher is nice and friendly. (A3-A4)</p>

<b>2. Teacher Traits</b>	The teacher is fair and treats students equally. (A3-A6-A7-A8) The way the teacher deals with students, talks to them and communicates with them is crucial. (A3-A4-A53) The teacher is neither too flexible nor too strict. (A79-A81) The teacher is open to learn from the students. (A53-A92) The teacher has knowledge and experience. (A92) The teacher knows her students. (A131)
<b>3. Teacher Responsibilities</b>	Develop a good relationship with the students. (A16-A52-A53) Make sure the students are learning from the teacher. (A26) Teach students what they don't learn at home. (A22) Support students when there are problems at home. (A88) Help students academically, esp. those who need extra or special support. (A32-A71)
<b>4. Teacher-Student Relationship</b>	Having a good relation with the students is an important aspect of teaching. (A16-A30-A54-A57-A80-A95) The teacher is close to the students. (A15-A16-A29-A31-A52-A53) If the students accept/like the teacher and feel close to her, they are more willing to learn and to talk. (A17-A31-A33-A84-A88) Communication with the students is important. (A53-A80) In the teacher-student relationship, the teacher learns from the students. (A53-A92) Confidentiality is important for the teacher-student relationship. (A87)
<b>5. Student Traits</b>	The student is malleable and inexperienced. (A12-A15-A16-A19-A85) The student is polite and respectful. (A88-A89) The student has good manners. (A24) The student likes to learn and to study. (A117) High school girl students are too young to be talking about relationships. (A85)
<b>6. Student Responsibilities</b>	Study and learn. (A38) Make an effort to learn even if they have personal problems. (A83) Pass the subject even if they don't like it. (A83-A118-A119)
<b>7. School</b>	School is like a family. (A40) At school, students have more chances to learn than at the university. (A39) At school, teachers care about the Sts. (A40-A41-A42)

**Table 2. T1 Belief Statements: Teacher - Student – School**

### *Teaching/Learning Goals*

As mentioned previously, this participant sometimes narrowed the meaning of the word ‘teaching’ to ‘teaching academic content.’ In this sense, she considered the teacher role as considerably broader than ‘teaching.’ From the standpoint of her teaching role, her teaching goals can be grouped into two areas: the development of social skills and the attainment of passing marks, with the former being stated by the teacher as significantly more important than the latter. In her words,

I keep saying to them, “I don’t care about your marks. The most important thing here is your manners because this is what will be remembered. Getting full marks, getting lower grades, this is not important. The most important thing is to know how to communicate with others. (T1-A24/25)

The *social skills* dimension referred primarily to *communication skills* and *manners*. For this teacher, knowing how to communicate with others and having good manners represented crucial skills to develop in all students. The theme of social skills, which had emerged as a central feature of a teacher’s competences, emerged again in relation to the skills to be developed in students, revealing the importance of social interaction in this teacher’s perspective. In this regard, the teaching role represented a possibility which had connotations of social responsibility. For her, the teacher was in a position of responsibility which entailed getting involved in the development of these skills in students, particularly when they came from families in which parents or older family members were not providing parental guidance. The specific nature of this social responsibility is illustrated in these passages:

My role is very good since I’m older than them. They should know how older people communicate with younger ones, to respect [the students], to listen to them, to give them time, to understand them because they are all coming from different backgrounds. I would say that mostly not from good backgrounds. It’s sort of a help, another way they can learn. If they don’t learn it from home, from their parents, from their families, at least they can learn it from us. (T1-A28/29/30/31)

(...) some of [the students] come from a broken house. Maybe the parents are there but not teaching them. I don’t know their background. This is also one way for me to advise them. (T1-A129/130)

These comments also suggest that for Samah, this sense of social responsibility was an inherent aspect of her teaching role. Although parents are the core foundation for children development, Samah believed teachers also have a key role to play in this matter, which becomes particularly relevant when students are deprived of parental guidance or care. This guiding/caring feature manifested frequently in her interactions

with her students as she constantly seized opportunities to provide the students advice and guidance. As an example,

Once the reading passage is finished and discussed, the teacher adds other topics to extend the speaking activity. First she asks whether they are allowed to hang out with friends; they reply negatively. The teacher adds, “*Alhamdulillah! When you finish the university and start working, you’ll be allowed. You are too young now.*” (T1-B23)

These responses, in conjunction with her beliefs that share a family resemblance, suggest that this teacher had a more holistic view of student development which extended beyond the confines of the classroom; a view that conceived the school as a family-like environment and the teacher as a caring individual with a close relationship with the students.

Although the teacher verbally stated that academic marks had little or no importance, the teaching practices described and observed showed otherwise, revealing that academic achievement and passing marks were at the center of instruction. This paradoxical stand regarding the priority of teaching goals was better understood when viewed from different angles. For Samah, passing marks were relevant within the scope of schoolwork and instruction, communication skills and manners were regarded as paramount from the perspective of what is relevant in life. In her words,

Getting full marks or lower grades is not important. The most important thing is to know how to communicate with others. This is life. Life is not about education, about marks, it’s about communicating with others, how to communicate with others.

Several of the teaching practices used by this teacher suggested that she considered instructional flexibility an important component of effective teaching (See Table 3). This flexibility in teaching adopted various forms, yet they all were intended to raise student motivation for learning and ultimately increase students’ chances of achieving good marks. Different expectations, task differentiation based on student proficiency, flexibility regarding assignments (in topics, dates, etc.), optional activities, use of extra points/marks and second chances were some of these practices. Although student effort,

motivation, and good marks are closely interrelated, the last three strategies were primarily used to ensure the achievement of good or passing marks.

<b>T1 Teaching Practices</b>	
<b>THEME</b>	<b>STATEMENTS Samah...</b>
<b>1. Student Participation</b>	Used mini-lessons for student participation, esp. for strong-language students. (C61-C67) Selected students for classroom participation. (B25-B33-B39) Had students do mini lessons to increase participation. (A44-A46-A47-A51- A71-A72-A126-A127-C63-C70) Used grouping strategy to enhance participation, especially of weak-language students. (A64-A104-C4-C11-C12-C14-C78)
<b>2. Student Academic Motivation</b>	Gave extra marks to improve participation and learning outcomes. (A47-A68-A69-C63) Allowed students choose topics for presentations and mini lessons. (A47-A50) Socialized with students to improve disposition to learning. (A54-B42-B47) Gave students second chances to improve outcomes (marks). (A42-A74-A109)
<b>3. Student Learning Differences</b>	Simplified tasks for weak-language students to boost self-confidence and maximize success. (A46-A62-A73-A74) Checked weak-language students' class work individually. (B40) Sat weak-language students near the teacher's desk. (B11) Tutored weak-language students outside classroom time. (C49-C50-C52-C58)
<b>4. Student Guidance/ Support</b>	Taught/modeled good manners. (B2-B10-B13-B43-B48-B75-B80-B84-B93-C77) (Verbally) Encouraged good behaviour. (A49-A55-B21) (Verbally) Encouraged students to respect one another. (A49-A55-A89) Listened to and advised students. (A49-A80-A90-B61) Pursued students to ensure they fulfill their academic duties. (A40-A41-A42)
<b>5. Student Understanding</b>	Checked student progress and offer help during group work. (B24-B38-B57-B106) Reviewed content for consolidation. (C68-C71-B16)
<b>6. Instructional Method, Activities &amp; Resources</b>	Used mixed-ability grouping for classroom work. (B12-B23-B24-B26-B32-B37-B51-B56- B70-B100-B104-C76-C77) Grouped students by level rather than mixing abilities. (A65-A66-C14) Used whole-class approach for instructions, explanations, and reading comprehension. (B21-B22-B31- B35-B37-B62-B87-B91) Used textbooks as the main source for what and how to teach. (A128 -Observation 1, 2, 3) Skipped activities from the textbook (B55-A120-A130) Introduced new activities. (A129-A130) Added complementary information from the internet to the lesson. (A126) Used worksheets for grammar practice. (C62-C69)
<b>7. Subject- specific</b>	Had topic-free conversations to encourage the use of English. (B42-B74) Used L1 to teach vocabulary and clarify meaning. (C5-C8-B23-B32-B63-B70-B97) Used examples, definitions and synonyms to teach vocabulary. (B23-B56-B59-B61-B68-B69-B71-B89-B97) Checked reading comprehension through oral questions. (B66-B72-B94-B99-B103) Gave emphasis to grammar and vocabulary (A45-B16-B22-B23-B56-B59-B61-B68-

<b>Strategies</b>	B69- B71-B89-B97-C23-C24-C25), writing, (C86) and pronunciation (B25-B92 - B95). Gave students the chance to correct grammatical mistakes. (B20-B21-B22-B28-B34-B35) Accepted grammar and pronunciation mistakes during speaking practice. (A48-A62-A63) Discouraged the use of L1 in the classroom to promote English practice. (A75-A76-A77) Encouraged the use of English outside the classroom. (A78)
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**Table 3. T1 - TEACHING PRACTICES**

These practices also revealed Samah's awareness of her students' diverse levels of language proficiency and of her responsibility to attend to these differences.

Differentiating assignments according to degrees of difficulty and student language proficiency level was reported as one of the main strategies used for this purpose, with an emphasis on simplifying tasks for weak-language students so they had higher probabilities for attaining good marks. These practices appeared congruent with Samah's beliefs about her responsibility for student learning. She believed weak-language students are more likely to be successful at easier, less demanding tasks which in turn would have an impact on student self-confidence and their intrinsic motivation for language practice and learning. The more confident the student feels; the more willing and comfortable she is to use the language. By contrast, she gave more advanced students the opportunity to be teachers and deliver mini-lessons. She believed this participatory strategy kept them motivated and served as encouragement for weak-language students to challenge themselves and take on a more active role.

Given the wide range of proficiency levels in the classroom, she used group-work as an important teaching strategy since she believed students, particularly low achievers, have higher chances at success and learning if they work in groups. She believed, however, that homogenous grouping is more effective than mixed-ability grouping because students work better and more productively if all the members of the group are at the same level of proficiency and performance. In mixed-ability grouping, the more advanced students tend to do the work and the others limit themselves to copying the work. Despite this belief on the effectiveness of homogeneous grouping over mixed-ability grouping, she used the latter strategy in all the lessons observed.



Despite awareness and keenness to providing learning experiences suitable to the students' level, in practice, this teacher's lessons fit mostly within the whole-class teaching approach in the sense that all students followed the same lesson at the same pace, doing the same activities and using the same supporting material. Her main source for curriculum delivery was the English textbook - which comprised the student book and the practice book (See Table 3, Theme 6). Although the teacher had the autonomy to modify the sequence and degree of complexity of the textbook activities, skipping and introducing others, she followed the textbooks with a high degree of fidelity, not only in relation to the content, but also in terms of learning activities and their sequence. Her lessons started with a brief introduction of important knowledge or a brief revision of previously introduced content followed by instructions and exercises set for the entire class which the students executed in groups. Group work appeared more like a sitting arrangement rather collaborative work. The students were clear on what they were expected to do, once instructions were given, but did not know how group work functions. In other words, they sat in a group but did not work as a group. Since her lessons were presented in a textbook-and-talk style and no roles were assigned in the group work, participation and knowledge-sharing was strongly dominated by a few more-advanced students, while weak-language students struggled to keep up with the work. For example, instructions and vocabulary teaching were done orally, a strategy that hindered weak-language students' participation and minimized their probability for practice, making their lack of basic knowledge and understanding even more evident.

For this teacher, practice and language use were the key avenues towards English language learning and the main goal was language fluency which is believed to be achieved primarily through speaking practice. Congruent with this goal and in order to facilitate the use of the English language at all times inside the classroom, the students were not allowed to use Arabic inside the classroom. They had to make an effort to speak in English, although translation into L1 was used as a strategy to teach vocabulary and for better comprehension of meaning. With the same goal in mind, grammar and pronunciation mistakes were accepted during speaking practice. Samah believed that allowing students to speak freely stimulated practice and hence, promoted

the development of language speaking skills. Although she believed English is acquired through practice, she also believed that grammar rules and vocabulary are important language elements that need to be memorized.

The centrality of student academic achievement, highlighted in Samah's practices, was reinforced by her description of contextual factors affecting her teaching endeavour. Most of the issues that Samah described reflected her concern for student motivation and academic outcomes (See Table 4). One of these factors was the students' level of English language proficiency. According to Samah, most students were below standards in all four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), therefore few students had an active participation in class while the majority remained passive. This was a major deterrent to speaking and language practice - which was for this teacher the main conduit to language acquisition.

<b>T1 - Contextual Factors</b>	
<b>THEME</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
<b>1. Student Family Background</b>	Some students are forced to come to school. (A117) Some students come from broken homes. (A90) Some students do not have much parental supervision and guidance. (A21-A22-C35) Some parents do not limit their children's access to social networking sites. (C33-C44-C46)
<b>2. Student Mindset/ Attitude</b>	Students think English is too difficult, hence they do not study. (A34-A59) Students think English is a subject like other subjects. (A61) Sts are not interested in studying. (C40-C41) Students do not like English. (C39) Students' interest on social networking (a distraction) (C32-C33-C34-C35-C37-C42-C43-C47-C60)
<b>3. Student Behaviour</b>	Student behaviour is good. (A55-A57-C17) Misbehaviour issues do not occur frequently. (A55-A57-C18-C19) Grade 10 students do not have basic behaviour patterns developed. (C74-C76-C78)
<b>4. Student Proficiency/ Performance</b>	Most students do not study and do not make an effort. (A34-A60-C3-C21-C22-C26-C74-C75) Most students do not prepare for the lesson. (C2-C65-B85) Good students who like to study, to learn and are passionate about it, are very few. (A117) In class, few students are active; most of them keep quiet. (A100-A101-B24-B32-B37-B105) Strong-language students dominate the interaction and participation in class. (B72-B94-B99) Student level of English is low -in all four skills. (A70-A73-A101-A103-A104-C7-C15-C21-C48-C55-C59-C83-C85) Student proficiency in English and in Arabic language is poor. (C27-C28-C29-C85)

	A few students perform poorly only in English. (C57-C58) Student performance in English is worse now than in the past. (A113-C48-C49-C56)
<b>5. Teacher Autonomy</b>	Teacher has autonomy to select activities (C80-C82), materials (C81), sitting arrangement (C13), as well as classroom strategies.
<b>6. Assessment System</b>	Marking system has lowered English standards. (A105-A107-A109-A110-A111-A116) Current Marking System does not assess English language conventions separately (grammar, punctuation, and capitalization). (C84-C87-C88-C89)
<b>7. English Subject</b>	English is not taught properly; more practice is needed to use English as a skill. (A36) English textbook topics influence student learning and classroom engagement. (C30-C36) English is a requirement to access UAE universities. (C54-C56) People, esp. in Dubai, are surrounded by foreigners and are used to listening to English. (A37)
<b>8. School related</b>	The school administration is very good. (A58-A132-A134) The school administration supports the teachers. (A58-A132-A134) Lack of activities to attend to student talents and keep them occupied. (A93-A94-A95-A97) No resources and no proper facilities available for school activities. (A96-A97-A98-A129) The school day is a boring routine. (A94-A95-A125) Deliver curriculum within a definite timeframe. (C65-C66-C72-C79)

**Table 4. T1 - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

A second factor was the students' attitude towards studying and towards English language learning in particular. Samah noted that her students thought English was too difficult and that they were not good at it, therefore they didn't study. She stated that in general students were lazy and did not study, and that those who were passionate about studying and about English, were very few. Consequently she strived for making her subject more interesting and easier, for example, by introducing more appealing topics of conversation, giving less demanding tasks to weak-language students and being flexible about schoolwork.

While the previous two factors, performance and attitude, are inherently related to the student, the other issues raised by Samah were a combination of factors which are linked to the instructional environment, which indirectly affected students. One of these factors was the students' family support or lack thereof. The teacher highlighted the fact that some students were forced to attend school while others had little supervision and/or poor parental involvement in their schooling process; all variables known for affecting student academic motivation.

Similarly, Samah also identified the excessive use of online social networking as a major distracting, yet tempting, factor affecting students' priorities and focus on schoolwork as the time invested by some students in their studies was inversely proportionate to the time spent on online social networks. Some of these users spent long hours, sometimes without their parents' consent or awareness, socializing online, creating a dynamic that ultimately impacted their school performance. In Samah's view, student performance is worse nowadays than in the past because current students do not make an effort to learn and do not earn their marks as they are not investing time and effort in their studies.

Samah's panorama of disengaged students was aggravated by other school-related factors that she believed are acting as hindrance for students making an effort. One of them was the current assessment system. In her view, the way the marking system is structured was fundamentally affecting student motivation and academic effort since it gave failing students the opportunity (in the form of a school project) to be promoted despite their poor performance throughout the year and in their final exams. She believed that the marking system had a powerful effect on the students' approach to schoolwork and their understanding of how much effort is needed for achieving acceptable learning standards and passing. Samah's main concern regarding the marking system was the percentage allocated to exams versus an end-of-year project, in which the latter was given more relevance than the former. In her view, this school project had too much value, percentage-wise, presented low level of difficulty and entailed little learning, yet it provided students -including low achievers- the opportunity to achieve passing grades and get promoted to the next grade level with minimum effort. In Samah's words:

I don't like this way of marking because now everyone start passing. Even if they fail in the exams they are passing because they have 60 marks. So this is like unfair. That's why they are moving from class to class [= passing]. (T1-A152)

30 marks for a project and she has no idea about it. Clueless! (T1-A159)

*Q: And if she doesn't pass at the end ||*

|| She passes. (...) Last year, I said to one of my students, ‘You will fail if you don’t study.’ This year I said the same thing and she said to me, ‘Last year you said the same thing and I passed!’ so I said, ‘You want me to give you exam? I’ll give you time to study. (...) I challenge you to study and pass.’ (T1-A154)

These comments suggest that Samah believed the school project included in the assessment, was counterproductive because it served as a ‘lifesaver’ for failing students with poor performance and a disincentive for studying and making an effort. In her view, the marking system was lowering standards by keeping the students’ English language proficiency low.

A second school-related theme that emerged as an important intervening factor was the lack of variety of school activities and the consequent unattractive boring daily routine students were exposed to. Samah referred specifically to the fact that activities, such as cooking, photography, painting, movie workshops, etc. were no longer part of the school curriculum, nor are fieldtrips. She believed that this type of activities would increase the students’ appeal for studying and schooling.

All these factors, those related to the student and those related to the environment, have been identified in the existing literature as strong forces affecting academic motivation and, therefore, as underlying causes for poor academic outcomes, suggesting that Samah regarded student achievement as an essential part of school life in which academic outcomes, in the form of marks and/or test scores, played an important role.

### ***Teacher-Student Relationship***

The teacher-student relationship was a recurrent theme in this case. For Samah, having a close positive relationship with the students was an essential engaging aspect of being a teacher and a catalyst that stimulates student learning and wellbeing. The centrality of this close relationship for this participant became apparent through various responses to different topics. For example,

#### **a) Words related to *student*,**

With *student*, I would say communicating with them and having a relationship with them. (T1-A81)

b) Characteristics of her favourite teachers:

The way they were (...) talking to us. It was very nice and we were very close to them. (T1-A10/11)

c) Concept of *teaching*,

I do my best to get close to them, especially at this age. It's very critical. If they don't like me, it's not good for me. I'll find them difficult to reach them, to get close to them. (T1-A25/26)

d) Characteristics of a *good* teacher,

One who can be close to the students (T1-A39).

It's very important to have a relationship with them. It's the most important thing. The moment they accept me, it is much easier to affect them, to teach them (T1-A40/41).

Some of the students start getting close to me and then they start studying. Even their marks! I can't say very high but at least they start studying for the vocab, for the grammar. They start doing some effort. I think that's a great achievement. They never even liked to touch the books! (T1-A44)

e) Characteristics of a *good* student

Miss [name] is teaching [these students] now. She has her own way. So this is the thing they miss. Also I miss them. It's nice to have a relation with them. (T1-A78/79)

As observed in these comments, the teacher-student relationship was viewed as central to the success of the teaching-learning process. Samah believed that a positive student-teacher relationship helped boost the students' interest in their schoolwork and served as an incentive for students with poor academic performance, leading consequently to better outcomes. For her, if students feel close to the teacher, they are more willing to invest time and effort in studying the teacher's subject. Similarly, students have a more positive perception of the teacher if she got involved with them and socialized with them. It was this close connection that provided the teacher an entry point into the students' more personal realm, offer them advice and guidance in all sort of matters

(for example, marriage and love relationships). She believed that the fact that she did not cover her face made her more approachable to the students. Similarly, gaining and maintaining the students' trust was integral to this relationship, particularly when students confided in her. This suggests that she was aware of the sensitive position of influence that she was in.

Apart from trust, this teacher-student relationship was composed of time, caring, talking and being there for the students when needed. It is these beliefs that allow understanding some of her practices. She regularly made herself available for the students and devoted time to interacting with them, inside and outside the classroom. During recess she greeted and talked to students who constantly approached her to share stories or anecdotes. She also invested personal time and effort on behalf of the students by giving individual tutoring sessions during her free time. In the classroom, she created and took advantage of learning situations to socialize with the students and offer them advice on a broad range of topics, for example, on expectations and appropriate behaviour for girls at this age. The importance of this relationship for this teacher enlightens her stand on masking her anger when upset with a student and on balancing care and control by being neither too strict nor too flexible; being approachable and friendly yet remaining an authoritative figure.

Consequently, fostering a strong and positive relationship with the students was at the center of her teaching endeavour. She strived for being well liked by the students and for building a positive relationship with them since she believed that students are more prone to get involved and to learn when they like and accept their teacher. Furthermore, she believed it was her responsibility to establish this connection or bond with the students; a responsibility that seemed congruent with her teacher/mother self-image and with her perception of the school as a family. Consequently, being close to the students, communicating with them, listening to them and advising them were viewed as teacher duties that became more meaningful when grasping the essential meaning that the teacher-student relationship had for this participant.

The development of social skills and a close positive teacher-student relationship were prominent themes that emerged in the conversations with this participant. The centrality

of academic outcomes became apparent when looking into the dominant forces guiding Samah's practices as well as her view of her teaching context. These salient elements, in conjunction with her perception of the teaching role, were particularly useful in grasping Samah's perspective on teaching, in terms of conceptualization and practice.

Summarising, the main objective of the education endeavour for his teacher was to develop students who are primarily socially competent, yet academically successful. She endeavoured to achieve her educational goals by building a solid relationship and a strong connection with the students which, she believed, enabled her to perform her role more effectively.

### **Teacher 2: Nura**

Nura was a High School English teacher who had a teaching degree from a well-known local university. Her first ambition was to study medicine, yet she could not pursue this career due to family commitments (marriage and motherhood) acquired prior to the end of her High School years. Given these circumstances, she followed what she referred to as her second dream, education, a choice approved by her husband. Despite being her second option, she exuded commitment and dedication to the education endeavour which manifested in her classroom behaviour, her interactions with the students and the way in which she passionately spoke about her teaching world. She had 7 years of experience teaching grades 10, 11 and 12. She was currently teaching Grade 12, having an average of 31 students per class. Since graduation, she had always worked in the same school where she was the only Emirati English teacher.

#### ***Teaching Role***

Figure 3 illustrates Nura's organizing system that presents the main themes, concepts and relationships that emerged from her perspective. For Nura, the claimed role expressed in the conversations and through her classroom teaching was first and foremost as a *teacher* who serves as *guidance* towards knowledge and whose primary concern was to prepare students for college. She was concerned about the girls' prospects for success in their future university education.



### Nura's Organizing System

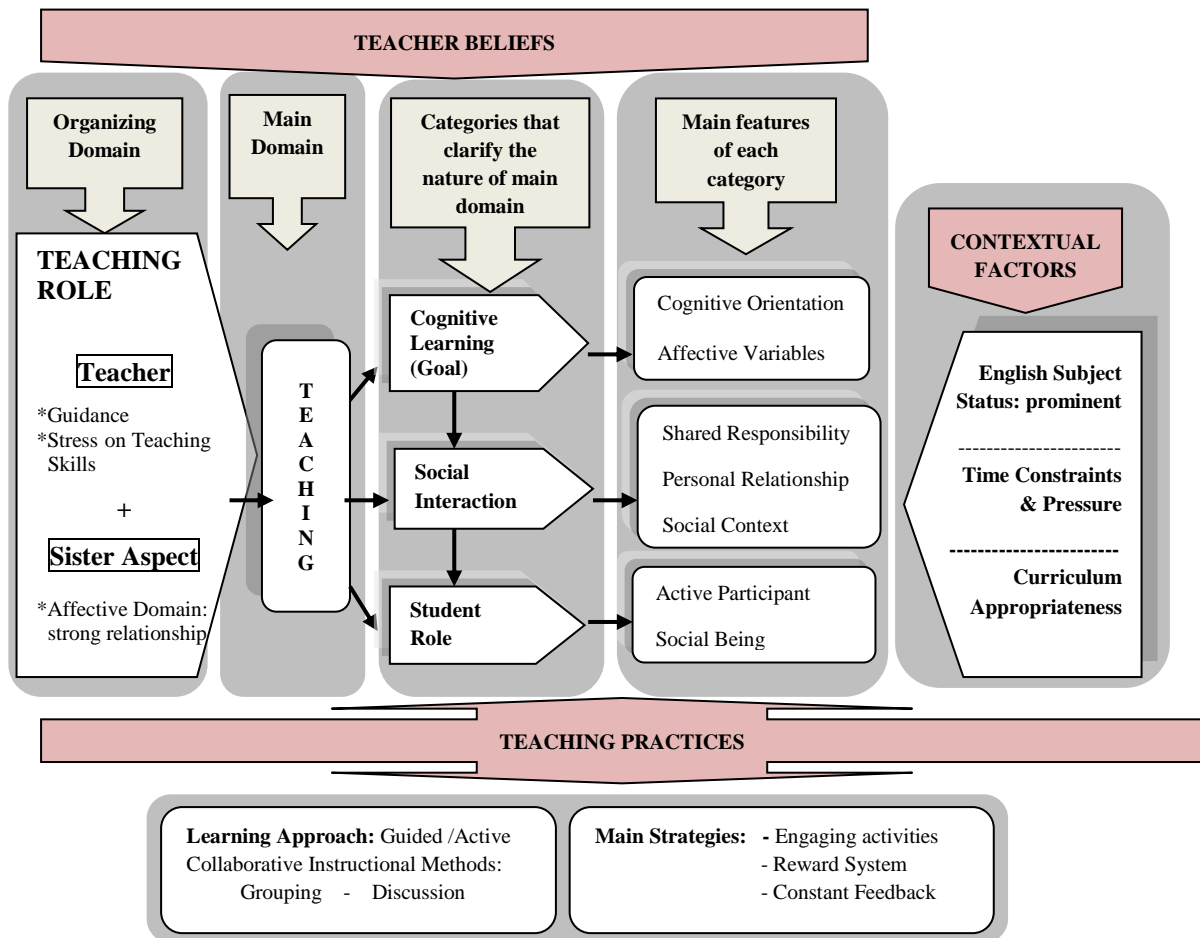


Figure 3. Nura's Organizing System

Her personal understanding of the *teaching role* became apparent through the interviews, but also through her classroom teaching which was markedly focused on student learning. She used a wide array of activities and strategies intended to maximize successful learning. However, her view of this teaching role extended beyond knowledge and information into the realm of morals and values, adding the issue of moral development to the teacher's gamut of responsibilities.

Concomitant with the cognitive and moral elements imbedded in this teacher's perspective, there was a more personal meaning attached to her perception of the role that she played regarding student development which manifested in the course of our conversations: that of a *sister or a friend* who listened to the students' problems and

had a strong relationship with them. The personal significance of this aspect of her teaching role was expressed by this teacher in the following way:

It's not a relationship like a teacher and students. I feel really [it's] a social interaction between friends, between sister and sister. Sometimes I tell them, "If you want me to be your mother, I'll be your mother." This is what I feel is teaching. (T2-A22)

This comment highlights a distinctive feature of Nura's conceptualization of her teaching role: her flexibility and openness to adapt to students' needs and be what they wish her to be. In other words, she is willing to accede to the identity ascriptions of her students, a feature that seemed congruent with her view of attending to students' affective needs (discussed further on). In contrast to the other participants who viewed their role as self-defined and stable, Nura conceived it as adaptable. This feature of the teacher role also appeared congruent with the attributes that she conceived for the teacher, i.e., being capable of adapting to students and contents (see Table 6, Theme 2) and congruent with her practice of giving voice to students (see Table 7a, Theme 4).

This flexibility also showed her awareness of the many roles she believes she plays with regards to the students. For Nura, the teaching role was multi-faceted. She viewed herself as a *teacher* with a *sister-friend* component. While the *teacher* facet of the role focused on student learning, the *sisterly* facet entailed a care-giving role and a closer connection with the students which was infused with a legitimate concern for the student emotional wellbeing. Although this *sisterly* facet provided insight into what it meant for Nura to be a teacher, this close connection was interpreted from a teaching perspective. In other words, this emotional aspect suggested that, for this teacher, there was also an *affective orientation* to the actual teaching experience which was viewed as necessary accompaniment to cognitive learning. As stated by Nura,

They are not going to accept any information I am going to give or guide them to. I let them to be happy from inside, to clear out any problems that they have. At least, if I cannot help them to fix it, let them to speak, to feel relaxed, then to be able to observe what I want to say. (T2-A19)

This comment suggests that Nura was aware of the significant implications of negative emotional states for teaching and learning, regardless of whether the source of those negative experiences was related to the school or carried into the school by the students. Since she felt responsible for the student cognitive development, she believed that she should also manage student emotions in order to enhance likelihood that they will engage in learning.

From this perspective, the issue of student readiness emerges as a precondition to learning, suggesting that she believed students learn better when they are emotionally ready, facilitating the teaching/learning process. In other words, emotions tend the door to learning. The theme of affective factors reappears in this teacher's view of teaching/learning and in her approach to instructional practices, establishing a semantic relationship between a network of concepts (teaching, learning, teacher role, and student role) which in turn are related to her teaching practices -which are discussed in the following section.

T2 BELIEFS STATEMENTS: Teaching / Learning	
THEME	STATEMENTS
<b>1. Teaching</b>	It's a social interaction between one person, the teacher, and a group of people, the students. (A14) An interaction between sisters. (A22) Guidance for students to find sources of knowledge. (A15) Teaching is more than providing information. (A16)
<b>2. Teaching Goals</b>	Provide knowledge, morals and values. (A14) Prepare students for college. (A11-A13)
<b>3. Learning</b>	Learning is a shared responsibility between the teacher and the students. (A26-A29-A57) Students learn better when they actively participate in the learning process. (A24-A25) Emotional states affect student readiness for learning. (A19) In the teaching-learning process, student and teacher learn from each other. (A28-A30) Learning is a process in which the students get information. (A29) Rewards improve student motivation and performance. (C3) Motivation and participation are indicators of a good lesson. (C1-C15)
EL	English language learning is cumulative. (A10)
Learning	In English language learning, the same skills are taught every year. (A10)

**Table 5. T2 - BELIEFS STATEMENTS – Teaching and Learning**

## *Understanding of Teaching*

This *teacher/sister* role, which served as a lens to view this participant's professional world, was closely related to her understanding of *teaching* which appeared to shape her instructional practices in important ways. The nature of this role manifested in her understanding of what *teaching* entails. In her words, "teaching is more than providing information", it is also about "providing morals and values" (See Table 5, Theme 1 & 2). She believed that knowledge, morals and values were the content of *what to teach*.

T2 - BELIEFS STATEMENTS: Teacher and Student	
THEMES	STATEMENTS
<b>1. Teacher Role</b>	<p>The teacher is like a sister or a friend to the students. (A22)</p> <p>The teacher talks to students and listens to their problems. (A17-A18-A19-A20)</p> <p>The teacher guides the students to the sources of knowledge. (A15)</p> <p>The teacher is a source of information. (23)</p>
<b>2. Teacher Traits</b>	<p>The way of teaching/teaching style is important for the teaching endeavour. (A4-A5)</p> <p>The amount of information provided and the clarity of explanation are important teaching skills. (A5-A7)</p> <p>The teacher invests time and effort in enriching student learning. (A35)</p> <p>The teacher is knowledgeable and updated. (A37)</p> <p>The teacher is open-minded and flexible, able to adapt to different settings and students. (A37)</p> <p>The teacher is sensitive and cares for her students. (A20-A21-A22-A56-A59-A31-A32 -A64)</p> <p>The teacher makes the lesson fun. (A35)</p> <p>The teacher learns from her students. (A28-A30).</p>
<b>3. Teacher Responsibilities</b>	<p>Teach knowledge, values and morals. (A14- A16)</p> <p>Care for the students. (A20-A59)</p> <p>Prepare students for college. (A11-A13)</p> <p>Listen to the students and support them. (A17-A18-A19)</p> <p>Pay attention to students' different abilities and learning styles. (A59)</p> <p>Maximize probabilities for student learning. (B14-B15-B18-B22 )</p>
<b>4. Teacher Relationship with students</b>	<p>Strong relationship between teacher and students. (A18)</p> <p>It's more than a teacher/student relationship, it is a relationship between sisters.(A22)</p> <p>The teacher knows when the students are sad. (A18)</p>
<b>5. Student Traits</b>	<p>The student is an active participant, not a passive recipient. (A23-A24-A29)</p> <p>The student is curious and eager to learn. (A27-A33)</p> <p>The student is independent, creative and with initiative. (A34)</p> <p>The student is smart and hardworking. (A33-A34)</p> <p>Every student matters -student inherent value. (A20).</p>
<b>6.</b>	To seek knowledge. (A34)

<b>Student Responsibilities</b>	To participate in class and enrich the lesson. (A34) To take an active role in their learning. (A34)
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**Table 6. BELIEFS STATEMENT: Teacher and Student**

Nura understood teaching as a “social interaction between a teacher and the students, and more specifically, as “an interaction between sisters” (See Table 5, Theme 1). These statements have implications for grasping the way that she viewed *learning* as well as the *teacher* and the *student* roles. The first part of this perspective of teaching as a *social interaction* suggests an underlying belief that *learning* happens in a social context and that the students learn through their interactions with others, namely the teacher and their peers. In other words, the student interactions facilitate and shape their learning. Therefore, as a teacher, she played a crucial role in shaping these social interactions and in creating situations for them to occur. The structured activities prepared for the observed lessons put forward the assumption that she was to some extent aware of the importance of the quality of classroom activities and the significance of student interaction for language learning.

The relevance assigned to social interaction is congruent with the instructional methods used by this teacher to promote group work. She facilitated student interaction in well thought-out activities in which roles were assigned to the students while she monitored and assessed their work. Most group activities involved varying degrees of group discussion which was the main instructional technique used to foster the sharing of ideas and information among the students. She also used it to promote student participation and enhance understanding, as observed in these examples,

The teacher asks the students to discuss in groups what they understood from the video and identify the reasons why dogs are smarter than cats. (T2-B15)

The teacher hands out a blank chart to each group for them to complete. They discuss in groups to choose a topic and two elements for comparison. (...) The teacher walks around and helps them find comparison points for their topic. (T2-B20)

The teacher projects the words on the board which appear/disappear very quickly. The students look at them attentively. At the end, they excitedly start

writing down as many words as they can remember. Everyone in the group tries to contribute in order to win. The teacher asks them to put down their pen and count how many words each group got. (T2-B34)

The second part of this teacher's perspective of teaching, 'an interaction between sisters,' suggests that, congruent with the teaching role described above, she viewed teaching as deeply-seated in personal relationships which for her were an important element embedded in the teaching endeavour. The metaphorical figure used to characterize the teacher/student relationship -that of *sisters*- alludes to the personal features attached to this unique relationship: close, supportive and meaningful. These qualities manifested in this teacher's behaviour (she was sensitive and caring) and in her beliefs about the importance of a welcoming environment which she endeavoured to permeate with positive attitude by paying attention to her students' emotional state, interests, motivation, self-confidence, and by bringing creativity and fun into the classroom (See Table 7a).

This view of *teaching* can be more fully grasped when interpreted from the standpoint of *learning* and the role of the *teacher* and the *student* within the learning process. These three concepts are closely intertwined in this teacher's perspective; hence they help clarify the nature of her understanding.

<b>T2 - TEACHING PRACTICES Part 1</b>	
<b>THEME</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b> <b>Nura...</b>
<b>1. Student Participation</b>	Uses mini-lessons/presentations for student participation. (A24-B25-B26-B61-B65-B68) Calls on students for classroom participation. (B16-B17) Encourages student participation by assigning roles. (B16-B23)
<b>2. Student Academic Motivation</b>	Accommodates student interests by introducing their preferred activities into the curriculum. (A71) (Verbally) encourages positive attitude towards school work. (A21) (Verbally) Boosts student self-confidence. (A31-A32) Highlights teacher-student mutual influence on each other's performance. (A57) (Verbally) boosts student self-confidence to improve performance. (A31-A32) Gives opportunities to enhance student sense of self-efficacy through classroom activities. (A52- A54) Constantly rewards student performance, using words of recognition (B32-B34-B41-B69-B76), peer recognition (applause) (B35-B38-B64-B69-72) or prizes (B27-C3-C17-C18) Uses engaging activities that capture student interest. (A46-A85-B34-B40-C14) Gives students freedom for group formation and preparation of presentations. (B63-B65)

	-B68-D4) Considers student input in terms of learning needs and preferences. (A12) Use of motivational phrases depicted on the walls of the English Room. (B60)
<b>3. Student Learning Differences</b>	Provides support to weak-language students during class work. (A51-B16-B23 -B46) Uses encouraging words to boost weak-language students' self-confidence. (A32) Assists students during class work, esp. weak-language learners. (B15-B21-B23-B46) Uses mixed-ability grouping to avoid labeling. (C5-C6-Observation 1, 2, 3)
<b>4. Teacher Self-Evaluation</b>	Uses student satisfaction and appreciation as indicators of effectiveness. (A55-A56) Uses parent feedback as referent to assess her effectiveness. (A63-A64) Asks for student input and feedback to help her meet their needs. (A12)

**Table 7a. T2 - TEACHING PRACTICES – Part 1**

### *Teacher and Student*

Two themes were linked to Nura's personal definition of *teacher*: teaching skills and guidance. Within the former, this participant emphasized the way a teacher teaches, her teaching style and the effort invested in delivering information in a right and enjoyable way. In other words, the teacher's ability to teach and to make it enjoyable stood out, but also her willingness to put in the necessary effort to do so. The range of activities observed in her classroom suggest that this teacher devoted time to prepare for class; that she put thought into the planning and preparation phase, which constitute evidence conducive to think that she cared about student learning. This practical orientation of her view comes with specific traits like being knowledgeable and updated as well as open-minded and flexible -capable to adapt to different settings and students. These traits support an emphasis on knowing what and how to teach.

Regarding the second theme, Nura viewed the teacher as *guidance* to knowledge rather than as *source* of knowledge. Her personal view of the *teacher* was that:

(...) students think of us like a source of knowledge but in my point of view, I think we are just guidance. We guide them to find the source of knowledge that they think we have. This is what I feel. (T2-A15)

This perception suggests a focus on a guiding role in which the teacher guides the students towards knowledge, and more specifically, towards knowledge *actively* acquired. In practice, this belief of guiding learning translated into a pedagogical approach in which she took the most significant decisions (about the lesson's learning

goals and the strategies used as well as the measurement of outcomes, the provision of feedback and rewards) while the students took part in a series of activities geared towards processing content, mainly interacting, applying and sharing. Through active learning strategies, the students were invited to read, listen, play, discuss, describe, analyse and reflect upon the material to which they were exposed. Given this active learning approach, this teacher keenly promoted classroom participation by stimulating student discussion, having them work in groups and share information, assigning them group roles, calling on students, getting them to answer questions, make presentations and mini-lessons (See Chart 7b).

A second theme related to affective factors and one that may also be linked to student participation which emerged in the conversations and the classroom observations: student motivation. This theme, together with student emotions, was believed to be gatekeepers to learning. Diverse strategies were used by this teacher to enhance academic motivation, from boosting student self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy to rewarding student performance and designing engaging activities (See Table 7a). An important contextual theme related to academic motivation.

Apart from these strategies observed in her classroom practices, the implication of the student being *actively* involved was manifested in this teacher's verbal commentaries,

Learning is a process where [students] get information but they share in getting this information. It is not ready-made information they just get in, gain. They help in getting it. (T2-A29)

I admit that teachers are a source of information. We provide information but not like before, just giving and they are just listening. They are not passive now. They are active, they can provide information. (T2-A23)

I expect that whenever there is something that they don't understand, they'll ask about [it]. If there is further area of investigation, they will go and look for information, bring it, and share it with the whole class. Whenever there is a project or small activities, (...) they will show very creative things. (T2-A27)

As suggested here, she viewed the *student* as an active participant in the learning process who constructs her understanding of the content that she is exposed to; a



participant who is creative, curious and eager to learn as well as independent and with initiative. This curiosity and eagerness to learn manifests in a desire to inquire about what they do not understand, search for further information, and contribute to enrich the learning process. Consequently, for Nura, teacher and student had an active role in the teaching/learning process.

Congruent with this active involvement approach, Nura believes students have the ability to monitor their own learning and therefore are able to discern their own level of understanding, which is why she invested time in having students acknowledge when they do not understand (See Table 7a).

<b>T2 - TEACHING PRACTICES (Cont'd)</b>	
<b>THEME</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b> <b>Nura ...</b>
<b>1. Lesson Prep &amp; Delivery</b>	Prepares resources, activities and assessment before the lesson. (A83-C8)) Includes warm-up, revision, core activities, and wrap-up in her lesson. (Observations 1-2) Incorporates assessment activities into the lesson. (A46-A49) Adapts lesson plan during implementation if needed -unforeseen circumstances. (C8-C9)
<b>2. Instructional Method</b>	Uses grouping strategy for projects and presentations. (A24-D22 -Observation 3) Uses individual (B40-B42) and grouping instructional methods for classroom work. (A46-A82-B3-B9-B10-B15-B20-B22-B23-B29-B34-B37-B46-B48-B50-B58-B66-B70) Assigns roles to students for group work. (B16-B24-B61-B67-D6) Uses group discussion to facilitate the sharing of ideas, information and understanding. (B16-B21-B34-B37-B44-B46-B48) Constantly monitors and assesses the groups and their work. (B20-B23-B37-B44)
<b>3. Learning Strategies</b>	Explains content, supported with visual aids, and followed with application. (B44-B45-B47-B52) Constantly checks student progress and provides assistance during class-work. (B20-B22-B37-B46) Constantly checks student understanding, namely, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comprehension of instructions -through questions and paraphrasing (B36),</li> <li>- knowledge application during task development (B20-B23-B46),</li> <li>- and outcomes -through task review (B17-B18-B25-B26-B39-B41-B47-B49)</li> </ul> Asks the students about their level of understanding (meta-cognitive skill). (A51) Does constant content revision for understanding and consolidation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at the beginning (B13-B32-B34-B35),</li> <li>- in the middle (B18-B22) and</li> <li>- at the end of the lesson (B54)</li> </ul> Has students present and share results/findings with the class. (B17-B25-B39-B47-B49) Gives instructions verbally and supports them with visual aids and examples to ensure understanding. (B13-B14-B19-B33-B36-B39)

	Plays audio material more than once. (B15) Discourage use of L1 in the classroom. (C17-C18) Implement variety of activities for student work (presentations, listening comprehension, games, watching videos, essay writing, data analysis, etc). (B15-C34-B40-B61-B67) Uses various strategies and resources (competitions, internet, audio material, grouping, realia, etc.) for classroom activities.
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**Table 7b. TEACHING PRACTICES Part 2**

### ***Learning***

Following this conception of the student role, we grasp that for Nura *learning* was an active search for knowledge and meaning which is done by the student under a teacher's guidance whereby he/she constructs knowledge rather than receives it passively. Hence, learning is a process done by the students who, as intrinsic social beings, are able to enhance learning by cooperating and sharing with one another. She believed that learning is actively acquired through social interaction with the teacher and among students –consistent with the belief that *learning* happens in a social context and congruent with the instruction method used in the classroom for student work - students worked primarily in groups. The fact that learning is a process of active search and social construction done by the student but guided by the teacher seem to substantiate her belief that learning is a shared responsibility.

Compatible with this connotation of *guidance* attributed to the teacher role is this teacher's belief that learning requires frequent feedback, revision and practice to be internalized and retained, which is why she engaged in a recurring process of assigning tasks for content application, checking understanding, and rewarding student performance. Her lessons were planned in advance and organized around core activities that started with a warm-up and ended with a wrap-up. These core activities were in turn structured in a sequence of instructions, application, and task review, accompanied by constant feedback in every step. Providing feedback involved checking comprehension of instructions, supervising tasks and revising task findings or outcomes. Similarly, during the lesson she regularly previous required content to facilitate the development of tasks (See Table 7b).

The previous theme of frequent feedback, revision and practice provided insight into an underlying focus on *cognitive learning* which appeared substantiated by this teacher's commitment to student understanding. This became apparent through the strategies used to maximize understanding for all the students, including differently-abled and weak-language learners. For example, Nura explained content, supported with visual aids, and followed with application. She also used visual aids to give instructions and provided examples to illustrate procedure; she played audio material more than once; and she constantly checked student progress and provided assistance during class-work (See Table 7b).

In summary, in Nura's practices, *teaching, learning, teacher* and *student* formed a network of closely entwined concepts that allowed us to understand how she made sense of her teaching world and how she brought it into practice. Her beliefs about *teaching* appeared directly linked to how *learning* takes place while the role of the *teacher* in the teaching/learning process was linked to that assigned to the *student*.

### ***Contextual Factors***

As described in the account above, the cognitive and affective domains were at the centre of this teacher's endeavour. Keeping this as backdrop, four themes emerged as contextual factors affecting Nura's teaching experience (See Table 8). One can be described as conditions to be taken into account for teaching; the second one can be considered as a positive factor that facilitated teaching/learning, and the other two as negative factors that portend obstacles or barriers.

The first theme was student characteristics which described the main features of the students she was responsible for. Nura described them as lively, creative and caring students who have well-developed behaviour patterns and, in general, with good performance. She acknowledged that their interests had a technology orientation rather than schoolwork; and that they preferred more hands-on activities and discussion. She was aware of proficiency levels and self-confidence issues in her classroom. These features were not regarded by the teacher as neither positive nor negative but rather as entry behaviours that she needed to take into consideration.

<b>T2 - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS</b>	
<b>THEME</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
<b>1. Student Characteristics</b>	<p>The students are active, lively, and creative. (A70-C4)</p> <p>The students care for the teacher and show her appreciation. (A55-A56-A64-C8)</p> <p>Some students lack self-confidence. (A32)</p> <p>Students are not very interested in learning, they have other interests. (A68-A69-A73-A74)</p> <p>Students prefer more hands-on activities and discussion, (A75)</p> <p>Students' classroom behaviour patterns are well-developed. (A10)</p> <p>There are weak-language students as well as high achievers in the classroom. (A50-A87-C24-C25-C26-D15-D18)</p> <p>Student performance is good. (A28-A28-A30-31)</p> <p>There are students who are special cases (C20-C21)</p>
<b>2. Subject Status</b>	<p>English is given prominence by education authorities. (A42)</p> <p>English is treated as important as Arabic. (A38-A43)</p> <p>English is now taught starting in Grade 1. (A42)</p> <p>English is a compulsory requirement to access higher education. (A44)</p> <p>Constant training is given to the English teachers. (A43)</p> <p>English has high prestige. (A38)</p>
<b>3. Curriculum Appropriateness</b>	<p>The curriculum given fits a defined timeframe, so there is no space to introduce other content. (A24-A45)</p> <p>The curriculum does not target daily vocabulary but rather specialized terminology. (A40)</p> <p>The textbook topics are not motivating and engaging for the students. (A53-A75-A92)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The textbook topics do not meet students' interests. (A40-A41-A90-A92-A93)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The textbook topics are not related to local culture. (A39-A90-A92)</p> <p>The teacher is not satisfied with the textbook topics. (A90)</p> <p>Teacher has no autonomy to modify the curriculum and introduce other college-oriented materials. (A45)</p> <p>But she has autonomy to enrich the lesson in terms of activities and resources and adapt the level of difficulty. (A84-A86-A87)</p>
<b>4. Time Constraints &amp; Pressure</b>	<p>Pressure to meet deadlines, particularly at the end of the semester. (A66)</p> <p>The teacher has too many administrative and non-teaching responsibilities that take time away from teaching. (A60-A61-A94-C6-C20-D1-D8)</p> <p>e.g. Attend conferences and training -which has an impact on teaching time. (A43-C8-D8)</p> <p>e.g. Head or be part of school committees. (C6)</p> <p>Without prior notice, the school sometimes modifies the schedule for the day to accommodate a special activity, shortening the duration of the class periods. (A48-D2)</p> <p>The education authorities sometimes shorten the school calendar right before exams, causing problems to finish the curriculum. (A67).</p> <p>There is lack of system stability and constant changes (e.g. in curriculum) which happen regularly, causing confusion and stress. (A62)</p> <p>Pressure from colleagues to concede English class hours. (A95)</p> <p>Need to work at home due to lack of time at school. (C12)</p>

**Table 8. CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

The second theme was related to the prominent status of English as subject and as language. In her view, English was given high priority by education authorities, treating it as a subject that was as important as Arabic (taught from Grade 1 and providing constant training for English teachers) and has become a compulsory higher education requirement. In her view, the prominence and priority given to the English subject serve as favourable conditions to promote the learning of the language.

By contrast, the next two themes had a negative connotation as they worked as obstacles to teacher effectiveness. One of them was related to curriculum, more specifically content appropriateness combined with lack of teacher autonomy to introduce modifications to it. She highlighted that the textbooks were a major detriment to student motivation as the topics included in them were not engaging; they did not relate to the students' interests or to their culture, making it more challenging to capture the students' attention. The curriculum is determined by the textbooks whose learning units are expected to be taught within a defined timeframe, leaving no space for adding other topics or content. Furthermore, teachers have no autonomy to modify it.

The next negative factor emerged as a prominent reiterative theme throughout the conversations with this teacher and the observations: time constraints and consequent pressure upon the teacher. In Nura's view, several other related issues contributed to this effect; the most important being the considerable amount of non-teaching responsibilities assigned to teachers which took time and energy away from teaching (for example, heading or being part of school committees and attending conferences and training sessions). Pressure was the most salient experiential dimension of teaching for Nura which had such relevance and impact upon her that she had seriously considered leaving the job.

After stopping the recorder, the teacher continues talking about the excessive amount of administrative requirements and tasks assigned to the teachers. She shares that initially she was very motivated to be a teacher but nowadays she feels like resigning because of the amount of other duties and responsibilities that take away time from teaching. (T2-D1)

Other contributing factors causing teaching time constraints and pressure upon the teacher, was the regular and unexpected changes introduced to the school daily timetable (to accommodate special activities) and the last-minute modifications introduced to the annual calendar, both reducing teaching time and increasing the pressure to meet deadlines. Within this context, Nura made reference to the lack of stability in the education system and the consequent changes frequently introduced to it, causing confusion and stress. This stressful situation was augmented by colleagues' requests/demands to concede English hours to finish their own subject curriculum. All these factors converged at a central point: the amount of teaching/learning time and the pressure to manage teachers' responsibilities within constricted timeframes.

As described above, Nura viewed herself essentially as a teacher, with a sister facet that cared for the students' well-being. She viewed teaching with a clear cognitive dimension but also with an accompanying affective orientation that could enhance or hinder learning. For her, learning occurred as a result of social interactions in which the students had to play an active role. She used grouping as the main instructional method and emphasized the implementation of engaging activities in which she provided constant supervision. The most salient contextual factor affecting her teaching were the amount of duties and responsibilities assigned to teachers, especially those that take time away from teaching.

### **Teacher 3: Symia**

Symia was a High School English teacher who had a degree in English Linguistics from one of the oldest government-sponsored universities in the country. When she was young, she never planned to become a teacher, as a matter of fact she was studying a different business-oriented career. However, two years into her studies, she was confronted with the decision of continuing with her current studies (and not being able to work as she would not be allowed to work in a male field) or change her career path. Teaching was the viable option -other than being a housewife- that was approved by her husband since it is a profession that can be exerted in a female work environment.

She described society at the time -20 years ago when she chose a college education- as conservative and more limited in offering work environments that were gender-segregated. The decision to study English (as opposed to another subject matter) was her own based on her natural skills for languages. Symia had 17 years of experience teaching Cycle 1, 2 and 3 in several schools. She was currently teaching Grade 11, Art and Science Sections, in the school where she had been working for the last five years.

### Symia's Organizing System

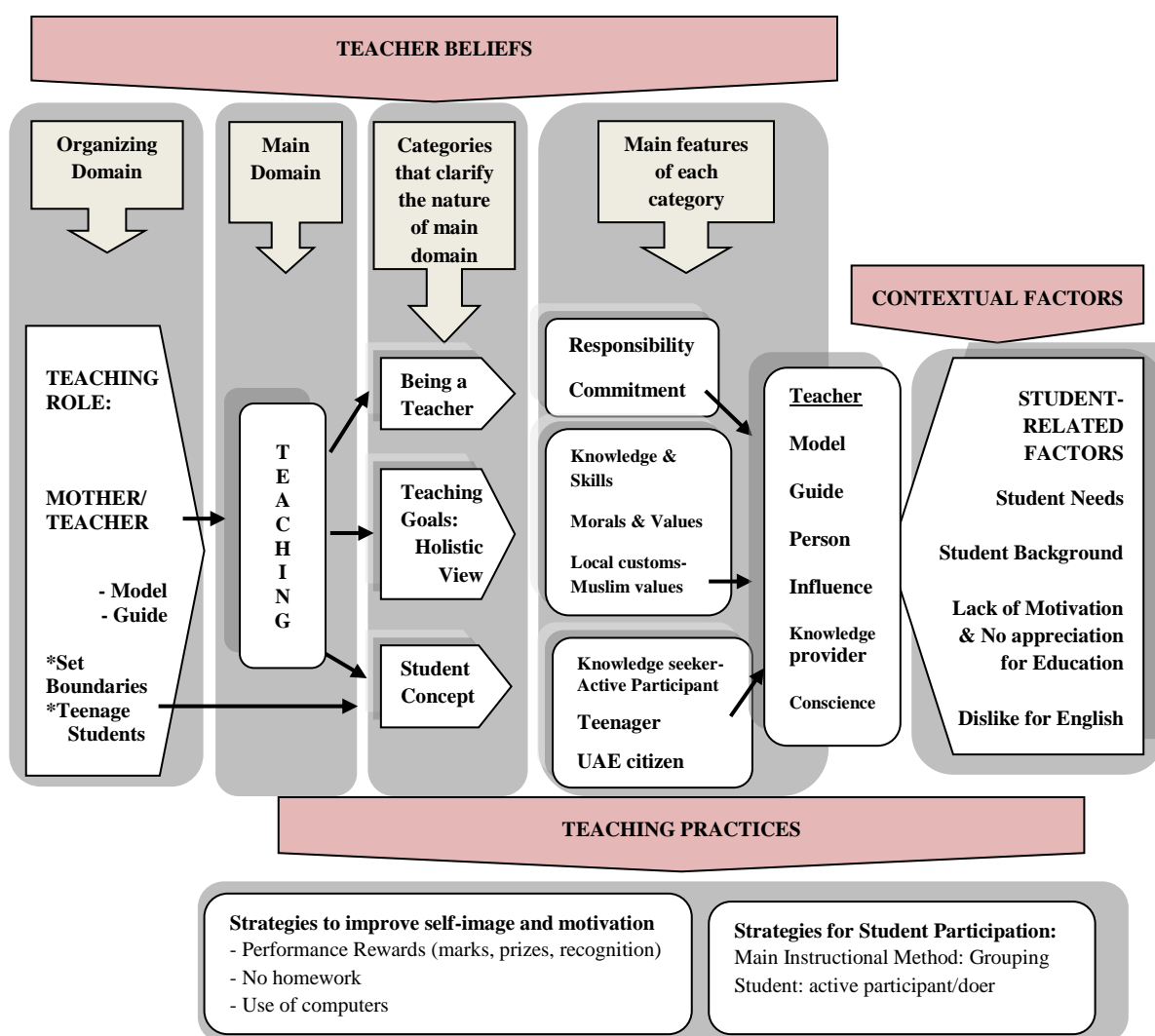


Figure 4: T3 Symia's Organizing System

### ***Teaching Role***

The first step in the idiographic analysis of this teacher's narratives was the identification of a self-image that provided us with the perspective to look into Symia's professional world; which is presented in Figure 4. In this regard, the belief that emerged most prominently in her perception of her teaching role was that of a teacher-mother, an understanding in which both aspects of the role were closely intertwined yet one in which the motherly facet was clearly salient. In her view, her role was more of a mother to her students than a teacher; a connotation that she associated with the fact that her students were teenagers and her belief that adolescence is an age in which girls need a mother figure and guidance. Given the mother-teacher role, being a guide and a model are two of the facets that this teacher added to this multifaceted teaching role. Both facets were perceived as intrinsic to the mother role.

Several of Symia's comments provided an insight into her personal understanding of what being a teacher means for her. The following comments, imbedded in her responses to different topics, make reference to her self-perception as a mother.

#### *About teaching:*

T: If you are in primary school, that'll be very easy (...) the child will just obey but being a teenager, I think it is more being a mother than being a teacher. (T3-A13)

#### *Description of herself as a teacher:*

I'd say they think, "You know teacher, you are a second mother to me; you are kind but sometimes you put the red lights, the red lines we are not to go over." (T3-A56)

Even to my students I tell them, "I'm not telling you as a teacher. I'm telling you now as a mother. So please try to concentrate on this." (T3-A57)

#### *Characteristics of her favourite teacher:*

It was in the secondary stage. At that part of life, I think every girl needs not only a teacher but she needs a mother because it is a very teenage life. (T3-A6)



These comments provided an insight into the nature of this motherly figure that was perceived as closer to the students than a teacher and therefore with more influential ascendancy. In other words, Symia believed that if advice or suggestions were offered as a *mother*, there was more likelihood it would be heard and followed by the students. She believed that the teacher had the capacity to influence students' decisions and behaviour if well liked and accepted by the student (see Table 9).

These comments also revealed a relationship between this motherly role and two other dimensions which helped clarify its nature: boundaries (the responsibility of setting boundaries) and adolescence (the implications of teaching teenage students). The responsibility of setting and modeling appropriate boundaries represented for this teacher a correlate to this motherly role; a feature that she views as inherent to the nature of being a mother. This inherent relationship can be more clearly grasped in what Symia believed to be her students' perception of her: a second mother to them who is kind but also 'puts red lines for them not to go over' (T3-A56).

This view appeared congruent with Symia's conceptualization of *teacher* which became more evident when interpreted with respect to this motherly role and this 'boundaries' theme. For her, a teacher embodied personality characteristics that represented a blend of kindness and strictness. The following comments contain references to this kind-strict relation,

- I think that being kind, [and] at the same time being strict with following rules. (T3- A24). [Characteristics of a good teacher]
- "You are kind but you put the red lines (...). (T3-A56) [Description of herself]
- She was very kind, very thoughtful, at the same time very strict. (T3-A4). [Description of her favourite teacher]

Each one of these statements makes allusion to kindness and strictness, revealing a mutually dependent relationship between both aspects like sides of a coin. In her view, they coexist in a balanced manner in a good teacher.

Congruent with this motherly role, Symia believed a teacher needs to be an empathetic broad-minded person who is able, not only to impart knowledge but also be part of

every student's life. In other words, be able to integrate into the student's experiences, understand her and support her. This is precisely one of the features that defined the experience of being a teacher for this participant: the challenge to be part of so many worlds at the same time and be able to understand each one.

The second dimension related to this teacher's perception of her teacher-mother role was the students' age, teaching teenage students. In her view, being a mother more than a teacher was defined by the intrinsic personal needs and demands of teenage life; a view in which it is incumbent on the teacher to be the kind of support and guidance that students of this age need. At this age, she believed, students do not just obey orders and follow instructions –unlike their counterparts in primary education- yet they will do so if they like and respect the teacher. Consequently, being viewed by the students as a mother was an advantage over being viewed just as a teacher.

### ***Understanding of Teaching***

Closely related to Symia's beliefs about her teacher-mother role was her understanding of what *teaching* was about and entails (See Table 9, Theme 1). This understanding was in turn closely intertwined with other domains that contributed to clarify its nature: teaching goals, the responsibility of being a teacher and her view of the student.

#### ***Teaching Goals***

Symia conceived *teaching* in different levels and in close connection with its *goals*. In terms of knowledge or the specificity of the subject matter, she believed teaching is about providing knowledge and developing skills -within the context of English language teaching. In a broader scope, she believed teaching is about morals and values. In this sense, she viewed the teacher as an influential person who, on the one hand, had the capacity to set things right and change lives; and on the other, a person with the responsibility to guide the student, especially when at home this parental guidance is not being provided. It is in this area that Symia identified one of the contextual factors that she needed to take into account when bringing teaching into

practice. She believed that Emirati girls need teachers who can understand them and guide them. Her personal perception of the girl-students was:

I feel that especially in my country the girls really, really need teachers who can understand them. Because our girls here, our students are more to the European style: running around, whatever they see in the television. To be as a guide, that's the most important thing. If they go too far, come back. (T3-A69/70)

Symia's holistic view of teaching encompassing aspects of the students' life beyond schoolwork expanded to Muslim customs and values. Helping students become UAE models and UAE citizens was a goal that she willingly embraced as part of her Muslim duty, particularly in family contexts where mothers were non-Muslim and/or non-Emirati. In Symia's view Emirati values did not manifest in these students and thus, they needed to be guided in the right direction. (See Table 9, Theme 2). She identified this issue as another factor that described the student population of her school which also defined her role as a teacher since most of them have non-local mothers who sometimes do not share the same religion. In his sense, this broad view of teaching showed connotations of social responsibility.

<b>T3 Teacher Beliefs: Teaching, Teacher and Student</b>	
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
<b>1. Teaching</b>	<p>In English, teaching is about knowledge and developing skills. (A14)</p> <p>Teaching is responsibility (A11)</p> <p>Teaching takes everything. (A14)</p> <p>Teaching is more than giving information; it is about values and morals; it's putting something 'into the students.' (A12-A18)</p> <p>Teaching is not only giving information but being a person. (A14)</p> <p>Teaching is being part of the students' life. (A12)</p>
<b>2. Teacher Role</b>	<p>More like a mother for the students than a teacher, especially for teenagers. (A6-A13- A22-A23-A46-A57)</p> <p>The teacher is a model for the students. (A22-A23)</p> <p>The teacher is a guide for the students (A15), esp. when at home there is little or no parental guidance. (A70)</p> <p>The teacher is a knowledge provider. (A23)</p> <p>Teacher of Muslim traditions and values. (A71)</p> <p>Teacher of morals and values. (A11-A18)</p> <p>Conscience of the students. (A23)</p> <p>A person. (A14-A22)</p>

<b>3. Teacher Traits</b>	Being a teacher is first being a person. (A14-A22) The teacher is kind, thoughtful, considerate, supportive, and empathetic. (A4-A5-A24-A56) The teacher is firm, strict and sets limits. (A4-A24-A56) The teacher is part of the students' lives. (A12-A15) The teacher knows what is going on in the community through the students. (A17) The teacher is influential: she can change lives and set things right. (A19- A20-A21)
<b>4. Experience of Being a Teacher</b>	Being a teacher is stressful but joyful. (A16-A72) Being a teacher cannot be compared to others professions. (A18-A22-A72) Being a teacher is difficult because we have to be part of so many students' world at the same time. (A15-A72) Being a teacher is responsibility. (A11-A18) Being a teacher is a social responsibility towards Emirati girls. (A71)
<b>5. Student Traits</b>	Teenage students needs a mother more than a teacher (A6). The student is the one who does most of the work in the classroom. (A77-A78) The student is respectful. (A30) and punctual (A35). The student is enthusiastic (A31) and active in the learning process (A32-C1-C21). The student is helpful. (A36)
<b>6. Student Role</b>	Knowledge seeker who searches for knowledge from different sources. (A31-A33) Knowledge sharer, the student must share knowledge with others. (A37) Active participant in the learning process. (A77) Prepares for class. (A33)

**Table 9: T3 BELIEFS STATEMENTS - Concepts of *Teacher* and *Student***

### ***The Responsibility of Being a Teacher***

A prevalent and rather unique perspective that emerged in Symia's narrative was her perception of the experience of being a teacher. She described the personal significance of this experience as a huge *responsibility*, given the breadth and depth of the goals embedded in her understanding of her broad teacher-mother role which spanned from imparting knowledge to instilling morals and values, -including Muslim values. Values are an aspect of life which are deeply interwoven with daily living, hence for this teacher, being integrated into the Emirati girls' life and personal world was essential. This holistic view of student development related to another layer of Symia's perception of the teaching role, that of a *person* with values and morals. In her words,

‘Teaching is not only giving information but being a *person*.’ (T3-A14)

(...) First of all, you are a *person*, who gives knowledge; you are a mother; you are a model for the students. You are everything! (T3-A22)

A teacher is (...) a person who is like the conscience of the students. (T3-A23)

This holistic view of student development and the definition of the teaching role as a mother/model/guide seemed to have the implication of viewing the teacher as a whole, as a person who is an integral part of her students' life. Symia believed the teacher has many roles, yet these roles are shaped or affected by the kind of person that the teacher is. As a person, the teacher cannot be segmented into pieces of independent roles, they are inextricably interrelated and they are embedded within the nature of being a person. This element of Symia's perspective related to her belief that the responsibility of being a teacher cannot be compared to other professions. Viewing the teaching role as a mother who guides the students in all aspects of life implied seeing the student in her wholeness as person while the teacher gets also involved as a total person. For her, unlike a business person or a someone who makes things or does her job and leaves, the teacher 'puts something into the students' and does her job involving her total being.

Although she viewed teaching as a stressful responsibility, it was the same nature of this commitment which prevented her from resigning since she believed Emirati girls' needs are broader than the acquisition of knowledge and skills. She believed they also need to gain an understanding of who they are and of their place in the world, therefore, they need broad-minded teachers who can be part of their lives and guide them.

### ***Concept of student***

A third dimension that helped us grasp this teacher's understanding of teaching was her conceptualization of *student*. Just like the duality of the teacher-mother role and the double focus of teaching on knowledge as well as morals and values; the student was also viewed from two angles. From the standpoint of values, the most salient feature highlighted by this participant was respect. She believed that people must respect themselves and respect others to be respected. Therefore, the student needs to be far and foremost a respectful person. In terms of knowledge, the student was viewed as a knowledge seeker, one who actively seeks knowledge by searching diverse sources, asking questions, and being enthusiastic about learning. It is not sufficient for Symia that the student does what she/he is told or instructed; the student must strive for

knowledge. To emphasize the importance of seeking knowledge, Symia made reference to the Quran. In her words,

[A student is] a person who is very enthusiastic to learn and goes through whatever just to learn. Even in our religion, it says 'أطلب العلم ولو في الصين'. It means, ask for knowledge even in China. China was something very far in late times. I think students should search for knowledge wherever it is. (T3- A31)

I think a good student should always, not only prepare before hand, but also go search. Not only in the student's book, but go search through the net, through life to get the information they want. That comes to the way of being active, searching for knowledge. (T3-A33)

These comments yielded insight into Symia's valorization of knowledge and education and into her perception of the student's attitude towards knowledge and their desire to be educated. It is in this area that she identified one of the major contextual factors affecting her educational endeavour: the lack of academic motivation and the poor appreciation for the value of education. In her view, the girls' motivation to pursue an education was low, primarily because they thought they did not need an education since they had everything they need -a perspective that was shared by their mothers who were usually uneducated. Although some students were seriously interested in pursuing an education, most girls –and their mothers- regarded marriage as a priority rather than education (See Table 11, Theme 1). Therefore, improving their perception of the value of having an education was stated by this participant as a goal that teachers were working on.

<b>T3 - TEACHING PRACTICES</b>	
<b>Themes (Domains)</b>	<b>STATEMENTS Symia ...</b>
<b>Student Participation</b>	Has students do most of the work in the classroom (A41-B11-B13-B16-B18-B33-B35-B39- B42-A63-B64-B69) Calls on students for classroom participation. (B5-B9-B18-B52-B54)
	Uses a 'points' system to reward performance (extra mark). (A43-A45-B15) Constantly encourages and rewards student performance by using words of recognition

<b>Student Motivation</b>	(B9- B15-B21-B25- B69-C6), peer recognition in the form of applause (B15-B18-B26-B57) or prizes (C7-C8-C18). Asks students to praise themselves on good work. (B10-B23-C14) Working on improving student academic motivation and value of education. (A60-A62) Gives students her personal email to turn in assignments and homework in case of absence. (A49- A50) Pays attention to students' emotional state. (A55- C26)
<b>Student Learning Differences</b>	Pairs weak language students with stronger students. (A52) Lowers expectations and standards to the weak-language students' level. (C4) Provides extra support to weak-language students. (C5)
<b>EL Lesson</b>	Focuses on the development of language skills rather than knowledge. (A27) Organizes the lesson into warm-up, core activities and wrap-up. (A39- A40-A44-A78) Uses revision and homework review as warm-up to start the lesson. (A39-B52-B54-B55-B58- B59) Shares the lesson objectives with the students. (A40-B4-B31-B53) Uses student feedback to assess the lesson. (A53)
<b>ELT Strategies</b>	Uses individual and collective strategies for classroom work. (A44-A48-B24) Uses group work as the main instructional method. (A44-A48-B5-B15-B19-B30-B33-B43- B45-B50-B56-B65-C21) Displays student work in her classrooms. (A74-A75-A77-B3-B50) Uses computers for student work. (A73-A82-B40-B43-C11-C12) Uses computers for teaching: for explaining content and for giving instructions. (A73-A82- B11-B12-B14-B15) Sometimes supports verbal instructions with visual aids (slides). (B31-B32-B34-B36-B37-B38-B60-B61-B62) Explains content, supported with visual aids and followed with application. (B12-B13-B16- B19-B24) Checks student understanding through tasks. (B18-B21-B22-B41-B43-B44-B45-B57-B67) Provides assistance during class/group work. (B20-B25-B35-B38-B40-B43-B56-B66-C5)

**Table 10: T3 TEACHING PRACTICES**

Within the classroom, Symia utilized various strategies intended to improve the students' self-image which in turn were expected to increase academic motivation and participation. She used a cumulative points system to reward good performance which eventually translated into extra marks. She also constantly rewarded student performance with words of recognition that essentially conveyed a judgment of their quality as students rather than on their performance, for example, statements like 'beautiful girl' (T3-B69), 'amazing groups' (T3-B39), 'beautiful purple group' (T3-B17) and 'Who are going to be beautiful girls?' (T3-B20). Similarly, she also had the students praise themselves based on their impression of their own performance by

writing comments in their worksheet or workbook. These also tended to focus on the quality of being a good student rather than on their doing, suggesting an approach to motivation oriented towards student self-image rather than self-efficacy.

In terms of classroom practices (See Table 10), Symia's view of the student as an active participant in the learning process manifested in the opportunities that she created for the students to take on an active role and do most of the work in class. In the lessons observed, she used group work as the main instructional method, combined with whole class approach. In the former modality, students did the work in a sequence of activities in which they progressed at their own pace. She differentiated instructions in terms of work-pace and time. In the latter, the teacher directed the activities at the same pace for all the students and the instructions and revision were done at class level, having the students participate by answering questions, writing on the board, reading sentences and instructions, providing examples, and doing the workbook exercises.

<b>T3 - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS</b>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
<b>1. Student Characteristics</b>	Students do not like learning English. (A25-A26) Some girls can be unkind and disrespectful. (A68) Students do not do their homework; they either copy it or have someone else do it. (A46) There are learning differences among the students. Some are excellent, some are very poor. (A52-C3-C25) Students like technology. (A82)
<b>2. Student Academic Motivation</b>	Student motivation to pursue education is low. (A58) For some girls and mothers, education is not a priority (marriage is). (A58-A59-A62-A66) Some students are seriously interested in education, others not at all. (A61) Most students' mothers are not educated and do not value education. (A63-A64-A65-A66) Students, from non-local mothers, are not familiar with local customs and values. (A71) Girls in the UAE need teachers who can understand them and guide them. (A69-A70)
<b>3. Subject Matter</b>	English is very important nowadays. (A26) Although the teacher follows the textbook, she has the autonomy to introduce modifications. (A78- A80-C11)

**Table 11: T3 - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**



The theme of knowledge seeker, on the other hand, manifested through internet surfing activities which were incorporated into the lesson. Students were required to search the web for information to substantiate their arguments in an essay-writing task. Home assignments of this kind were not observed (although homework was mentioned by this teacher as rare occurrence). The integration of technology was also intended to engage student interest and capture their motivation. According to Symia, given the lack of academic motivation prevalent among students, interest in learning and schoolwork was low. Home assignments were identified by this teacher as another conflicting factor affecting her teaching practices. Students did not do homework; they either copied it or had someone else do it for them so homework did not serve any learning purposes, which is why she rarely used this strategy to reinforce or consolidate learning. In the case of the English subject, Symia viewed the students' dislike of the English language as an important barrier to learning, despite the fact that they constantly experienced the current importance of the language.

In summary, Symia's organizing system was built upon two main domains, her view of her mother/teacher role and her understanding of teaching which in turn had links with other related domains and relationships. The mother-teacher domain had connections with the dimensions of being a guide and a model for Emirate teenage students who have particular needs emanated from their age and their family environment. Her beliefs about teaching, on the other hand, rested on specific views about the goals and purposes of teaching which encompassed subject-specific as well as life-oriented objectives focused on a holistic perspective of student development. Given this wide and overarching goals, the experience of teaching had a special significance for this teacher which was both a huge responsibility as well as an engaging commitment towards the growth and education of Emirati girl students.

#### **Teacher 4: Hala**

Hala was a High School English teacher who had a teaching degree from a local university and had only three years of teaching experience -the year that she participated in this study was her fourth. Becoming a teacher was for Hala 'a dream

come true' as she had always wanted to be one. In her words, teaching was "like a bright star and I [caught] my bright star" (T4- A3). The decision to become a teacher was hers, and so was the choice of English as major; yet she was very pleased to count with the full support of her family following this career path. She was proud to be a teacher and teaching had a special meaning for her. During her past three years, she had always worked in the same school teaching primarily Grade 10 and Grade 11, Art and Science Streams, having between 20 and 24 students per class.

### Hala's Organizing System

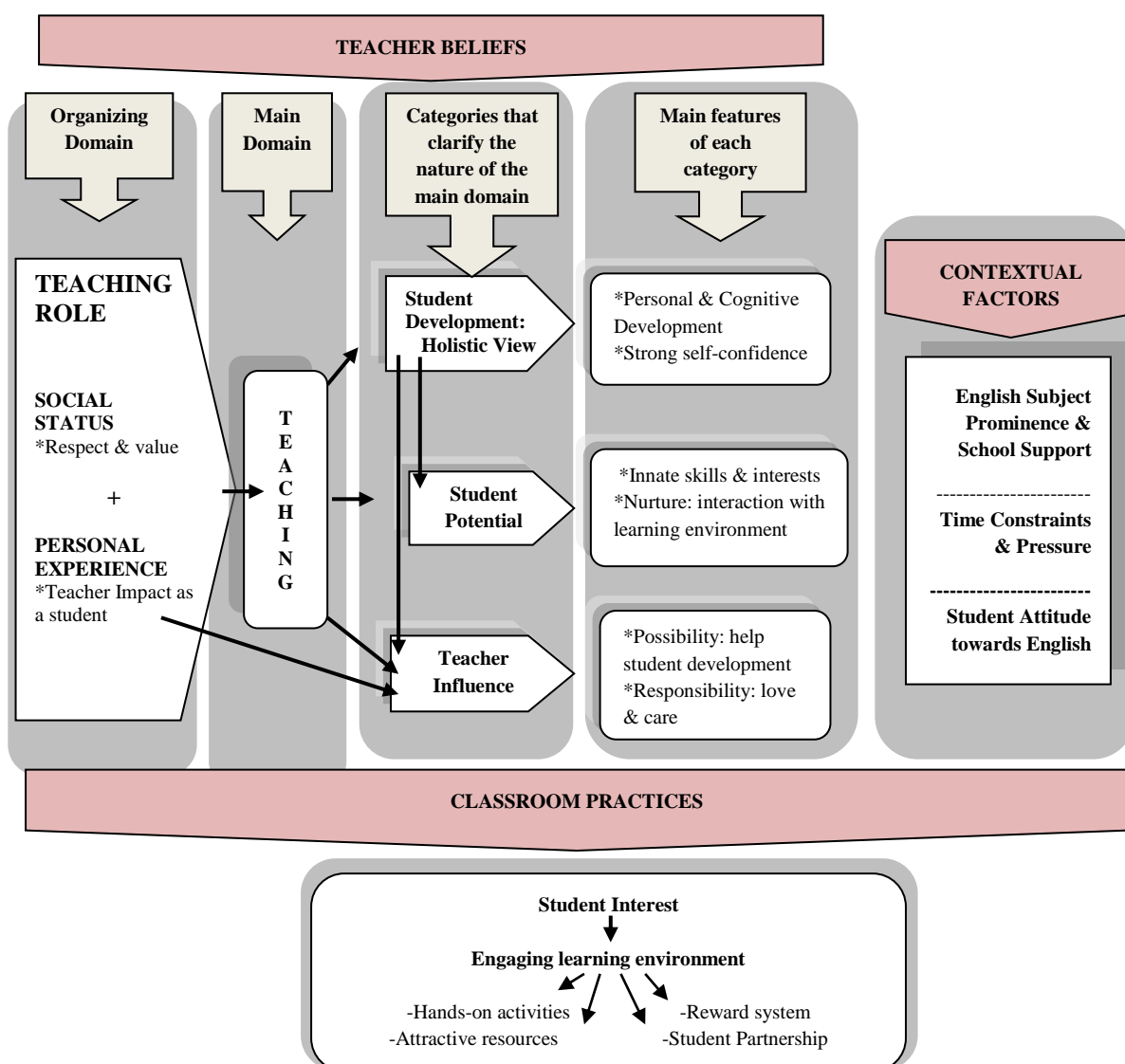


Figure 5. Hala's Organizing System

### ***Teaching Role***

Hala viewed herself far and foremost as a teacher, with no other salient self-image attached to this role. In her narrative, she made meaningful references to specific dimensions that allowed grasping the significance attributed by this participant to her teaching role. One of these dimensions was Hala's perception of the teaching role, based on its relevance within the local Muslim society. According to Hala, in Muslim society, the *teacher* is viewed as a *messenger* with a valuable message; therefore, teaching is regarded as a noble job that is socially respected and valued. This social status and respect towards teaching represented a source of encouragement that had been received from school, home and family.

The other dimension having an impact on Hala's view of her role was her prior personal experience as a student at school and at the university, and more specifically, the opportunities for personal development and the impact that some teachers had on her. This experiential meaning provided another source of inspiration to become a teacher and held implications for bringing this teacher role into practice.

This socially-influenced perception of teaching combined with Hala's personal experiential meaning made her current experience as a teacher 'special.' The specific connotation of this 'special' attribute is described in the following passages,

I feel very happy when somebody in the family tell me, "You finished the university and now you are working as what?" I say, "I'm a teacher." "Really? You are a teacher?" How they are amazed. I love this feeling. I can touch it.  
(T4-A21)

When I told my parents, sisters, brothers, about my plan, the major that I want to be is education, all of them agree to teach English. It is better. I remember my aunt. She said, "Please, teach English. We suffered when we were studying English." (T4-A16)

Q: What is it like teaching English to these girls?

Something very special to me. I chose it and I wanted to do it. Nobody forced me and said, 'Do that! Do this!' (T4-A36)

Hala took pride in being a teacher, a significant personal accomplishment, given her personality traits during her school life (characterized by shyness and low self-esteem) which evolved due to the influence of particular teachers; a fact that she appreciated and openly acknowledged. The theme of the teachers' impact recurrently emerged in this teacher's commentaries made in relation to a range of topics,

#### *Teacher memories of her school days*

A lot of teachers had an impact on me, so I did better and better in my studies. One reason that led me to be a teacher is the impact of my teachers to go on this journey and I love it. (T4-A3)

#### *Reason to become a teacher*

My teachers [had an] impact on me in a positive way. It was like my dream, like my bright star that I always look in the sky. (T4-A12)

#### *Teacher Impact*

That's something that I learned at the university, from my loveable [professor's name] who really had a nice impact on me, in my personality. (T4-A63)

As evidenced in these comments, the nature of the teacher's influence on this participant extended to the decision to be a teacher and to the development of her personality. The significance of this experiential meaning also presented a model of teacher traits and behaviours which she sought to emulate.

I always put pictures in my mind while I was studying in school. For example, if I were my favourite teacher -the Arabic one, I want to be like her- I'm going to do this. (...) I'm then thinking about the teacher that leads me. She is calm with me. I want to be like her when I'm going to teach my students in the future. (T4-A14)

Q: What in that [Arabic] teacher did you like so much?

First her personality. She [was] very close to us, like best friends or sometimes like a sister. The kind that sometimes you miss. The one that will put you in the right track, (...) that will encourage you when you are disappointed; someone that knows your weakness (...). (T4- A1/11)

These comments suggested that this teacher's prior experience was influential in the development of her understanding of teaching.

### ***Understanding of Teaching***

Congruent with the social standing of the teaching role in the Muslim society, described by this participant, teaching was viewed primarily as a responsibility that entails love and care: care for the students and love for the profession. Her understanding of teaching was not confined to subject matter or cognitive mastery. At the centre of her teaching endeavour was the student personal development as an integral component. This understanding of *teaching* appeared to be influenced by her personal experience which attributed particular features to the teacher and to the student, revealing two primary interrelated dimensions: teacher influence and student potential.

For Hala, the teacher's capacity to influence student development constituted the conduit to help students discover interests and natural skills. In this regard, she viewed *teaching* as a possibility to affect and maximize students' probabilities for success in life and the *teacher* as having a highly influential role with the capacity and ascendance to have a profound impact on the students. This perspective revealed a more holistic view of teaching encompassing cognitive learning and social development.

Intertwined with teacher influence is the dimension of *student potential*. Hala believed that students have innate skills and interests which can be fostered and strengthened; that every student possesses a set of skills and talents and the ability or the potential to develop them if properly guided and supported. These beliefs were made evident through verbal comments based on her prior personal experience as well as her rationale for teaching practice. The following passages illustrate this view,

This is something that I learnt from the university; something that I missed while I was a student. Someone [who would] ask me, "Do you have something here inside? Maybe you have a lot of creativity." I have a lot of hobbies that I didn't know about. So the university pulled it out. (T4-A24)

(...) The university and now my career shift[ed] my personality. I have something that I didn't know about myself, for example, dealing with people. It was a challenge in previous years that I couldn't interact with people. Why these barriers? Something strong that I put in front of my path. (T4-A27/29)

I always [under]estimate[d] this on me while I was a student. So, I don't want them to feel the way that I felt. (T4-A62)

She believed that if the conditions are not provided, a student can go through her school life without discovering hidden strengths and talents. This teacher loved teaching, not only because of the language or the subject matter but because of the possibility to help her students become what they can be and help them remove barriers that may be limiting what they can be or achieve. She viewed teaching as giving *magic things*, a *magic touch* that students do not know about, which has the power to enlighten them.

T4 - BELIEF STATEMENTS: <i>Teaching, Teacher and Student</i>	
THEMES	STATEMENTS
<b>1. Teaching/ Learning</b>	<p>Teaching is more than academic work. (A31)</p> <p>Teaching is giving the students <i>magic things</i> or a <i>magic touch</i> that enlightens them.(A31)</p> <p>Teaching is responsibility and care for the students. (A17- A18)</p> <p>Learning triggers student interest which in turn stimulates learning. (A44)</p> <p>Connections to real life facilitate learning. (A55-A56-A57-A58-A59-A60-A64-A91-B48)</p> <p>Instructional resources and activities affect student interest. (A34-A43-A59-A60-A69- A71-A75-A95-A97)</p> <p>Hands-on and movement-based activities engage students. (C11)</p> <p>The teaching space has an effect on the students.(A34-A90-B73)</p> <p>Rewards have a big impact on the students. (A35)</p>
<b>2. Teacher Role</b>	<p>Influential role which can have a profound impact on the students. (A14-A30-A31-A75)</p> <p>In this society, the teacher is a messenger with a very valuable message. (A19)</p> <p>The teacher is socially valued and respected. (A19)</p> <p>Teaching is a noble job (A20)</p>
<b>3. Teacher Traits</b>	<p>The teacher is firm and strong while flexible and calm. (A14-A76-A77)</p> <p>Teachers can be old fashioned and unchangeable. (A32)</p> <p>Teachers welcome challenges and seek for new things. (A32)</p> <p>The teacher is very influential. (A30-A31)</p>
	<p>Help students realize their potential. (A24)</p> <p>Know her students, their likes, interests, strengths and weaknesses. (A22-A23-A57)</p>

<b>4. Teacher Responsibilities</b>	Capture student interest. (24) Create an engaging environment. (A34) Create and implement fun and engaging activities. (A34-A43) Reward performance. (A35) Responsible for the students. (A22) Responsible for delivering the curriculum. (A22)
<b>5. Experience of Being a Teacher</b>	She loves teaching. (A18) Proud to be a teacher. (A16-A21) Teaching is a special experience, a dream come true. (A36) Has a positive relationship with her students. (A30)
<b>6. Student Traits</b>	The students are human beings who have diverse backgrounds. (A22) Students have potential and latent skills or talents that need to be discovered. (A24) Students have different sets of skills and interests. (A26)
<b>7. Student Responsibilities</b>	Do more than what they are asked. (A53) Search for further information. (A53) Work and participate in class. (A50) Establish connections between what they are learning and real life. (A50) Do homework. (A53) Be helpful with other students. (A54)

**Table 13: T4 BELIEFS STATEMENTS**

These views of the teacher as having the capacity to contribute to the development of student skills and personality implied that she believed that the student potential can be nurtured and that the teacher can do so through the interactions with the learning environment that they expose the students to. This belief has important implications for her practices in the classroom and for her understanding of teacher traits and responsibilities. For Hala, capturing student interest was essential -as expressed in this passage,

As a responsibility, I have to know how to read my students. I'm very interested to know what they like, dislike, what are their interests. Since they are a generation born with technology, it is something that I have to knock the door on and gain their attention. Tune their interest. This is very important. (T4-A23/24)

For Hala, in order to capture student interest, the teacher needs to know her students, their likes and dislikes, their strengths and weaknesses and use this information to create an engaging environment and implement appealing activities. Closely linked to these beliefs of the teacher responsibilities (of knowing her students and engaging their

interest) was her view of teacher traits. For her, the teacher must constantly be searching for new things in teaching and be creative regarding activities, resources and the classroom environment. Hala used a considerable number of strategies, from classroom activities to instructional resources and from rewards systems to classroom displays, to affect student interest and thus increase classroom engagement. She strived for implementing appealing activities and for targeting different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, reasoning and social interactions) in her effort to ‘tune in’ with their interests and innate abilities.

Table 13 summarizes Hala’s classroom practices and shows the wide variety of activities, resources and strategies that she put in motion in her classroom, e.g. games, competitions, colourful worksheets, picture cards, real life videos, audio-tapes, stickers, etc. Among her array of strategies, she incorporated student preferred activities into her lesson, included hands-on and movement-based activities, made connections between the curriculum and real-life situations, used constant performance rewards, gave students the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on what they liked and disliked about specific learning experiences. Hala used group discussion to incite engagement, increase participation and assess learning, so it was a technique often observed in her classroom dynamic.

<b>T4 - TEACHING PRACTICES</b>	
<b>THEMES</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b> <b>Hala ...</b>
<b>1a. Instructional Methods, Activities &amp; Resources</b>	<p>Uses individual (B37-B53-B56-B63-B67-B88) and grouping (A73-A74-B6-B14-B22-B25- B29-B33-B37-B60-B72-D2) instructional methods for class work.</p> <p>Focuses on the development of all languages skills: listening, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary and grammar. (B14-B24-B29-B33-B37-B39-B53-B56-B60-B67-B76-B81-B86-B89-C3-C7-C12-C15)</p> <p>Uses a varied array of activities for classroom work, e.g. games, competitions, matching exercises, discussions, inference-based challenges, role play, peer dictation, presentations. (B29-B33-B59-B67-B78-B91-C9)</p> <p>Uses varied instructional resources, e.g. dictionaries, worksheets, student book, workbook, cards, picture cards, audiotapes, videos, overhead projector, whiteboard. (B12-B13-B19-B24-B27-B28-B3-B32-B35-B36-B41-B51-B52-B55-B56-B58-B63-B67-B78)</p> <p>Uses group discussion for sharing of knowledge and for checking understanding. (A61-A64- B75-B76-B81-B85-B86-B89)</p> <p>Gives instructions verbally (B11-B20-B24-B28-B36-B75) as well as supported with</p>



<b>1b. Lesson Organization</b>	<p>visual aids (B27- B32- B52- B55- B58- B63) to facilitate understanding.</p> <p>Checks understanding and task completion through various strategies, e.g. answering questions, reading answers out loud, self-correction using answering sheet, writing answers on the board, brief presentations. (B26-B30-B34-B38-B54-B57-B62-B68-B77-B82)</p> <p>Checks student progress and provides assistance during class work. (B25-B33-B37-B60-B61-B86-B89)</p>
	<p>Organizes her lesson into warm-up, core activities and wrap-up. (B41-B48-B76)</p> <p>Starts the lesson with an interesting or fun warm-up. (A101-A102-A103-B9-B13-B48)</p> <p>Sets and shares the lesson objectives with the students. (A99-A100-B17-B41-B49-B81)</p>
<b>2. Student Interest: Strategies</b>	<p>Prepares and implements engaging activities to capture student interest, e.g. games and competitions. (A43-A73-A74-A95-A96-A97-B78-C7)</p> <p>Constantly rewards student performance using words of recognition (B23), applause (B16- B26-B40-B50), stickers (B11-B15-B31-B35) and by thanking them for their work or participation (B16-B50-B54-B68-B77-B83).</p> <p>Provides a reason for earning rewards and for otherwise. (B31)</p> <p>Uses visual aids to capture student interest and maximize understanding. (A43-B13)</p> <p>Uses fun and colorful worksheets to increase classroom engagement. (A71-B12-B19-B78)</p> <p>Incorporates students preferred activities into the lesson. (A70-B12)</p> <p>Makes connections to real life through examples and materials to make the curriculum meaningful. (A57-A58-A59-B13-C31-C33-D8)</p> <p>Implements activities as competitions to enhance student engagement. (B14-B29-B59-C3)</p> <p>Uses student feedback to assess activities and resources. (A72-B50-B84-B90)</p> <p>Displays student work. (A91-B3-B73-D7)</p>
<b>3. Student Learning Differences: Strategies</b>	<p>Provides extra-support to weak-language students. (B91-C19-C20-C21)</p> <p>Uses visual wall displays to support weak-language learners. (D7)</p> <p>Simplifies task complexity at the start of the unit to ensure everyone can follow. (D6)</p> <p>Calls on students to maximize participation and ensure they all contribute to the lesson. (B23-B38-B40)</p>
<b>4. Student Study Habits</b>	<p>Uses homework as a strategy to make students revise and study at home. (A48-B92)</p> <p>Uses dictation as a strategy to foment study habits. (A49)</p>

**Table 13: T4 TEACHING PRACTICES**

Hala's implementation of these strategies did not appear to respond to a student academic motivation issue (although there is an element of student negativity towards English present in her teaching context which is discussed further on) but rather to the belief that exposing the students to diverse learning experiences and stimuli may lead the students to explore new areas of interest and/or discover and develop skills and qualities which in turn may provide a foundation for building a strong self-esteem and self-confidence. This aspect of her teaching perspective gained significant importance when interpreted with respect to her personal school experience. She was a shy, quiet

school student with poor social skills and low self-confidence, who eventually evolved into a teacher that loved who she became. Becoming a teacher was meaningful for this participant not only in terms of the skills she acquired but also in terms of the person that she aspired to be:

I love myself because I figured myself [out]. The university and now my career shifted my personality. (T4-A27) I really love my personality now. (T4-29)

Although personal growth may not be attributed to one single variable, this teacher identified the impact of specific teachers and professors as a significant affecting factor in her particular case. Students' potential may or may not be realized depending on affecting variables or conditions, thus in her view, every detail may become a source of motivation and concurrently contribute to create a positive environment conducive to student development. The following passages provide an example of those instructional details that Hala paid attention to in the management of her classroom,

Any creative teacher [can] create for her students an environment that they can love, especially activities that involve, for example, movement, things with small pieces of paper, colorful papers. The students that I am teaching now, they are in Grade 10 and 11, but it doesn't matter. When I reward them, I give them a star, put it in their name, they feel really happy. So, why don't we just put these things, the special ingredients in our classroom? The way we are rewarding. Sometimes, awards put nice things in the student's mind. (T4-A34/35)

Hala's main reason for using rewards was her belief that they positively impact the students. She used concrete and verbal rewards, which included words of recognition as well as words of appreciation. She was mindful to provide the reasons for being or not being awarded rewards. In the lessons observed, she often thanked her students for their work and their participation in class; a strategy that suggests she regarded the students as partners in her endeavour to create a successful classroom environment.

These strategies (namely, having students provide feedback on learning experiences, giving reasons for earning/losing rewards, integrating her students' preferred activities into the lesson, investing time and effort in preparing attractive activities and eye-

catching resources, thanking her students for their work and participation) suggested that this teacher regards her students with respect, valued their effort and work, and cared for them. By showing the students consideration, she expected them to feel appreciated and consequently strengthened.

### ***Contextual Factors***

Congruent with this participant's belief about the teacher's responsibility to know her students, recurrent comments were made throughout the conversations about characteristics of her students that she used as background information for preparing her lessons.

Apart from her comments alluding to her students' characteristics, no significant themes related to contextual factors stood out in a prominent way in this teacher's account. However, when asked about influences affecting her practices positively or negatively, the theme of *student attitude* towards English surfaced (See Table 14); the fact that students did not like studying English and believed English to be a subject that did not require studying; hence they did not revise or prepared for class or exams. They believed that language can be acquired through other means like movies or social media. Giving homework and regular dictation were some of the strategies that this teacher used to improve student study habits, as well as making learning English fun.

Additionally when asked about other factors facilitating or hindering her teaching, two other themes were mentioned: an advantage and a challenge. The advantage was the prominence of English subject given its unique role as language of communication in this country. The subject also counted with the full support of the school principal, which facilitated the accessibility to and provision of resources and facilities. By contrast, *time pressure* was identified as a challenge. In Hala's view, specific factors contributed to create pressure upon the teacher, namely, completing tasks (e.g. curriculum delivery) within fixed timeframes and teachers' relations as they may get strained by the manifestation of specific behaviours, namely, requests for conceding teaching hours and the lack of cooperation and support among colleagues. Another factor identified as increasing time constraints is changes in the daily school timetable

to hold special activities or event which reduced the amount of teaching time. The untoward consequence of this time constraints and pressures was, according to this participant, its effect on teacher creativity.

<b>T4 - Contextual Factors</b>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
<b>1. Student Characteristics</b>	<p>Students have varied language proficiency levels. (A66-A68)</p> <p>Students have preference for activities, e.g. drawing, hands-on, movement. (A69-A70)</p> <p>Students like discussions (talking and sharing).</p> <p>Students are active. (A68)</p> <p>Students like rewards, e.g. stickers and stars. (A35)</p> <p>Students have well-developed behaviour patters and routines. (B14)</p> <hr/> <p><b>Student Attitude</b>    Students have a negative attitude towards learning English. (A42-A47-A52-A67)</p> <p>Students believe English does not require studying. (A46-A47-A48)</p>
<b>2. Time Pressure</b>	<p>The curriculum timeline creates pressure on the teacher. (A108)</p> <p>Getting tasks and responsibilities done sometimes creates pressure. (A85-A87-A106)</p> <p>Changes in the daily school timetable causes time constraints. (C15)</p> <p>School colleagues put pressure on teachers by asking to concede teaching hours. (A86)</p> <p>The pressure affects teacher creativity. (A107)</p>
<b>3. English Language</b>	<p>Predominance of English as language of communication in this country. (A15-A37)</p> <p>Principal supports English language learning and the subject. (A81-A82-A83-A84- A88-A89-A93)</p>
<b>4. School Staff</b>	School staff is sometimes uncooperative and not good at sharing.

**Table 14: T4 - CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

In summary, Hala's organizing system was built upon two predominant themes: teacher impact and student potential. It was this personal experiential meaning that yielded insights into her understanding of a *teaching role* with the capacity and responsibility of affecting student development in a positive way. From this perspective, teaching represented the possibility of affecting and maximizing students' skills and abilities; a view in which knowing students' strengths, weaknesses, and interests was essential. This view on teaching provided the foundation for understanding Hala's practices and her efforts to expose the students to an engaging learning environment in which a wide range of activities, resources and strategies were used to tap on student interests and ultimately contributed to the student personal as well as cognitive development.

## **Nomothetic Analysis**

The analysis of the database for each case allowed grasping an in-depth understanding of each teacher which in turn facilitated an initial identification and interpretation of prominent themes across teachers. The organizing system used to represent these common themes and their relationship is an extension of the organizing system used at the idiographic level. The purpose of using the same system, as opposed to one that was entirely different, was to focus and capture the range of teachers' perspectives on the phenomenon of teaching. In other words, the nomothetic analysis was based on the individual teachers' perspectives rather than an analysis of the phenomenon of teaching. However, the representation of the nomothetic-level organizing system took a table form rather than a visual graphic (See Figure 6) in order to organize and represent each domain or theme, both common and unique, with its various manifestations (commonalities and variations) across teachers.

The data used for this analysis consisted of core and ancillary material:

- The first and central source was the narrative accounts provided by the four teachers (Samah, Nura, Symia and Hala) which were interpreted and discussed in the idiographic analysis -the core of the database used for this study.
- The second source was supplementary and consisted of material derived from background Interviews from teachers who withdrew from the study either during or after the first phase of the data-gathering process, prior to classroom observations. Teacher 5 took part in sessions 1 and 2 while the other three teachers participated in all three sessions (session 3 included) of the background interviews phase. Therefore this dataset was incomplete.

The purpose of using these ancillary data was to substantiate the findings in order to better understand the phenomenon under study. While three of these teachers met the inclusion criteria, the fourth one was a novice teacher with only one year of experience who was willing and interested in participating and whose exclusion was likely to affect another teacher's disposition to participate (since both worked in the same school). Because this teacher did not meet the inclusion

criteria, she was regarded and treated as a unique separate case, used just as another point of comparison to discuss the findings.

For the purpose of participant identification, the teachers from this incomplete dataset, were coded T5i, T6i and T7i while the novice teacher was coded Tn.

	Code	Degree	Years of Experience	Grade currently Teaching	Number of Teaching Hours
Core Material	T1 Samah	English Literature	11	10 & 11	19
	T2 Nura	Teaching Degree	6	12	13
	T3 Symia	English Literature	17	11	13
	T4 Hala	Teaching Degree	4	10	18
Ancillary Material	T5i	English Literature	19	11	19
	T6i	Teaching Degree	11	10	12
	T7i	Teaching Degree	4	10	12
	Tn	Teaching Degree	1	11	12

**Table 15. Participants' Background Information - Summary**

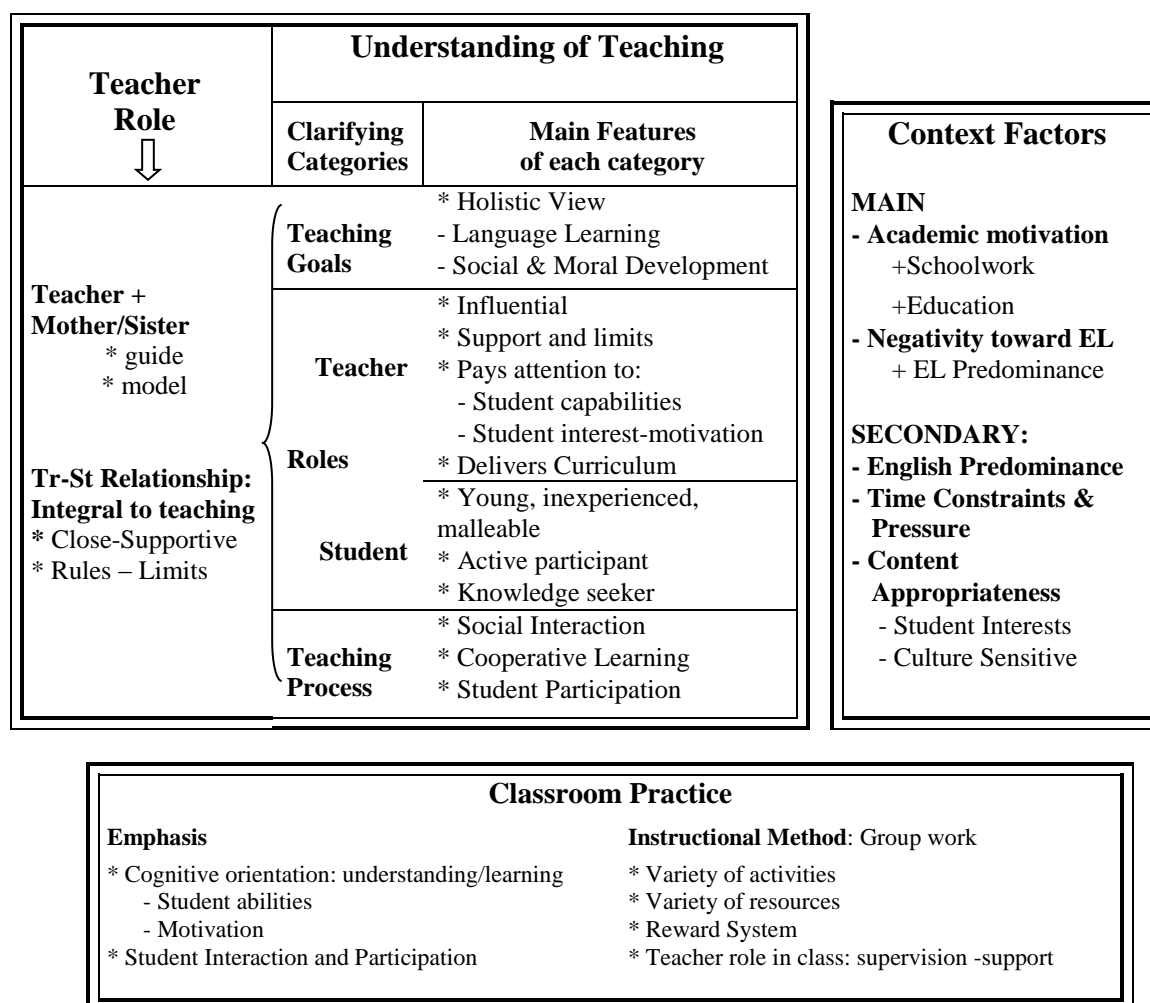
The inclusion of the ancillary material, since it consisted primarily of verbal commentaries (without observed classroom-based material or post-observation accounts), was limited to substantiate or oppose findings in terms of dimensions, themes and categories emanated from the core data. No new themes or categories were added on the basis of the ancillary material. Table 15 provides an overview of the participants' background information.

## **The Nomothetic-level Organizing System**

The idiographic-level organizing systems were built upon two main building blocks, the teacher's view of their *teaching role* expressed in the form of a self-image or self-representation that provided a lens to approach the teacher's *understanding of teaching*. These broad themes were used as the main dimensions for the nomothetic analysis.

## Teaching Role

Two consistent and most prevalent themes related to the dimension of *teaching role* were that of a family member which adopted the form of a *mother or a sister role* and the correlated theme of the *teacher-student relationship*.



**Figure 6. Nomothetic-level Organizing System**

**Mother/Sister role.** This role emerged in all the teacher's perspectives but with varying degrees of prominence and influence on the teachers' views on teaching.

- For Symia (T3), the *mother* aspect was clearly salient in her understanding of her teaching role, permeating her beliefs about what a teacher is like (strict, yet kind

and empathetic), what a teacher does (sets boundaries, supports and guides her students, takes part in their life), what teaching is about (provide knowledge and instil values and local customs) and her perception of her teenage students (their need for a mother rather than a teacher).

- Samah (T1) viewed herself as a teacher and a *mother/older sister* to the students; both facets manifested in her views about what a teacher is (an influential, knowledgeable and experienced adult who is strict but kind and fair) and what a teacher does (take care of the students, listen to them and advise them in school- and life-related matters), her views of the instructional setting (the school as a family) and the overall aims of teaching (manners and communication skills as well as academic achievement).
- Nura (T2) self-represented first and foremost as a teacher with a sister/ friend facet. In her perception, the more authoritative connotation of the *mother* image was not identified; yet the *support* and *care* elements were present in the form of an *older sister* role. This teacher's beliefs became more apparent and meaningful when interpreted against this prominent teacher/sister role, namely her views about teaching-learning (a social interaction between sisters; deep-seated in personal relationship), and her teaching practices (focused on student affective readiness and mastery of the language).
- For Hala (T4), the *sister/friend* image surfaced in a more subliminal way through the personal experiential meaning attached to the role. Embedded in this experiential meaning was the theme of the *impact* that teachers had on this participant when she was a student which affected her decision to become a teacher and her social development. Hala's memory of her favourite teacher was as *sister* or a *friend*, though she did not claim this form of self-representation for her own role.
- *Ancillary material*. For T7i and Tn, the theme of the mother/sister was a significant image that emerged consistently throughout the conversations. For them, this role was either more or as salient as the *teacher* aspect (understood as the one imparting knowledge). They worded their views in the following way:
  - “The teacher loves the students like daughters or sisters” (Tn-A6).
  - “I'm not a teacher here in the school. I'm a teacher and a sister, sometimes a mother” (T7i-A19);



Similar to T1 and T3, this role gained more relevance in cases in which students were deprived of parental guidance, adopting ‘substitute parent’ connotations. This defining role appeared to influence the teacher’s perception of responsibilities, main characteristics and goals. By contrast, T5i and T6i did not claim any self-representing image other than *teacher*; however, T5i (like T4) viewed the teacher as a *messenger*.

The prominence of the *mother/sister - sister/friend* image varied in strength from teacher to teacher, going from T3 whose understanding of the mother role was very strong that it appeared to dominate her whole perspective to the case of T4 in which the theme emerged tangentially and its importance seemed diminished.

***Teacher-student Relationship.*** Despite differences in prominence, the quality and the nature of this relationship was perceived by the teachers in similar terms: first as close and supportive, and second as an integral part of teaching and of being a teacher. However, the lens through which the teachers viewed this relationship had some subtle variations.

- For Samah (T1), a close relationship with the students was essential to being an effective teacher and for the achievement of educational goals (see Table 2, Theme 4 & 5); i.e., a positive teacher-student relationship was a means and an end.
- For Nura (T2), personal relationships were the foundation upon which teaching rested and a constructive teacher-student relationship was the means whereby she could affect student emotional states and facilitate student readiness for learning.
- In Symia’s case (T3), she did not verbally confer significance to the teacher-student relationship; however, a positive personal connection was implicitly suggested by her claimed mother-teacher role which was inherently understood as having a personal parent-child connection. This interpretation was also suggested by the closeness involved in being part of the student’s life and personal world, a personal goal that strongly emerged in her view of teaching (See Table 9 - Themes 1 & 3).
- In Hala’s case (T4), having a good relationship with her students was one of the elements defining her current *experience as a teacher*. She celebrated being able to interact with them and offer them an opinion or advice that could potentially impact

students usefully. Her personal goal of knowing her students well, her classroom interactions with the students as well as her well-prepared classroom practices suggested that she regarded her students with great respect and care, leading to the assumption that she valued her personal relationship with them as well.

- *Ancillary material.* Though a mother/sister role implicitly entails a close relationship between teacher and student; this theme did not emerge in a salient manner in the incomplete accounts, with the exception of the novice teacher (Tn) for whom it was an integral part of her role. For Tn, teaching rested upon a close teacher-student relationship built on respect which facilitates communication and provides the comfort to incite students to share personal matters and open the door for the teacher to adopt a counselling role. This relationship, apart from being a goal in itself, provided a venue whereby she approached the teaching of English and a link to teacher responsibilities. In her view, it was a teacher's responsibility to build a positive relationship with the students that entailed being close to them and take care of them.

Whether explicitly stated or embedded in other domains, there was consistency among teachers in viewing the teacher-student relationship in terms of two main features: emotional support (close and positive) with influence (impact on student academic and/or social development and performance). This relationship was viewed as a goal in itself and as instrumental help. The teacher-student relationship was attributed more prominence for successful learning and student development than classroom practices and teacher instructional abilities.

### **Understanding of teaching**

Closely related to the teachers' perception of their teaching role as mother/sister and the supportive teacher-student relationship was their understanding of teaching. There was consensus among the teachers on two main ideas:

- a) Teaching is *responsibility*. Whether openly stated or implicitly conveyed, *teaching* was commonly viewed by all the participants as a considerable responsibility which was not restricted to school hours or to the confinement of the school walls; but rather

transcended to the teacher's whole life. In other words, teaching was viewed as more than a job but rather as a way of life. This sense of responsibility was viewed as joyful and sometimes unrewarded, but in all cases as having the capacity to change lives. For all the teachers, this responsibility implied curriculum delivery and student development -in all areas. Concomitantly there were two other facets to this responsibility. For T1 and T3, it had a parent-oriented connotation which entailed adopting a parent role when the student lacked adult guidance and support at home. For T3, T6i and T7i, it had a nationalistic undertone as they viewed teaching as a means to serve the country through the education of young Emirati girls. This responsibility appeared to be commensurate with the teachers' educational goals; the broader the scope of teaching goals, the larger the influence and the sense of responsibility.

b) *Teaching extends beyond academic achievement.* The word *teaching* was generally used by these participants with two different connotations. The narrower meaning had an intellectual orientation and referred specifically to the teaching of academic content or the subject matter. The second meaning was broader in scope and involved a broader understanding of student development. All the teachers expressed their belief that teaching was not confined to bookish learning and thus, was more than merely passing on knowledge. They articulated their views in the following way:

- Teaching is more than a teaching role. It is knowledge, communication with the students and having a relationship with them. (T1-A11/12)
- Teaching is more than providing information. It's about knowledge, morals and values. (T2-A16/14)
- It is an interaction between a teacher and a group of students. (T2-A14/15/16)
- Teaching is more than giving information. It's about values and morals; it's about being a person. (T3-A12/18)
- Teaching is not books. It's also to give the students like magic things; a magic touch that they didn't know about and you enlighten them with that. (T4-A31)

These statements show in broad terms that teaching was believed to encompass more than schoolwork and 'marks.' However, to fully grasp these teachers' understanding of teaching, these statements did not suffice. Other dimensions or related themes

contributed to clarify the nature of the main domain (teaching) and its interrelations. As shown in Figure 6, the dimensions that more prominently stood out in each teacher's perspective involved beliefs about *teaching goals* (what to accomplish) and beliefs related to the *responsibilities and traits* of the *teacher* and the *student*. Only one teacher alluded to the element of the *process of teaching*, viewed as a social interaction.

### ***Teaching Goals***

One of the themes that consistently emerged in these teachers' perspectives was the achievement of *teaching goals*, which tacitly entailed beliefs about one of the fundamental elements of teaching: what to teach. In this regard, the nature of these goals varied among teachers -so did their views of what aspects of the student growth and development were the focuses of their teaching endeavour (and thus, what fell within their scope of responsibility). Various elements emerged from each dataset regarding student growth and development: learning, marks, social skills, language skills, natural interests, manners, morals, values, and Muslim values and customs. Mastering the subject matter was present in every teacher's teaching perspective, although not always as a primary goal.

- For Samah (T1) Symia (T3), and Hala (T4), there was a superior goal above learning the language: the student's social and moral development. In their view, communication skills and manners (T1), social abilities and personality (T4) as well as values and morals (T2 and T3), including Muslim values (T4), held more relevance from the standpoint of what matters in life. While Samah (T1) regarded the development of communication skills as a goal in itself, Hala (T4) regarded the development of social skills as conducive to building a solid sense of self-confidence and fulfilling the student potential. For her, every learning experience had the latent quality of helping the students discover and develop innate interests and abilities. For Samah (T1) and Symia (T3), the student social and moral development gained even more relevance in student cases that their parents or the family failed to provide parental guidance. They regarded as incumbent upon the teacher to adopt a substitute role that ensured

the students were acquiring the values promoted by the local society. In the case of Symia (T3), this role extended to the teaching of Muslim values and customs. In this regard, teaching did not only deal with the achievement of goals related to the subject matter but also with superior aims in the social context of community life.

- By contrast, in Nora's case (T2), her goal was clearly cognitive in nature -to prepare students for college which involved mastering the English language. Her focus was primarily cognitive, yet she acknowledged the role of affective variables (namely, student emotional states and motivation) for a successful teaching-learning process. Despite this emphasis, she identified morals and values as another significant goal embedded in teaching. As noted above, not all these aspects of student development were held in consensus among all teachers nor were they all found in one teacher's perspective.
- *Ancillary material.* Social development and cognitive learning emerged in these teachers' accounts with varying degrees of prominence. For T6i and Tn, teaching had primarily an intellectual orientation in which student outcomes involved academic achievement (grades) and language acquisition. Proper manners and behaviour came secondary. T7i, on the other hand, believed teaching was about knowledge as well as social skills -an equation in which social development was regarded as considerably more important than knowledge. Helping students have strong communication skills and self-confidence was at the centre of her endeavour. For T6i, T7i and Tn, contributing to the development of the country was also a significant goal.

These beliefs about teaching nurtured a broader understanding of student development that focused on their intellectual, social and emotional potential in accordance with local culture's values and customs, an overarching goal targeting the student's holistic development.

### ***Teacher Responsibilities and Traits***

A second dimension that consistently contributed to clarifying the teacher's perspective on *teaching* was *teacher responsibilities and traits*, i.e. what the teacher does and what

the teacher is like. In this regard, there were similarities and differences among the teachers.

### ***Teacher Traits***

*Being Influential.* The first common trait related to the *teacher* concept that was identified, either explicitly or implicitly, by all the participants was its influence or the capacity to have a significant impact upon the students' learning and development. This quality intrinsically implied a view of the teacher as being more knowledgeable and experienced and thus, with a responsibility towards the young and inexperienced. This influence manifested in the form of guidance towards knowledge, towards fulfilling their potential and towards a righteous life. In other words, these participants (from the core and the ancillary database) believed that the teacher guides the student along a path of knowledge and a path of morals and values.

*Support v/s Boundaries.* A second commonality found among teacher's perspectives was a blend between the attributes of being *kind/flexible/friendly* and being *strong/strict/firm*.

- For these participants, the teacher was, on the one hand, someone who took care of the students, listened to them, supported them and gave them advice in school- and life-related matters and, on the other, she was the person who set limits and established rules inside the classroom. These qualities emerged in all the teachers' accounts (see Tables 2, 6, 9 and 12).
- *Ancillary material.* T6i and Tn, who had a more academic orientation towards teaching, gave more prominence to setting limits and establishing classroom routines and rules. T6i highlighted the fact that nowadays students expect to be friends with teachers and are not shy to express their feelings or opinions. Therefore the teacher must listen to the students, but also must set limits to avoid problems, emphasizing the impracticality of being in a constant friend-friend relationship with the students. Being patient, kind and keen on listening to students were traits that emerged in all the teachers' accounts, and with particular emphasis in T7i's perspective (which was congruent with her beliefs of student development).

*Personality Traits and Teaching Skills.* In terms of prominence of teacher traits, there was a notable difference among teachers.

- Samah (T1) and Symia (T3), the two teachers with more years of experience (11 and 17 years respectively) gave significant relevance to teacher personality. Samah stated that the teacher's personality was what mattered most in a teacher's repertoire of qualities (See Table 2, Theme 2) while Symia mostly emphasized teacher qualities with no reference to teaching capabilities (See Table 9, Theme 1 & 2).
- Conversely, Nura and Hala (6 and 3 years of experience, respectively) highlighted the importance of teaching skills and knowledge of the subject matter. Nura in particular, and Hala to a lesser degree, underlined specific teaching skills: way of teaching, clarity of explanation, making the lesson fun, being knowledgeable and updated, and constantly searching for new ideas. For example, when asked about their favourite teacher from their school days, three teachers (T1, T3, and T4) identified the teacher's personality as their main trait. Only Nura (T2) made reference to teaching abilities.
- *Ancillary material.* T6i and more prominently the novice teacher (Tn) highlighted qualities related to classroom teaching, namely, being responsible with the knowledge taught to the students, being creative and active and prepared for the lessons. T7i, on the other hand, stressed qualities related to the teacher's personality (e.g. patient, friendly, and with a big heart), which were congruent with her emphasis on the teacher-mother role and her teaching goals.

### ***Teacher Responsibilities***

The teacher responsibilities fluctuated within a continuum from a teacher-focused to a parent-focused outlook with some features common to all the participants. Towards the parent-end of the continuum,

- All the teachers (T1, T2, T3, & T4) regarded as their responsibility to care for the students which entailed listening to them, advising them in personal matters and guiding them. As noted earlier, this responsibility was particularly relevant in cases in which the students were deprived from parental guidance or support

at home (T1, T3). The advisory responsibility was observed only in Samah's (T1) interaction with her students. They manifested primarily in the form of advice on non schoolwork-related matters which were offered to the students during the lesson.

- *Ancillary material.* Listening to the students emerged in the T5i, T6i and Tn accounts. However, the justification and the relevance of this responsibility varied among them. In T5i's case, this was a responsibility that acted as a preventive measure and as an obligation (to prevent consequences) while for T6i and the Tn it was viewed as part of their mother/sister role. These responsibilities also included inculcating model behaviour and manners and giving them advice and guidance.

From the teacher point-of-view, all the verbal comments made by the participants alluded primarily to responsibilities towards student learning, both prior and during classroom practice.

- Regarding classroom practice, the participants stated various responsibilities related to curriculum delivery and student learning:
  - impart knowledge and/or skills (T1, T2, T3, and T4);
  - prepare lessons (T2, T3, and T4);
  - ensure students get satisfactory marks (T1);
  - know the students' strengths and weaknesses (T4); attend to student varying abilities (T1, T2, T4), emotional states (T2, T3) and learning styles (T2);
  - capture student interests (T4);
  - create an engaging environment (T2, T4) by rewarding performance (T3, T4) and implementing appealing activities (T4);
  - and set behaviour rules (T4).

These responsibilities translated into the implementation of a wide collection of strategies, some of which were observed in their classroom practices (which are discussed in the next section: Teaching Practices).

In terms of lesson preparation, Nura (T2), Symia (T3) and Hala (T4) prepared and organized their lessons around warm-up, core activities, and wrap-up activities. These three teachers gave particular importance to the design and



implementation of an interesting warming-up (as it was believed to be the key element to capture student interest) and to the statement of objectives.

- *Ancillary material.* The theme of teacher responsibilities surfaced more saliently in the case of the novice teacher (Tn) who highlighted responsibilities centred on student learning: capture student interest, do activities than involve students, enforce behaviour by setting classroom rules and inspire students to be successful. T6i, T7i and Tn identified lesson planning and delivery as part of their responsibilities and in it, preparing attractive warm-up and assessment activities, and focusing on the development of all language skills.

The responsibilities identified by the participants were mainly focused on student learning and development. Responsibilities towards themselves were raised by the novice teacher (Tn) and indirectly by Symia (T3). For Tn, the responsibility was first of all towards herself, as a person and as a teacher, then towards others. For Symia T3), this responsibility was expressed in relation to having the morals and values implicit in a model behaviour.

### **Student Traits and Responsibilities**

The third dimension that helped grasp a clearer understanding of *teaching* for these participants was *student responsibilities and traits*. In this dimension, teachers identified general qualities (i.e., being polite, punctual, respectful, helpful and with good manners) as well as student-specific qualities (i.e., curious and eager to learn, creative, independent, active, and hardworking).

Embedded in their teacher/mother-oriented perspective in which the teacher was viewed as experienced and knowledgeable, the *student* was essentially viewed as inexperienced, in need of guidance, malleable and capable of being influenced. Within this process of affecting student learning and development, the student was given a role that extended from passive recipient to active participant who constructs and seeks knowledge.

- In Samah's case (T1), the student was a recipient of knowledge and guidance, whose main responsibilities were limited to studying and learning. In Symia's

case (T3), the passive role was primarily circumscribed to following cultural values and norms. As for knowledge learning, the student was regarded as an active *doer*. Nura (T2) and Hala (T4) conceived the student as having a mind of their own with specific interests and views, so they strived for student engagement. Furthermore, they believed learning to be a shared responsibility between the teacher and the student.

- This active role was congruent with Nura's, Symia's and Hala's view of the student as a knowledge searcher, with the ability to seek or search for knowledge or further information beyond what is provided in class and to enrich the lesson by sharing knowledge with others, especially those academically challenged. This last feature was linked to the attribute of being helpful with others regarding knowledge sharing. For one participant (T3) seeking knowledge was particularly meaningful since she viewed this quality as congruent with Muslim views. The teaching practices observed in these three teachers (T2, T3 and T4) emphasized and substantiated these qualities.
- In terms of responsibilities, students were held responsible for studying, preparing for class, doing homework, participating and working in class, making an effort, and passing the subject (see Table 2, 6, 9 & 12, Theme Student Traits & Responsibilities).
- *Ancillary material*. In terms of general traits, being punctual, polite, and with good manners were qualities that also emerged in this group of teachers. Apart from good manners, good behaviour and good personal appearance were considered by T6i and T7i as important traits. From a student standpoint, eager to learn was the main characteristic, while getting high marks, memorizing and learning, revising at home and searching for information or knowledge were stated as student responsibilities.

As shown above, there were commonalities among the teachers regarding student traits and responsibilities, discerning between those qualities desired in a person and those related to being a good student. This dichotomy is congruent with dual teacher/mother role and the teaching goals related cognitive learning and to social and moral development.

## Teaching/Learning Process

As noted above, among the dimensions that helped clarify the nature of the teachers' understanding of *teaching*, references were made about the actors involved in teaching (teacher and student) and implicitly about the content of teaching -what to teach, embedded in the teaching goals (knowledge, morals, values, skills, abilities, etc.). However, the theme related to the *process of teaching* only emerged as a salient dimension in one of the teacher's perspectives. Nura (T2) believed the process of teaching to be a social interaction between teacher and students, which suggested underlying assumptions for *teaching* and *learning*. First, that *teaching* rests upon personal relationships, and second, that *learning* happens through interactions with others (teacher and peers). These beliefs appeared consistent with her views of the teacher being responsible for creating and shaping these social interactions that constitute the essence of the student learning experiences. Congruently, teacher traits related to teaching abilities and knowledge of the subject matter were present in her teaching perspective. For the other teachers, their classroom practices yielded some insight into their understanding of the teaching process and how teaching becomes practice.

## Contextual Factors

As stated in the theoretical framework, contextual factors can also affect the teaching-learning process in the classroom. These teachers described environmental (community- and parents-related) factors and student characteristics that affected their instructional choices and practices.

Regarding the characteristics of the students in their classrooms, these teachers identified some important variables affecting their practices. The most prevalent issues were the *varied student proficiency levels* in the classroom and the *poor student academic motivation*, both viewed as ultimately affecting student performance. All the teachers pointed to the varied levels of English proficiency levels within the classroom which extended within a wide spectrum from fluent students to students who barely knew how to write their name in English. The teachers were aware of this

miscellaneous range of language skills within the classroom and felt it was their responsibility to attend to them by implementing a diversity of strategies intended to enhance students' abilities to perform in English. (See previous section Classroom Practices, Student Learning differences).

The second common theme, *student academic motivation*, emerged prominently in all the teachers' narratives, which was considerably more complex in terms of connections with other contextual factors. The dimension of this issue and its causes varied from teacher to teacher. This lack of motivation manifested at three different levels:

**a) *Related to the subject matter.***

- Student negativity towards the English language learning was highlighted by all the participants and was attributed to a reaction to being forced to learn the language, given its compulsory status at school and in higher education, creating a negative attitude towards the subject (T1, T4). This situation was worsened by the students' belief that English as a subject does not require studying and therefore no effort is needed and/or their belief that English is difficult and they are not good at it; hence they made no effort.
- Closely related to this latter issue was the current assessment system which Samah (T4) believed to function as a disincentive to school effort because it offered the opportunity to students to pass the subject with little knowledge of the language.
- Another salient element was *content appropriateness*, which was raised primarily by one teacher (T2), yet since all teachers used the same textbooks as source for syllabus and curriculum delivery, this issue gained relevance. This content-related issue essentially referred to the textbook topics which were described as uninteresting and not culturally sensitive as they did not meet the students' interests and worked as a disincentive, making it a challenge to get the students enthused and motivated. Although all teachers acknowledged having the autonomy to introduce supplementary activities and resources, they could not change the content. The curriculum was designed to be delivered within limited timeframes with no time for introducing other content (more appealing or more skills-oriented, especially those needed to succeed in higher education).

***b) Related to schoolwork.***

- In a more pervasive outlook, this lack of interest in learning was generalized by one of the teachers (T1) to all subjects; not only English. The causes were ascribed to several factors: students' interests (set on other areas, e.g., social networking and technology); students being forced to attend school; poor parental involvement and supervision; and boring school routines. (T1).

***c) Related to Schooling and education.***

- At a larger scale, this lack of motivation was linked to the valorisation of being educated and the interest in pursuing education, a situation in which schooling was not considered relevant for girls' future. The cause for this lack of valorisation of education was attributed to another factor: the students' mothers who were uneducated and prioritized marriage over education (T3).

These factors corroborate the findings reported by Khamis et al. (2008) in their study of middle and high school Emirati students which established an association between student motivation and curriculum content and student interest in the subject matter. Whether the lack of academic motivation affected only the learning of English or the overarching perception of the value of education, this factor was consistently believed to be affecting student learning and evidently classroom teaching practices.

In contrast to the previous point, the *importance of English* as language of communication and its consequent prominence as subject matter were believed to be advantageous factors. In their view, English has achieved a unique status in the country as language of communication (T1, T3, T4) and thus, the subject has been given top priority by education authorities, introducing it into the curriculum in grade 1, providing ample teacher training opportunities (T2), and making it a compulsory requirement at most universities and colleges (T1, T2). This prominent status, however, was not identified as affecting student attitude towards the language in a positive way.

The following two factors did not unanimously emerge in all the participants' accounts. However, they were a central affecting variable for the teachers that brought them to light. The first one was *time constraints and pressure*. The two early-career teachers (T2 and T4) identified this issue as a prominent factor affecting teacher disposition and

performance. In specific terms, it referred to the pressure to accomplish tasks (e.g. curriculum delivery) within finite timeframes. Two main contributing elements were listed as causes for this pressure: the number of teaching and non-teaching responsibilities/tasks assigned to the teachers and the amount of time available to accomplish them. In the former case, the considerable number of responsibilities took time away from teaching and teaching preparation (T2). In the latter case, changes in the school daily timetable (which shortened teaching periods in any given day in order to accommodate special activities), last-minute changes introduced to the annual calendar, and missing on teaching time due to conferences or training sessions were identified as intervening factors causing time constraints. From the standpoint of pressure, both teachers made reference to a specific situation that often happened at the end of the term: pressure from colleagues to concede English teaching hours for them to finish their subject matter; a practice that seemed to have been prevalent in the past and colleagues still expected them to agree and do it. This constant pressure was viewed as affecting teacher creativity (T4).

Within the ancillary material, *student attitude towards English* language learning emerged as the most important variable in T6i, T7i and Tn accounts. According to these teachers, at the centre of this negative attitude was the issue of accepting learning English as compulsory and thus, forced to learn it. For some students, foreigners must learn Arabic rather than them learning English. Other reasons for this negativity were simply the fact that some students disliked the language, the fact that English is a difficult language to learn, very different from Arabic, and the fact that some students have very poor language proficiency levels. All these elements combined create a difficult situation for the teaching of English. All these teachers recognized the *prominence of English* as language and subject since it is a college and career requirement, yet in their view the student negative attitude remains unaffected.

The factor related to *time constraints and pressure* emerged only in the novice teacher's (Tn) narratives, in relation to the class period not being long enough to get tasks done. The variable related to curriculum appropriateness did not surface at all.

## Classroom Practices

To understand teacher beliefs about teaching involved looking into classroom practices. In this study, the observation-based data yielded insight primarily into these teachers' beliefs about goals and roles (teacher and student) as well as particular elements of the teaching process, namely, instructional approach, activities, and materials.

### *Teaching goals*

In terms of goals, practices congruent with goals related to student social and moral development were observed, yet with variations in focus. Samah (T1) placed emphasis on teaching manners and proper behaviour, congruent with Muslim values (see Table 3, Theme 6). Nura (T2) and Hala (T4) provided ample opportunities (e.g. group discussions and presentations) to develop speaking skills whereby to strengthen student self-confidence (see Table T7a, Themes 2 & 3 and Table 13, Theme 2).

Gave instructions -verbally	T1	T2	T3	T4
-supported with visual aids		T2	T3	T4
-supported with examples		T2		
Checked comprehension of instructions -through questions		T2		
-paraphrasing		T2		
Explained content -verbally	T1	T2	T3	T4
-supported with visual aids		T2	T3	T4
-supported with examples			T3	
-followed by application	T1	T2	T3	T4
Made connections with real-life				T4
Provided assistance during class work by				
-answering questions	T1	T2	T3	T4
Supervised development of activities	T1	T2	T3	T4
Reviewed task results -verbally	T1	T2	T3	T4
-using a whole-group approach	T1	T2	T3	T4
-individually			T3	
Did content revision -at the beginning of the lesson	T1	T2		T4
-throughout the lesson		T2		

**Table 16. Teaching Strategies used to enhance Student Understanding**

All the teachers utilized the grouping strategy for student classroom work which, although used by the teachers to influence the learning of the language, they intrinsically fostered the development of interpersonal skills by facilitating communication among students. Table 16 shows an emphasis on the cognitive dimension of the teacher-learning process. However, the degree of emphasis placed in this particular dimension varied from teacher to teacher. Table 16 includes a list of strategies used by these teachers intended to enhance understanding of content, instructions and classroom tasks and, consequently, enhance student learning.

Nura (T2), who stated preparing students for college as her main goal, used the widest range of strategies to ensure students were on task and heading towards the achievement of objectives and activity outcomes. By contrast, Samah (T1) used the least number and variety of strategies which were basically circumscribed within a verbal whole-class approach.

### **Teacher Role and Responsibilities**

In terms of responsibilities, the observed classroom practices revealed the teachers' awareness of their responsibility for the teaching/learning process. Their instruction suggested an emphasis on specific elements of the process to maximize student learning, namely, *student learning differences* and *student motivation* (see Tables 3, 7a, 7b, 10 and 13).

*Student Learning Differences.* All the teachers acknowledged having students with varying learning abilities and language proficiency levels in their classroom. Therefore, diverse strategies were implemented to attend to these student differences and language levels:

- A common strategy used with varying degrees of consistency by all the teachers was to provide extra assistance to weak-language students during class work.
- A second strategy used by Samah (T1) and Symia (T3) was to lower standards (student outcome) at weak-language student level to ensure learning.



- Most of the teachers used mixed-ability grouping for class work, although only one teacher (T2) stated using this strategy to support weak-language students' participation and learning. Two teachers (T1 and T4) stated that one-level grouping was more effective, but only one of them Hala implemented this strategy.
- Differentiation according to pace of work was observed in one lesson (T3) (students working at their own pace). In general, the content, techniques, activities, resources and timeline were the same for the whole class in all the lessons observed.

*Student interest and motivation.* All teachers identified student motivation as a major factor hindering learning. Most teachers, with one exception (Samah, T1), invested time and effort in creating and implementing classroom strategies intended to engage students in learning. However, there were differences in their approach.

- Nura (T2) and Hala (T4), the two teachers with less years of experience, used a wider range of pedagogically-oriented strategies to engage student interest and enhance motivation. They used as main leverage engaging activities and resources (including games and competitions, visual aids, student preferred activities) as well as student input as feedback for their instructional choices.
- By contrast, Samah (T1) and Symia (T3) implemented strategies intended to emotionally affect the students' attitude towards the teacher in order to influence their disposition to work, for example, by socializing with the students, sharing their personal email, awarding extra marks, and having students praise their own work.
- While Samah (T1) limited herself exclusively to the use of these affective strategies to influence student motivation, Symia (T3) complemented them with the use of visual aids and computers, a reward system, student work displays and the use of student feedback to assess her activities.
- While the strategies used by the first two teachers, and to a certain extent by Symia (T3), have a pedagogical foundation (strategies commonly known for being effective), the latter group of strategies have a more emotional or personal

approach to student motivation which is based on the teacher-student relationship, one of the dimensions that emerged as significant.

- A strategy that these teachers (with the exception of T1) believed to be effective to affect student disposition was the use of rewards, verbal and concrete (mainly words of recognition, applause and stickers, and more rarely the use of prizes). They had a reward system in place that they regularly used and believed to be effective. A collateral strategy linked to the reward system was the use of competitions to give out rewards; those who finished first –and had answers correct- were usually the winners.

*Lesson organization.* In the stated practices, Nura (2), Symia (T3) and Hala (T4) identified warm-up activities and objectives as important elements of the lesson. In practice, these teachers shared with the students the ‘objectives’ of the lesson. In Nura’s case (T2), she stated the focus of the lesson (e.g. writing, reading comprehension) rather than objectives or activities; Symia (T3) and Hala (T4) stated activities -which they called objectives- (e.g. learn new vocabulary and identify main ideas) while Samah (T1) only indicated the name of the unit and selected with the students, at the beginning of the lesson, what textbook-based exercises to work on. She followed the textbooks quite faithfully - which suggests that little or no preparation was involved.

As for lesson organization, starting with a warm-up activity was common to all the lessons. Some warm-ups were more appealing to the students than others. For example, games and discussions (as in T2’s and T4’s case) as opposed to content revision (T1) or homework review (T3). The lesson closure or wrap-up was rarely observed as the period ended while students were still involved in activities.

### **Student Role and Responsibilities**

In the lesson observed, the students participated in a series of activities for processing and applying content and for interacting and sharing: reading, listening, writing, discussing, decision-making, presenting, playing, searching, reflecting, and analysing. The students were given varied degrees of autonomy in these activities ranging from highly guided (Samah’s case) to more independent (in Nura’s lessons). This

independence was measured in terms of the degree of assistance and supervision provided by the teacher during classroom work and in terms of work pace. Students were expected to actively participate in class, although the opportunities not always appeared appropriate.

In the lessons observed, the opportunities for student active participation took several forms:

- Student input used to design and assess learning experiences, giving the student an active participant role and a voice to express their opinion and preferences (T2, T3, and T4).
- Group work used as the main instructional method. This grouping strategy promoted student classroom participation when,
  - The tasks chosen were appropriate for group work, as opposed to activities that could be accomplished individually. For example, discussions, brain-storming, presentations, (T2, T3 and T4);
  - Group work roles were assigned to the students who had been taught the basic behaviour patterns related to group functioning (T2 and T4);
  - Tasks were well structured in terms of clear instructions that specified what to do and how to do it (T2, T3 and T4).

This grouping strategy did not render the participatory outcomes in Samah's (T1) classroom, since the tasks consisted basically in textbook-based exercises to be done in groups (which were developed by the strong-language students and copied by the rest); no group roles were assigned and the students did not know group work rules.

- Learning experiences that required the student to do the work: group and individual presentations, group and class discussions, games and competitions, essay writing, vocabulary practice, data analysis, web searching, group projects, etc. (T2, T3, T4). In the case of Samah's classroom practices, there was an emphasis on drill practice.
- Interesting, relevant and realistic topics were used to build the activities around, engaging student interests and stimulating prior knowledge and thus facilitating participation (T2, T3, and T4). Samah (T1) made use of this strategy for free

class conversations, incorporating current student-related daily life events. However, weak-language students were unable to meet the communicative competences required to participate in the conversation, being left behind.

Nura (T2), Symia (T3) and Hala (T2) invested time and thought into creating strategies that promoted student classroom participation. In the case of Samah (T1), though she stated being an advocate for student participation, her classroom dynamics did not facilitate this process. Contrarily, it fostered dominance of strong-language students.

### **Teaching Process**

The teaching process emerged as a prominent theme in one of the teacher's (T2) organizing systems which contributed to understand her perspective on teaching. The classroom practices yielded further insight into the teacher's understanding of the teaching process and how it is put into practice.

All the teachers used grouping as the main instructional method, although one of the teachers (T1) used it basically as a sitting arrangement rather than a group work strategy. The teachers used this method to promote interaction and participation. In general terms, the observed lessons showed an approach to language teaching based broadly on the underlying principles of cooperative learning in which students did tasks in groups to achieve academic goals. This approach relies on interactions among students in order to develop their language skills. Therefore, all teachers were very strict with English-only interactions in the classroom –except when translation was used to teach vocabulary (a strategy utilized by only one teacher). Incentives were used to encourage students and groups to speak English in class. Similarly, clear behaviour guidelines for group work had been developed (with one exception).

The variety of activities and resources used highlighted the importance in the teachers' perspective of student motivation for classroom engagement and participation. Games, presentations, competitions, discussions, role-play, dictation, essay writing, data analysis, and web searching were some of the activities observed. Dictionaries, videos, audio-tapes, pictures, worksheets, textbooks, cards are examples of the resources used. This varied array of instructional resources suggested that making English fun appeared

to have been considered the main venue to engage students in learning. This belief became apparent particularly in Hala's lessons (use of competitions, colour worksheets with pictures, use of a toy ('angry bird') to express disapproval of student behaviour. If placed on a fun-dull continuum, Hala would be on one extreme and Samah (T1) would be on the other end -with activities that were repetitive and drill-based.

This chapter has described the main findings of this study in two sections. First, at individual level, case by case (idiographic analysis) and then collectively, describing the commonalities and prominence of themes that emerged from each teacher's perspectives. In doing so, it has touched on the complexity of teacher's beliefs (which form a system of themes with miscellaneous semantic relations) as well as the intricate interconnectedness of contextual factors forming a chain of cause-effect relationships.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, the findings described in the previous section are discussed in terms of prominence within this study and in light of comparable findings reported in similar research. Conclusions are also discussed as well as the implications and limitations of these findings.

#### *Discussion of Findings per Research Question*

The findings of the study, described in the previous chapter, showed that this group of female Emirati English teachers indeed possessed a set of interconnected beliefs about teaching, some of which were shared in common among all the teachers. These beliefs became apparent through the conversations and the classroom observations. The findings also showed that these beliefs were not always realized in practice, yet important relations could be established between stated beliefs and classroom practices. The teachers' perception of their teaching context was also recounted in the previous chapter, and commonalities were found among the salient contextual factors, suggesting that the teachers' instructional decisions and choices were influenced by their beliefs about good teaching as well as by the needs or requirements imposed by the instructional environment.

In this section, the discussion is guided by the research questions that this exploratory study sought to answer. Therefore, the chapter is divided into four sections which summarize and discuss the results pertaining to each question.

#### *1. What beliefs do IFE-EL teachers hold about teaching?*

Nespor (1987) suggests that teachers hold beliefs about their role as *teachers*, their *students*, the *subject matter* and the *school*. Bondy et al., (2007) defined beliefs as propositions related to *teaching*, *learning*, and the *students*. The findings of this research showed evidence that this group of teachers possessed interconnected beliefs

about teaching which encompassed views about themselves as teachers (teaching role, their relationship with the students, their teaching responsibilities and attributes), about the students (responsibilities and traits), about teaching goals and the teaching process.

#### *Views about the teacher's role*

These teachers seemed to hold a similar belief with regards to the role that they played in the students' lives; a role that they embraced in order to do their job. This overarching belief, prevalent in the majority of the teachers, was the role of a *mother or sister* to the students which manifested in the teachers' sense of responsibility to care for the students and, for some of the teachers, care for the community. This perception of their teaching role as teacher-mother/sister to the students extended from being a mother/older sister with a stronger ascendancy connotation to being a sister with a friendship component.

This image of a family member appeared to be a 'core belief' (Clark and Peterson, 1986) or in Rokeach's (1968) terms, a belief that was more central than others, since it clarified and gave meaning to the nature of their understanding of teaching, their views of teaching goals and the specific traits and responsibilities attributed to the teacher and the student. This image or identity provided a lens through which to approach the teachers' professional world and understand the role they adopted.

This form of identity claimed by the teachers emerged from their definitions of what teaching is about and the roles that teachers play. No specific question targeting the topic of professional identity or self-representation was included in the interview guides, yet since the questions were formulated in broad terms, they allowed the teachers to interpret the questions in any way or direction they deemed suitable. This finding about teachers having beliefs about a professional role or identity supports results from other studies (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004; Tsui, 2007) which showed that teachers generally have assumptions about a sense of professional self and that the way they do their job is closely related to this professional identity; substantiating the conclusion that this mother/sister role was a core belief in these teachers' perspectives. This finding is also congruent with studies (e.g. Nagatomo, 2012; Walkington, 2005) suggesting that core beliefs are closely connected to teachers' identity.

### *Teacher-student relationships*

Being close to and caring for the students were two features at the heart of the relationship with the students, which was regarded, on the one hand, as integral to the teacher-mother/ sister role and, on the other, as instrumental for the achievement of educational aims. Teaching was not viewed as limited to subject matter and methodologies but rather as the venue to achieve superior aims related to a holistic view of student development for which this relationship was essential. In other words, this relationship was viewed by these teachers at the centre of teaching and education.

The teachers' views of this relationship appeared to have subtle nuances. For some teachers, developing a positive relationship with the students was viewed as a motivational tool. Having a close relationship with the teacher was believed to influence student disposition towards the teacher and thus, towards the subject and eventually contribute to learning. They believed that 'if students like the teacher, they like the subject' and consequently are more inclined to invest time and effort in studying the subject matter. This finding is congruent with current research (e.g. Wubbles et al., 2012) that emphasizes the central role that positive, supportive teacher-student relationships play to motivate students to learn.

Secondly, the teacher-student relationship enabled the teacher to approach the student's personal and affective world. In this view, the teacher-student relationship enabled the teacher to support students emotionally and, in doing so, facilitate student learning readiness, viewed as a precursor to academic learning. This view showed that the teaching/learning process has an affective orientation, which is adjunct to cognitive learning. In other words, learning has a cognitive and an affective dimension and both need to be taken into account to maximize academic achievement.

Third, the teacher-student relationship was viewed as an integral component of the teacher-mother/sister role. In this view, being emotionally close to the students and developing trusting and enduring connections with them was intrinsic to the nature of being a teacher and a mother/sister. Safe and supportive relationships with the students, similar to the parent-child type, were believed to have a stronger bond and thus, a firmer ascendancy over the students than that of a *teacher*. It was this closeness and



ascendancy that enabled the teacher to add to student development academically, socially and morally. Fulfilling a parent-like role was regarded as a duty or responsibility that was part of the teaching role, a point-of-view that reveals underlying beliefs about a broader relationship between the school and the community, and the role of the teacher within the society.

### *Views about teaching*

When asked about the meaning of teaching, the nature of the experience of being a teacher surfaced as a significant element. Teaching was considered a responsibility that affected the teacher's daily life beyond the school walls; a duty that was not restricted to a work schedule but rather involved a way of life. They believed it was their duty to care for and be responsible for student development and for demonstrating appropriate professional and moral behaviour in order to be role-models, in terms of the values and qualities that they intended to instill in their students. In this regard, teaching was viewed as a responsibility of considerable magnitude, not as employees towards the school, but towards society, as citizens, since they are in charge of the education of the young generations –and thus perpetuate the values of the Emirati culture. This notion of responsibility is further clarified by the nature of the education aims pursued by the teachers through teaching –discussed in the next point.

### *Views about teaching aims*

Almost all the teachers, when asked to talk about *teaching*, responded by making references to the educational aims to be achieved rather than the process of teaching - how teaching goes about in the classroom or how learning happens. This suggests that for this group of teachers either what to achieve was more important than how to achieve it or they had more clarity about where they are going rather than how to get there. Whether it was for one reason or the other, teaching aims or goals emerged as a prominent dimension.

Congruent with the adopted professional role described above, there were differences between the teachers in terms of the educational aims to be achieved through teaching and schooling. Those teachers that embraced a sister/friend role gave more emphasis to knowledge acquisition and subject matter. In this view, the sister/friend aspect of the role facilitated the development of a closer affective connection with the students which in turn was believed to benefit academic learning. By contrast, those teachers with a stronger sense of mother/older sister role had a more holistic view of student development. For them, the instilment of values and the development of social skills (i.e., proper manners and behaviour as well as self-confidence and communication skills) took precedence over academic learning. They viewed the student as a person who was also growing affectively and morally and believed that the teacher played a role in fostering the development of a wholesome student/citizen. Inherent in this belief is a broader view of the school's responsibility towards society which was also implicit in the teachers who emphasized academic learning, as they believed their duty was to prepare students to be ready for college or career.

Despite differences in their priorities in educational aims, these teachers viewed teaching as a duty; a job that made them feel proud of themselves for doing what they believed was right and for the profession as it allowed them to contribute to the country. In other words, *teaching* emerged as having connotations of moral responsibility, of vocation or service for which they were willing to make sacrifices. Two teachers expressed how their sense of care and service prevented them from leaving the profession:

I thought of resigning lots and lots of times, but I feel that our girls, Emirati girls, need teachers that have a very broad mind, that can give information at the same time be part of the students' life. (T3-A15)

In this context, this view of *teaching* as service or vocation substantiated the view of teaching as a responsibility towards the community and towards the country, described above. Included in this sense of responsibility towards the community was the instilment of Muslim values as the norms of the local culture that need to be preserved.

### *Views about Teacher Traits and Responsibilities*

Research has shown that teachers generally hold beliefs about themselves as teachers and about their students (e.g. Nespor, 1987; Bondy et al., 2007). Thus, the fact that these participants had beliefs about the responsibilities and traits of the teacher and the student was not surprising. However, the emergence of these particular beliefs may have been triggered by the nature of the conversation guides which were very broad in scope and open to interpretation and by the questions themselves since the topics of *student* and *teacher* were included in the list of topics for discussion.

These participants' views about teacher attributes were closely intertwined with their beliefs about their teaching role. A common feature attributed to the teacher, regardless of other differences, was the quality of being highly influential and with the capacity to shape the malleable nature of the students. They believed that as teachers they could have a big impact on student motivation and development.

These participants primarily focused on two types of attributes. Those teachers that gave emphasis to the teacher/mother role and had a more holistic view of student development emphasized attributes related to personal traits; qualities that revolved around the encompassing attribute of caring (caring about the students). On one end of the spectrum there were traits like being *flexible, kind, supportive, friendly, and encouraging*. On the other end, there were traits like *strict, firm, demanding, and strong*. These apparently opposing sets of attributes were believed to be present side-by-side, simultaneously in the teacher. While being kind and supportive, the teacher was also expected to be strict and demanding, both seen as manifestations of a caring attitude towards the students. A caring teacher was understood as one that set limits and expectations and pushed students to do their best. In this view, caring was not regarded as synonym of nice and lenient. On the contrary, being a teacher entailed having the discerning ability to find a balance between both extremes in order to provide support and set boundaries. This category of teacher traits became more meaningful when looked at from the standpoint of the teacher/mother role that they claimed and the importance attributed to the relationship with the students and to student development.

The second set of attributes was related to the subject matter (e.g. being knowledgeable and updated in terms of the subject matter and pedagogy) and emerged as important for those teachers who gave predominance to academic learning. In this case, caring for the students was viewed as pedagogical responsibilities that ensured students were learning in an interesting and fun manner. These teachers' comments and practices suggested that they took upon themselves the responsibility to make English enjoyable and appealing in order to maximize student achievement. They felt it was their duty to respond to students' feelings and needs -affective and academic. In this regard, teachers seemed to be carrying alone the total responsibility for student wellbeing and learning.

Most of the responsibilities mentioned by the teachers were focused on student learning and development and towards the country (educating Emirati girls was viewed as a social responsibility and a service to the nation). Responsibilities towards themselves (namely, being a role model, upgrading knowledge, attending professional development and providing for learning differences) were peripherally mentioned. They emerged as significant in as far as they affected and benefited student learning. Responsibilities towards the school management (e.g. enforce school procedures and rules) or towards the parents (e.g. keeping parents and/or family informed) did not surface at all.

These two categories were not exclusive. Both sets of attributes and responsibilities were significant and present in these teachers' perspectives but with different grades of emphasis. The relevance of these teacher attributes suggested that the mother/teacher role entailed conceptions of teaching in which relationships and caring were paramount and pedagogy and subject matter were relegated to secondary positions, while the teacher/sister role entailed an inverse relationship. This 'caring teacher' views appeared consistent with studies that place caring as a primary characteristic of competent teachers (e.g. Irvine, 2001; Cooper, 2003).

These participants' notions of teacher traits and responsibilities relate at least to a certain extent to their own personal experience as students and their perception of their favourite teachers with whom they had a close relationship. Most participants, when asked about their favourite teacher from their school days, made references to the teacher's personality and personal qualities related to their way of *being* –as opposed to

ways of *doing*. Whether these qualities were accurate or they had been beautified over the years, they were held as true by these participants and were in most cases regarded as a model to follow. This point bears relevance in two ways. First, it substantiates these participants' belief that teachers indeed have the capacity to have a big impact on student development and, second, it supports research findings (e.g. Richardson, 1996; Tatto, 1998) that suggest that teacher beliefs are fostered by personal experience.

### *Views about Student Traits and Responsibilities*

The dichotomy present in the teacher role (teacher/mother) and in the educational aims (academic learning / student development) also emerged in the perception of the student: as person and as student. Thus, general traits (related to politeness, respect and good manners) as well as student-specific attributes (curiosity, creativity and hard work) were identified.

From the standpoint of academic learning, most teachers conceptualized the student role as an active participant and a knowledge seeker. In terms of classroom performance, the student was expected to be the main actor by being active and doing the work since they believed participation facilitated learning; a notion that is congruent current research on learning (e.g. Turner and Patrick, 2004). Concurrently, there were also teachers who viewed the student as a passive recipient whose main task was to comply with teacher directives and accept what teachers offered. Thus, the teachers' beliefs about the student role fell within in a range that went from passive to active, from follower to actor and from absorbing to constructing knowledge.

In the cases of the two early-career teachers (4 and 6 years of experiences), student responsibility appeared to be constructed as students being active, involved, having their own opinions, preferences, needs, and thus capable of contributing to the teaching and learning process and able to take on responsibility for their learning. Conversely, the experienced teachers, one of them particularly, viewed student accountability as compliance and the teacher as the one in charge and responsible. In terms of responsibilities, the students were expected to study, prepare for class, do homework, work in class, and pass. Elements related to the student as an actor were also present

(e.g., search for information, hold discussions, and give feedback on needs and preferences, among others).

There may be various explanations for these divergent student conceptualizations. One of them may be linked to teacher education. The early-career teachers attended college more recently and may have been introduced to more updated teaching trends that position students as actors of their own learning (e.g. communicative approach, cooperative and active learning). One of the teachers, for example, recurrently made references to techniques and strategies learned at the university. Closely related to this possible explanation is the intervention of professional development as the venue for getting teachers familiarized with current teaching methods. Another element that may be at play in the utilization of instructional practices that promote active student involvement is the current system of teacher evaluation and supervision mechanisms which enforce the use of current instructional methods. These participants made comments related to constant ongoing professional training and the implementation of specific practices due to authority requirements. Consequently, this student conceptualization (active learning role) may be linked to contextual influences rather than a reflection of actual teacher thinking, yet they may eventually influence teachers' beliefs about the student role.

Within the realm of social and moral development, students were expected to acquire and follow norms of proper behaviour, manners and moral codes. In this regards, student responsibility was conceptualized as students doing what experienced adults told them and advised them to do. Thus, the student responsibility was to comply and to adhere to what was socially and culturally prescribed. At the base of this perspective, there was an underlying conceptualization of the student as subjected to and in need of the teachers' intervention; a view in which the teacher was the experienced and knowledgeable adult capable of creating the necessary structures and actions to guide young and inexperienced students. Given the resilient nature of teacher beliefs (Kagan, 1992), these conceptualizations may coexist side by side despite contradictions, with teachers basing their practices on more current teaching trends that may be at odds with their traditional conceptual beliefs.

### *Views about the teaching/learning process*

The topic of *learning* was not directly approached in the interview guides (with the exception of one question addressing the assessment of student learning). It was left open to explore the connections that the teachers made among elements of the teaching/learning process. In terms of verbal comments, these participants were mostly focused on *teaching* and almost no relationship was established with learning. On being asked about knowing when learning happens, they alluded to the use of questions and task development. In other words, knowing the answer and being able to complete tasks correctly were regarded as indicators of learning.

Teachers believed that learning occurs through social interactions which revealed an underlying belief that learning occurs in a social context. Although all the participants used grouping strategies for classroom work, which implicitly entailed an interactive approach to language learning, it was uncertain whether the use of this instructional method followed views and beliefs about learning or followed teachers' assumptions about methods and techniques that ESL teachers are expected to implement in their classrooms. Given the rejection of teacher-fronted lessons and the growing popularity of group work, due to strong theoretical and empirical support (e.g. Long and Porter, 1985; Gluck and Mylett, 2005), the question that arises is whether the observed classroom practices were a reflection of teacher beliefs about teaching or of their assumptions about expected teacher performance.

This section summarized those beliefs at the heart of these teachers' perspectives of teaching which basically encompassed assumptions about themselves as teachers, about the students and about teaching. The symbolic metaphor of mother/sister that these teachers claimed as a form of self-representation or sense of identity highlighted significant personal meanings that each one of them ascribed to the experience of being a teacher and to their understanding of teaching. Congruently, the personal traits and responsibilities attributed to the teacher and the student became more apparent and meaningful once examined through this viewpoint. This image also helped grasp the nature of educational aims involved in the teaching endeavour and helped comprehend the dimension of the responsibility of being a teacher –as viewed by these teachers.

## *2. What relationship can be established between IFE-EL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices?*

In light of the findings, there seemed to be two types of beliefs held by these teachers: abstract beliefs that were more generic in nature and related to broad educational conceptualizations (e.g. educational aims) and concrete beliefs that were more specific in nature and related to actual classroom instruction and management (e.g. use of L1). The latter set of beliefs was more strongly associated to action and practice. These findings revealed the multidimensional nature of belief systems and they echoed the same distinction made in other studies on teacher beliefs (e.g. OECD, 2009). Van-Driel et al. (2007), in their exploratory study of secondary Science teachers' beliefs in the Netherlands distinguished between general beliefs and domain-specific beliefs. Cooper (2003), in her study about effective white teachers, distinguished between conceptual beliefs and operational beliefs, defining the former as those beliefs that were discussed in the abstract or inferred from practice and the latter as those beliefs that manifested in observable events and practices. These concepts and definitions illustrate and substantiate the distinction between the two types of beliefs found in this study which should be borne in mind when studying the links between teacher beliefs and classroom practices.

### *➤ Teacher stated beliefs and practices*

Concrete beliefs were more directly related to classroom practices. Therefore, given the generic nature of some of the beliefs revealed in this study, the extent to which they could be related to practices was more limited. Abstract beliefs about the teacher role and educational goals did not lend themselves easily to empirical observation. By contrast, beliefs about the teaching/learning process were more directly related to observable actions. Yet, not all concrete beliefs translated into teaching practices or actions. Some stated beliefs and practices remained without any connection or manifestations in practice; a finding that has emerged in others studies (e.g. Simmons et al., 1999).

In terms of teaching goals, the teachers indicated that student social and moral development and academic learning were the main goals of the teaching endeavour.



These stated beliefs appeared as congruent with practices observed in the classroom, although establishing links between beliefs and social/moral development was more complex. In terms of moral development, the main practices observed consisted of verbal encouragement of proper behaviour and giving advice to students on diverse matters following Muslim values. This practice could also be linked to the motherly teacher role *caring* for ‘her daughters’ behaviour and adherence to culturally-acceptable values and standards (which was observed more consistently in one of the teachers).

Regarding academic learning, all the observed lessons intrinsically evidenced an emphasis on the cognitive dimension: learning the subject matter. The activities were geared towards learning the English language by processing, retrieving, relating and using language knowledge. A wide variety of strategies and activities was observed. Some were focused on maximizing student understanding of content, instructions and activity implementation and thus, enhance learning (e.g., varied forms of differentiate instruction). Other strategies addressed the affective dimension in order to enhance student engagement and motivation to learn (e.g., performance rewards and attention to student interests and needs).

The data from the interviews and the classroom observations were consistent and showed that teachers gave importance to both dimensions. In practice, they used different strategies to affect student motivation and to enhance understanding and learning. In terms of student motivation, the use of engaging activities and resources was the main strategy, yet they also made use of rewards and the teacher-student relationship to influence learning disposition -with one teacher using mainly the last two strategies. Two possible explanations for this particular teacher’s choice may be the lack of pedagogical knowledge to use other strategies (she held a non-teaching degree which may be an affecting variable) or lack of motivation (the teacher expressed disliking preparation of activities and resources, which in turn may explain the reasons for using a textbook-and-voice approach to teaching). Lack of pedagogical knowledge and lack of motivation are identified in the related literature as variables affecting teaching.

Within the cognitive dimension, all the teachers believed that attending to student proficiency was of primary importance for successful learning. This view was observed in the classroom through strategies that intended to differentiate instruction. Special attention to weak-language students was stated as usual practice (e.g. providing extra support in class) yet it was not frequently observed. Although all teachers maintained that student proficiency was to be paid attention to, observational data showed that they mostly employed a whole-class approach in terms of using the same tasks, activities, resources, time and work pace for all. With few and isolated exceptions (e.g. high-and-low worksheets, occasional differentiation of work-pace) the teachers did little to attend to learning differences -which may be an indication of lack of operational knowledge.

In terms of learning, the student was simultaneously viewed as an active participant (who seeks knowledge) and as a passive recipient (who absorbs knowledge).

Concomitantly, the teacher was seen either as a facilitator of learning or as the one responsible for transmitting knowledge to the students. Both views were congruent with the observed classroom practices. Some of the lessons evidenced an emphasis on an engaging environment, using varied activities that targeted different learning styles, giving the student active participation and ample opportunities for interaction. A second group of lessons had a more traditional approach. They usually had a grammar focus in which the teacher explained content verbally, assigned drill-and-practice exercises, based on the textbooks and workbooks and, generally used a whole-class teacher-centred approach. The first group of classroom practices, on the other hand, resembled a more constructivist orientation or student-centred approach, which for more than two decades, has been advocated for by researchers (e.g. Prawat, 1992) and practitioners to be the conduit to successful student learning.

These divergent practices were observed in different teachers as well as in the same teacher's approach, suggesting that teachers have mixed conceptions of teaching in which traditional and constructivist beliefs coexist. Similar findings have been found in prior studies done in very dissimilar contexts (e.g., Klein's (1996) study in Canada and Zhang and Liu's (2014) study in China). Another possible explanation for these mixed conceptions may be context-related, i.e., given the whirlwind improvement initiatives that Emirati teachers have seen and experienced in the last 10 years, they may be going

through a transition period from traditional teacher-centred to learner-centred practices. One other possible explanation may be a teachers' need for further training on learner-centred strategies. Kavanoz (2006) in her study of Turkish English language teachers' beliefs and assumptions found that the main barrier for implementing learner-centeredness was limited knowledge.

➤ *Stated Practices and Classroom Practices*

In terms of self-reported practices, the teachers' verbal comments addressed the topics of lesson organization and classroom work. Regarding the former they all described similar stages for lesson organization (warm-up, core activities and wrap-up) and gave major importance to engaging warm-up activities. In this regard, there was consistency between stated and classroom practices. Lessons consistently started with a warm-up and continued with core activities for content introduction or consolidation. Wrap-up activities were often not observed as they were thwarted by time constraints. This lesson structure was congruent with literature on effective teaching which postulates that an effective lesson is organized into these three stages (e.g. Richards and Bohle, 2001). The use of this lesson structure may appear to be linked to performance requirements included in the teacher supervision and evaluation system, (as hinted by one of the participants) suggesting that these practices may be the result of contextual influences rather than a reflection of beliefs about good teaching.

Regarding classroom work, all the teachers stated using grouping for student classroom work. Observational data confirmed that all the teachers used this strategy in all the observed lessons. A possible explanation for using group work all the time may be that these teachers believed this strategy to be *the* one way to teach English effectively. Although the teachers claimed using pairing and individual work as well, one was never observed and the other had very few occurrences. The use of this instructional method suggested that these teachers were familiar with current trends on collaborative grouping. However, the fact that they overused it and the fact that in some classes no team-work skills had been developed in the students may be seen as indications that they lacked the procedural knowledge of how to and when to use this strategy.

### *Classroom Practices*

The classroom is a complex dynamic system where teacher beliefs are expected to manifest themselves. These teachers' classroom practices revealed aspects of language teaching that had been tangentially tapped upon in the conversations. In this regard, these teachers provided ample opportunities for language use and practice (congruent with a skills-based approach) and use of mother tongue was not allowed except as a translation strategy to teach vocabulary; suggesting that teachers believed practice to be the main conduit to English acquisition. These practices suggest that teachers believed English is acquired through practice.

The observed lessons also evidenced the use of technology. These teachers habitually used computers either as a teaching tool (e.g., to project images for explanation and practice purposes, to play videos or to listen to CDs) or for student use in computer-based activities, including use of internet (e.g. search the web and make presentations). With one exception (a teacher who had a textbook-based approach), all teachers used computers. However, the two early-career teachers were using computers in more varied ways and more often than experienced teachers, which is congruent with findings from similar studies that suggest that younger teachers are more keen on incorporating technology (e.g., Hamid (2011) in his study of Malaysian secondary teachers' beliefs about ICT and its use in the classroom).

This frequent and diverse uses of computers suggested that these teachers were familiar with strategies for using computers in the English classroom and that they viewed computers as a lesson enhancing tool and as a motivational source. Using the computer as a teaching tool allowed them to target more than one learning style (auditory and visual senses of the student) and create more engaging activities (by incorporating text, audio, images, animation, and videos into them). Additionally, using computers was congruent with these teachers' beliefs about tuning in with students' interests in order to enhance academic motivation. In other words, these practices suggested beliefs about the benefits of technology (to enrich lessons and enhance student learning) which are not altogether surprising since other studies have reported similar findings (e.g. Agners and Machtmes, 2005; Mourtada and Salem, 2011).

Of the total number of lessons observed, computers were mainly used for teaching purposes (use of power point feature and videos); computer-based tasks for student work were observed in only one lesson and with limitations as there were considerably fewer computers than needed. It was also noticed that in the case of the teacher who did not use computers at all, there was no overhead projector or computer in the classrooms or in the English room. Although several factors have been identified as barriers for technology use in the related field (e.g. Franklin et al., 2001), it appears that in this particular case, access was one.

As noted above, some beliefs were more directly related to classroom practices than others (teaching aims and teacher conceptualizations of the teacher and the student roles in the teaching/learning process). As there were beliefs that did not realize in the classroom, classroom practices revealed beliefs and assumptions that did not emerge in the conversations (related to language teaching and the use of technology) which contributed to grasp these teachers' perspective about teaching.

### *3. What contextual factors, internal or external to the classroom, are perceived by IFE-EL teachers as affecting their teaching practices?*

Teaching occurs in an instructional setting in which a myriad of variables interact. Nespor (1987) stated that teachers make sense of the context and their practices through personal beliefs. In this study, a variety of contextual elements related to the student, the content, and the environment were believed to be affecting teaching practices: student attitude towards English (student perceptions), language proficiency level, student disinterest in studying (and a correlated predominance of social media), inappropriate textbook topics (detached from student interest and culture), lack of variety in school activities (related to lack of resources and facilities), time constraints (linked to teacher workload and constrained timelines) and undervalue of girls' education (associated with marriage priority). Most of these factors had a direct impact upon student motivation -which was also reported as an affecting variable.

Of the student-related factors, negative attitude towards learning English was generally reported to be the main obstacle mentioned by all the participants. Student negativity was affected by their perceptions of their own abilities, difficulty of the language, and low proficiency level as well as by the fact that students had no option but to learn the language -which was perceived as detrimental towards their mother tongue. Similar findings had been reported by Clarke (2006) in his study of Emirati EFL student teachers. In his study, Clarke reported that ELT students acknowledged the importance of learning English, while also being protective of local culture and traditions. In this study, the element of the predominance of the English language in the local context was not perceived as having a counteracting effect on student negativity.

In practice, this negativity was not observed in student classroom behaviour. In the observed lessons (of three teachers), the students were attentive, worked enthusiastically, asked questions, volunteered answers, and appeared comfortable and at ease -all behaviours that have been linked to motivated students (e.g. Palmer, 2007). One exception was observed in one teacher's lessons in which language-skilled students dominated classroom interactions while the weak-language students were passive and silent, appearing lost or uninterested. This behaviour may or may not be linked to motivational issues (in which poor language proficiency and the textbook-based approach used by the teacher may be important underlying elements).

These beliefs about student lack of academic motivation, including their negativity towards English, appeared to be influencing classroom practices as most teachers used a wide range of strategies, activities and resources to make English 'fun.' These practices also seemed consistent with the teachers' beliefs about the importance of academic motivation for successful learning and suggested that they believed students could be motivated as a result of their interventions and actions; finding that has been reported in other studies (e.g. Weisman (2012) concluded that, while students attributed their own motivation to intrinsic goal-oriented factors, teachers believed that their actions could affect student motivation).

Three environment-related factors that surfaced more significantly, although not common to all the teachers, were time constraints, poor variety of school activities and

lack of valorization of women's education. This last factor was significant for one single teacher who linked it to mothers' low level of education and to the fact that they were not Muslim, and often not Emirati. Studies on Emirati women's education (e.g. Madsen and Cook, 2010; Tennant et al., 2014) indicate that nationwide the number of female Emirati students in higher education has risen dramatically as a result of increased educational opportunities and changes in cultural attitudes (family encouragement and support), suggesting that this may not be an issue at a large scale, but of relevance at school level or in specific geographical areas.

Time constraints and lack of variety of school activities were the main significant school-related factors that surfaced in the study. The first factor was linked to stress and pressure as a result of the large amount of tasks and responsibilities. There is extensive evidence from different teaching contexts reporting on teachers finding their workload challenging (e.g. Al Mahrooqi and Al Hashmi, 2012), particularly for women (e.g. Lippel, 1999). Lack of variety in school activities (issue raised by one teacher) was linked to a boring daily routine and identified as affecting student motivation. Though she ascribed importance to variety of school activities within the curriculum programme, she did not relate variety of classroom activities to student motivation (she consistently used the same approach to teaching).

Numerous other elements have been identified (e.g. Borg, 2003; Pea, 2012) as factors affecting teachers' practices: principal leadership, parents, equipment, school facilities, policies, class size, instructional resources, accountability systems, etc., yet they did not emerge in this study. Although workload was mentioned, it was limited to the amount of tasks and responsibilities to be accomplished within constrained timeframes, without any links to school management or MoE requirements. Teachers seemed to believe that teaching was primarily about what they themselves did for the students, taking upon themselves the main responsibility of student learning, without much consideration of other important elements that may be affecting what they do. Surprisingly, issues related to themselves as teachers were not raised (e.g., gaps in their pedagogical knowledge, lack of experience, classroom management skills, or the need for professional support), raising the question of whether teachers understand the process

of teaching and learning and the many contextual factors that may enhance or hinder classroom practices.

These findings showed that the factors described above played a role in the instructional choices that teachers made for classroom practices. In general, these findings appeared consistent with studies (e.g. Crossley, 2010) that emphasize the importance of contextual factors to understand teaching practices and with a growing literature (e.g. Pea, 2012) that highlights the multidimensional nature of these variables and their intricate relationships.

#### *4. What links can be made between teacher beliefs and their socio-cultural background?*

Cuban (1987) argues that in every society there are deep-seated traditions of teaching and learning which carry implicit definitions of teacher and student roles. Emirati society is defined by its deeply-rooted Islamic character and, considering that Islamic teachings permeate all aspects of human life, it was not altogether surprising the emergence of some linkages. Three teachers made comments revealing a connection between their beliefs about teaching and their personal religious beliefs. One was related to the concept of *teacher* viewed as a messenger, with a very valuable message, who is socially valued and respected. The other one was related to the concept of *student* as a knowledge seeker, which was intrinsically interrelated with the value of knowledge which was viewed as worthy to be sought. Thus, it was the student's duty to search for knowledge and be enthusiastic about learning. To illustrate this perspective, a religious statement was cited by one of the teachers, "Ask for knowledge even in China" ('أطلب العلم ولو في الصين'). This teacher's view implied a strong valorization of knowledge and for the act of searching, which was congruent with Islamic epistemological views found in related literature (e.g. Kazi, 1998; Halstead, 2004) about the pursuit of empirical knowledge.

As described above, this group of teachers had salient beliefs about a teacher/mother or sister role, whereby they viewed the students as their daughters or younger sisters,



whom to care for. Within this view, being caring, patient, kind and a model for the students were important attributes. Similarly, teachers' responsibilities entailed student learning as well as the development of social skills and the inculcation of values (with the latter being more relevant than the former for some teachers).

These conceptualizations of teacher role, responsibilities and attributes had similarities with related literature on Muslim teachers. Sa-u et al. (2011), for example, based on Hashim's (1998) summary of the qualities and duties of a teacher according to the renown Muslim scholar Al-Ghazali, highlighted that teachers should treat students as their own children, should advise them and dissuade them from evil ways. In terms of practices, teachers should limit students to their level of understanding and should not require anything beyond what they can grasp, thus in the case of academically-challenged students, they should be given only what is clear and suitable to their minds. Cook (1999) in his article about Islamic versus Western conceptions of education, described three terms that are used for education in Arabic, each with a different connotation that denotes the multi-dimensional nature of the educational process in Islam: *ta'lim* (تعليم) related to knowledge sought or imparted through instruction, *tarbiya* (تربية) related to spiritual and ethical nurturing and *taadib* (تاديب) which refers to the social dimension of a person's development. Reagan (2005) states that for Al-Ghazali the focus of education was largely on what nowadays would be *moral education* rather than on academic learning alone.

Certainly some similarities can be seen between Cook's (1999) three concepts for education and the teaching aims identified by the participants of this study (learning, social skills and values) or between the participants' beliefs about teacher attributes and Hashim's (1998, in Sa-u, 2011) description of the teacher qualities and duties. Though actual influence could not be inferred, these similarities substantiate the probabilities that teachers' personal understanding of Islamic concepts may be impacting their beliefs about teaching and their enactment in the classroom. Mansour (2008), in his study of Egyptian Science teachers' beliefs, investigated the role of experience in teacher beliefs and practices using a socio-cultural perspective and found that teachers' personal religious beliefs and experiences were the main factor shaping their beliefs and practices. Similar findings were reported by Haidar (1999) in his study of Emirati

teachers' views about the nature of science. This suggests that further research is needed to draw more conclusive findings about links between teachers' personal religious understandings or worldviews and teacher educational beliefs.

## *Conclusions*

Although there is an extensive literature focused on the cognitive dimension of teaching and the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual teaching, there are fewer studies that have also examined teachers' perceptions about the role that context factors may play affecting their classroom practices. Also lacking in the existing related literature are more studies that, on the one hand, give emphasis to practitioners' experiences and, on the other, adopt a research paradigm congruent with the nature of teaching and the intrinsic nature of beliefs (which is bound to teachers' personal experience and personal stories). Considering the newness of the context of this study in terms of research and extant literature, and in an effort to contribute to fill in this knowledge gap, this study aimed at exploring Emirati teachers' beliefs and their interaction with classroom practices and contextual factors, using the particular perspective of teachers' perception of their teaching context.

This research study did an in-depth exploration of beliefs of eight female Emirati English teachers working in government secondary schools. From this group, the core information used in this study came from four teachers who took part in all the stages of the data-gathering process which lasted six months. The data-gathering process consisted of guided conversations (interviews) and classroom observations (namely three background interviews and three classroom observations) followed by post-observation conversations. Relevant information shared during informal conversations was also included and treated as data.

The current study aimed to expand extant knowledge on teacher beliefs by answering four questions related to beliefs held by female Emirati teachers about teaching, including beliefs about contextual factors affecting their teaching practices, and exploring connections between those beliefs and classroom practices. This concluding

section summarizes the main findings pertaining each research question, discusses the implications and the limitations of this study, and makes suggestions for further research on the basis of this study's findings.

### *Main Findings:*

#### *Female Emirati Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching*

Emirati English teachers indeed possessed a set of interconnected beliefs about various elements related to teaching, which, based on their nature, tended to be more abstract or more concrete, with the latter being more directly related to classroom practices, although they were not always realized in practice. Abstract beliefs were more generic and entailed conceptualizations related to educational aims, teacher and student roles, responsibilities and traits. Concrete beliefs, on the other hand, were more specific and made reference to the teaching and learning process regarding instruction in general and the teaching of English, in particular.

Teacher beliefs represented a complex interconnected system in which the belief about the teacher's role was central. This core belief about the teacher took a form of self-identity (a role adopted by the teacher) that described how the teacher viewed herself, which influenced other related beliefs within their system. Based on this core belief, the findings indicated that teacher beliefs focused on a duality that involved a teacher role combined with a family member (mother or sister) role. This core belief had connections that linked to other components involved in teaching. While the teacher facet was focused on the academic dimension of teaching, the mother facet had a more holistic view of student development that included the social and moral aspects. The teacher's responsibility was to pass on knowledge related to the subject matter, including the development of language skills; the mother/sister responsibility was to be a model of morals and values and care for the students. In terms of attributes, the teacher/mother was knowledgeable as well as strict and caring, an experienced adult who provided support and set rules. Similarly, the student was viewed as a person who

had to be respectful and well-mannered as well a student who was curious, active, and eager to learn.

Given this belief of a teacher/mother role, teaching was viewed as a responsibility of significant proportions in which the teacher-student relationship was central. This relationship was integral to teaching, to the nature of the teaching endeavour and intrinsic to the teacher-mother role. It also played an instrumental role as a motivational tool to enhance student learning and overall development.

In terms of beliefs related to the teaching/learning process, teachers had beliefs that fell within a traditional teacher-centred perspective to language teaching, while others were more congruent with a student-centred approach, revealing the coexistence of divergent beliefs at intra-level (within a teacher's perspective) and inter-level (across teachers). This dichotomy was reflected in the teachers' beliefs of the student role (from passive recipient to active participant) and the teacher role (from possessor of knowledge to facilitator or guide). Practice revealed a teacher role closer to manager of the learning environment, making pedagogical decisions about goals, strategies, assessment, and provision of feedback and rewards, with few instances of sharing that power with the students. Most teachers offered appealing activities for students to be active in the classroom, but practices about giving them voice (by using their feedback) and choice (e.g. select topics or activities) appeared incipient.

At a nomothetic level the teachers shared various beliefs, however, the centrality of these beliefs varied from teacher to teacher. The belief that teaching is about imparting knowledge was shared among all the participants. However, for one teacher this belief was central to the teaching endeavour, while for others it was relegated to second place after the development of social skills and the instilment of values. The participants also shared the belief that teachers possess knowledge, yet for some participants the teacher delivered that knowledge to students while for others, the teacher guided the students towards knowledge. These findings showed that belief systems were personal and idiosyncratic.

### *Relationship between Teacher Beliefs and Classroom Practices*

Despite the fact that beliefs were not always realized in practice, important relations could be established between stated beliefs and classroom practices. Interview-based data and classroom observations congruently showed that this group of teachers gave importance to the cognitive and the affective dimensions of teaching. Teachers paid attention to student motivation while attention to student differences on language proficiency remained more at the level of intentions. Whether the strategies used for these purposes were appropriate or effective was out of the scope of this study.

Teachers reportedly, and in practice, adhered to a warm-up/core/wrap-up lesson sequencing, although they often ran out of time to finish the lesson which thwarted the wrap-up activity. Thus, they did not give closure to the lesson and did not provide feedback to the students on what they had learned and the progress they had made or the goals they had achieved. For classroom work, grouping was stated and observed to be the main instructional method, although teachers varied in the way this strategy was implemented (including one teacher using it mainly as sitting arrangement), suggesting limited pedagogical and procedural knowledge. The use of group work, which is based on a cooperative learning approach, entailed underlying assumptions about learning in a social context and about language acquisition as a result of social interaction; however the use of this approach may be a reflection of teacher beliefs or the result of MoE-endorsed pedagogical guidelines.

In terms of classroom teaching, the lesson observations revealed that technology was regularly incorporated into the instructional practices to enhance lessons and increase student engagement, although there were limitations in terms of accessibility. Thus, the utilization of computers was mainly restricted to teacher use (power point) rather than as a student-user learning tool. The majority of the teachers implemented classroom activities that reflected a skills-based approach to language learning, which implies the underlying assumption that practice is the key to language acquisition. Although teachers believed English language was learned through practice, the use of this approach was not directly interpreted as practice following teacher beliefs but rather considered it may be the result of the structure and approach of the textbooks used for

curriculum delivery. The integration of technology and the use of grouping strategies (cooperative learning approach) and skills-based tasks may be a reflection of beliefs embraced by the teachers, yet they may also be the result of a contextual variable related to MoE directives and expectations.

Since teachers' verbal comments had a strong focus on generic beliefs, which were not always realized in the classroom, inconsistencies between beliefs and practices were few. For example, the teachers' belief about addressing student proficiency differences when, in practice, very few strategies were observed. Most instances of inconsistencies were teacher-specific. For example, Samah's belief that she enhanced student participation through group-work while maintaining a whole-class approach and one-size-fit-all activities in the classroom. Observed practices generally converged with stated beliefs about teaching and learning. These findings about abstract/generic and concrete/specific beliefs showed that the relation between beliefs and practices is not straightforward or easily established; on the contrary, they emphasized the complexity of the belief-practice relationship.

### *Contextual Factors and Teaching Practices*

The findings of this study yielded some insight into teachers' perceptions of the nature and the role that contextual factors played in their teaching practices. These factors interacted with teacher beliefs to influence instructional decisions and to facilitate or hinder the implementation of strategies and activities. Contextual factors related to student, content and environment (school- and society-related) were identified as affecting teaching practices; each having embedded in itself other related elements forming a complex multidimensional network of context-related factors. Student motivation was a central factor in the teachers' perspective and it had links to others related to student (disinterest in schooling), to content (textbook topics did not match student interests and culture), to the school (lack of varied activities) and to the environment (valorization of education). All these factors had varied degrees of prominence across teachers and within each teacher's teaching context.

While some factors were more generic in nature, others were specific to the subject. Student negativity towards learning English was the most significant factor mentioned

by all teachers, as it had an impact on student dedication and effort invested in the subject. This negativity revealed important elements related to students' perception of their own language skills and of the English language complexity, as well as their conflicting feelings about their own language and the mandatory standing of English language learning in the national education system.

These factors linked to student motivation and negativity appeared to be affecting classroom practices as most teachers implemented a wide variety of strategies to make English learning appealing to the students. Similarly, all teachers identified student heterogeneous levels of English proficiency as an important element impacting instructional decisions about classroom practices. However, though efforts were observed, strategies for differentiated instruction were in short supply, suggesting that lack of knowledge may be another factor involved.

These intervening factors described above provided some interesting initial insight into the kinds of contextual issues that female Emirati teachers of English perceived as affecting their classroom practices. These findings showed the complexity of their teaching contexts and the influence of teacher perceptions on their practices; which ultimately supported the argument that context played a role to understand teacher beliefs and practices.

### *Teacher beliefs and their Cultural Background*

The findings showed that teachers made connections between their understanding of teaching and learning (teacher beliefs about the teacher and the student role) and their personal religious/cultural beliefs. Similarly, resemblance was found between the teachers' beliefs (about teaching goals, teacher attributes and responsibilities) and Islamic views discussed in related literature. Although inferences about actual influence cannot be made, these similarities drew attention to the possibility that teachers' personal understandings of religious concepts may play a role in the formation of teacher beliefs about teaching/learning and in their enactment in the classroom.

In the light of these findings and taking into account the nature of beliefs as inextricably linked to personal experience and the deeply-rooted Islamic character of the Emirati context, it is reasonable to presume that Emirati teachers' personal religious beliefs and experiences may be shaping their teaching beliefs and practices. However, further research is needed to substantiate conclusive findings.

This study has contributed to bring to light the complexity of the Emirati educational context and the female Emirati teachers' beliefs about teaching, showing evidence of a blend of national culture-oriented concepts and practices based on international teaching theories. The cases included in this study evidenced the intricate multi-dimensional and idiosyncratic nature of belief systems and also showed the differences in the working environments, as perceived by the teachers. It has also confirmed the relevance for educational research of using practitioners' perspectives to better understand teacher thinking, practices and their environment.

### *Implications of the Study*

Although the study of a few cases may not constitute enough substantive base for making generalizations or prescriptions, they do yield in-depth insight into phenomena and, from this angle, envisage implications. This study about Emirati teachers' views and practices has relevance for a wide range of important issues related to education reform, teacher education, professional development and English language teaching.

First, this study draws attention to the coexistence and dynamic interplay between Western instructional theories and Emirati teachers' beliefs about education and teaching which have revealed connections with the teachers' personal understandings of religious concepts. Studies in other contextual backgrounds (e.g. Minnis, 1999, on Brunei; Niyozov, 2006, on Tajikistan; Mansour, 2008, on Egypt; Zhang and Liu, 2014, on China) and here in the UAE (e.g. Richardson, 2004) have reported on experiences and issues related to introducing Western teaching practices into non-Western educational systems; creating complex and mixed teaching perspectives and scenarios. Therefore, it is of great importance that researchers and teacher educators further



explore teachers' broader worldviews and experiences and their relationship to beliefs about teaching/learning and consequent enactment in the classroom in search for more conclusive findings, for which this study may be a starting point. Considering that one of the highest government priorities is to modernize education, while preserving local traditions and cultural heritage, gaining insights into this blending process may be of considerable interest and value to MoE authorities and decision makers in order to address possible incompatible worldviews and identify values and conceptions that need to be preserved from those that need changing and contribute to both objectives.

In addition, this study has implications for teacher education and professional development programmes. Extant literature (e.g. Knowles, 1992; Borg, 2003) suggests that programmes which ignore teachers' prior beliefs are less effective; unless conceptions derived from prior experience are brought to surface, teachers continue teaching in the same way, limiting their chances to be professionally developed. These findings showed that Emirati teachers hold a particular set of beliefs which can be used as the starting point for introducing new conceptions and views of pedagogy and education. As also shown in this study, Emirati teachers have actually embraced Western theories of teaching and practices. Thus, the cluster of beliefs that emerged in this study could be used as reference to help teachers reflect on their way of thinking and their practices and facilitate their own development.

Closely related to the previous point, this set of beliefs held by the teachers in this study may also be of value for teacher education institutions that use or may consider using a conceptual change approach to teach about teaching and learning -an approach which has been used in other contexts with encouraging results (e.g. Ho et al., 2001). These findings and the study itself may also be useful for teacher educators from the standpoint of research as they may be used as a starting point for undertaking further studies. From this perspective, an important task for teacher educators is to get familiar and to understand Emirati teachers' (pre-service and in-service) general worldviews in which beliefs about teaching/learning are embedded.

This study confirmed that teachers are familiar and are implementing instructional practices based on international ELT theories and has identified areas of teachers'

knowledge gaps. This information may be useful for the design of professional development programmes that match teacher needs and are in line with concrete classroom realities. Additionally, this study has shown a dynamic interaction between teacher beliefs and contextual characteristics affecting teaching practices, creating unique teaching scenarios with concrete needs. This has implications for the design of professional development programmes that are not simply adopted from elsewhere; but are actually adapted to these teachers' needs and their specific environment.

This study also provided an initial understanding of the kinds of issues that female Emirati teachers perceived as significant contextual influences, which can be useful information for educational decision makers to initiate a wider discussion on teacher perceptions of their teaching context in order to better support teachers and classroom practices. In this regard, emphasis is given to Emirati classroom teachers' perceptions of their teaching environment as opposed to external assessment done by outside educators. Once education authorities better understand the kind, prominence and influence of contextual factors, these perceptions can be integrated into professional development programmes and into the improvement of instructional settings.

### *Limitations of the Study*

With any research study, the findings must be interpreted in the light of the limitations of the research. There are several limitations to this study, some of which offer opportunities for further research. There are limitations derived from the context of this study circumscribed to the Emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, which have their own contextual characteristics. Therefore there is research potential in the other emirates which may have diverse contextual features that offer a different setting for school characteristics and hence, for teaching.

In methodological terms, the instruments used as interview guides to elicit verbal commentaries and observation guides were created on the basis of extant literature about common areas of teachers beliefs and on existing instruments of renowned researchers. However, eliciting teachers' beliefs and views is a complex task and so is

the observation of teaching, thus these instruments need to be researched and improved. New research using the same instruments would generate findings with a greater degree of comparability (Borg, 2006).

Since the participants were aware of the purpose of the classroom observations (for research purposes), this factor may have affected their instructional choices and led them to implement lessons that were not their typical lessons but rather an improved version. Therefore, a longer timeframe for collecting observational data would have probably gathered more authentic lessons. In this study, only three observations were carried out with each teacher.

Similarly, this study was done with a small sample and was circumscribed only to secondary school English teachers (due to the high demands upon them to produce high school graduates with strong language skills), thus the findings are limited to this specific group. Extending the study to other subject matters and to other school levels (preparatory and elementary) would provide data for comparison purposes. Teachers of other subjects may offer new insights into the interplay between beliefs, practices and context while investigating how English is taught at other levels may also be useful for better understanding of English language teaching practices currently in use.

Similarly, this study focused on female teachers only (as they outnumber male teachers considerably). However, considering that the significant shortage of male teachers (and the consequent recruitment of non-nationals to teach in boys' schools), there seems to be an immediate need to look at local male teachers' beliefs about teaching and gain a firm grasp of their understanding of the Emirati educational context and possibly shed light on the reasons for eluding teaching as a profession.

The small number of participants included in this study and their characteristics are relatively specific. Thus, further research is needed (using different samples and varied instructional settings) to build a stronger and wider base of knowledge that allows replicating the processes used in this study and to determine if similar findings are found that allow making meaningful generalizations.

### *Further Research*

One of the characteristics of exploratory research is that it does not provide conclusive findings and therefore creates ample opportunities for further research. The findings of this study revealed the multidimensional nature of belief systems which encompassed abstract/generic and concrete/specific beliefs, with links to teachers' personal religious belief system and to current international teaching trends. Given the complexity of belief systems, these relationships need further exploration and so do other facets of teacher beliefs to substantiate these findings. The findings about links between teacher beliefs about teaching and teachers' personal cultural/religious understandings constitute an area that requires further investigations to draw more substantive conclusions about cultural influences on teacher beliefs; including a deeper investigation of social/cultural factors influencing Emirati teachers' belief formation through enculturation.

These findings also showed that Emirati teachers are adopting Western-based theories and practices. Taking into account that teacher beliefs are influenced by teaching experiences, exploring how foreign theories are influencing Emirati teachers' beliefs is also relevant. Sandiford (2014), in her study of the enculturation of pre-service Emirati EL teachers, found that local, cultural and social forces indeed have a significant impact on student teachers' perceptions of themselves. More studies of this kind are certainly needed, especially in countries where policies of cultural preservation are challenged by modernization strategies.

In terms of contextual factors, this study provided an initial understanding of the kinds of issues that female Emirati teachers perceived as significant contextual influences. Each of these factors may become the topic or a working hypothesis for further research. Considering the priority given to education and to English language learning and taking into account that the issues of student academic motivation and student negativity towards English language were the two factors that emerged most prominently, these issues appear worthy of further exploration, in terms of the variables affecting student motivation (of which some emerged in this study) and in terms of

students' perception of the English language, given its unique role and predominance in the curriculum and in the country.

Regarding practices, research on teacher thinking needs to be increased, with a particular focus on pedagogical beliefs and practices. Although these findings showed consistency between stated beliefs and observed practices, particularly with regards to the implementation of current theory-based practices, this consistency may be an indication of the teachers' ability to conform to particular requirements or expectations. Considerable research is needed to determine actual change of teacher beliefs.

This study showed that pedagogical strategies for differentiating instruction, stimulating social interaction and for integrating technology were used in the English classroom; however, the connections between these practices and teacher beliefs were limited. Similarly, the findings of this study suggested that teachers viewed themselves as the main agent responsible for student learning. Further research on teacher responsibility may lead to better understanding of teacher views and practices.

Research can certainly make an important contribution to further understand Emirati teachers' beliefs and perceptions and to identify the nature of their teaching beliefs as well as their connections to practices. If we understand better the nature, formation and complexity of Emirati teachers' beliefs; they may be eventually integrated into the curriculum of teacher education and professional development courses in order to facilitate the process of bringing in outside models and adapting to the Emirati context.

### *Final Personal Remarks*

As an educator, I began to see with dismay the scant attention paid to contextual differences and to educational practitioners' experiences and viewpoints. The popularity of effectiveness models in educational reform movements is widespread and so is the pervasive tendency to regard these models as presumably socio-culturally neutral. Yet the relative success of these reform efforts has highlighted the centrality of contextual variables. The field of teacher research has also shown, theoretically and methodologically, a tendency towards a positivist orientation. This study was conceived as an effort to distance from that tendency. It is an exploration of English teachers' beliefs about teaching, in the Emirati educational context, with a focus on their relationship to classroom practices and contextual factors.

A small group of female Emirati teachers took part in this case study and opened the door to their professional world. They expressed their beliefs and understandings about teaching in general, about teaching Emirati girl, about the English learning and about their educational context. In the process of exploring teacher beliefs, this study revealed teachers who felt committed and dedicated to contributing to education and, in this way, serve the country; teachers who appeared open and flexible to incorporate international theories of teaching in order to improve education.

It is my hope that the findings of this research study provoke interest among education authorities to look into teacher beliefs, perceptions, knowledge, and practices. It is hoped that this study shows a way forward for understanding teacher thinking and thus achieve better teaching and learning. It is also my hope that this study serves as stimuli for further research to investigate this and other related phenomena which are central to prominent controversies and issues in the country. At a personal level, this study allowed me to develop my abilities as a researcher and as thinker, gave me the opportunity to study a topic of great interest to me, acquire a better understanding of Emirati teachers' educational perspectives and of the complexities of beliefs systems and, in doing so, develop my independent views and broaden my own perspective.

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## Appendix A: Sample of Interviews Transcripts and Coding

T4 - Background Interviews			
<b>Teacher:</b>	T4 – Symia	<b>Date:</b>	November 5, 2012
<b>Interview:</b>	Conversations 1 and 2	<b>Location:</b>	English room at school
<b>Time:</b>	9. 40 a.m.	<b>Duration:</b>	23 minutes

		<b>R: In your opinion, what is a <i>good</i> teacher like? What characteristics would a teacher have that you would say she is a <i>good</i> a teacher?</b>	
VIEWS	Teacher Traits	24. I think that being kind, at the same time strict with following rules. [SV: Tr	
		[Role/Inf] From all that I said before, I think you can elicit being a teacher. Being kind, being respectful, being a very considerate person, being at the same time a very strict person. You can put there whatever is there to put. [SV: Tr Traits/Kind-Strict]	
		<b>R: What do you think about English as a subject to teach?</b>	
CONTEXT	St Attitude	25. In English you don't have lots of information to teach, especially in the Emirates here. Our students don't like English. They think that, "Why are we learning English?" They have to learn our Arabic and then they have to learn English. [CF: St Att Eng/Neg]	
		26. But everyday they find that English is very important. They feel it now, especially when they are going abroad. They feel that it is very, very important. But they don't like it. [CF: Eng/Imp]	
CONTEXT	Eng Lang	27. According to us, nowadays we are teaching only English skills. We teach some information, grammar, vocabulary but mainly we focus on skills. [TP: Eng Focus/Skills]	
		28. Meaning by <i>skills</i> that if you put the student in any situation, she can get through it. For example, if she wants to write something, she has a certain way of writing. We just teach her how to. For example, if she wants to write a letter, we show her how to write a letter, but not what's in the letter. [TP: Eng Focus/Skills]	
PRACTICE	English Subject	29. We are teaching more skills than the language itself, especially in the secondary section because they should have nearly all. Whatever there is to be taught from Primary and coming to us. We just make the final adjustment, giving more information at the same time, giving new grammatical...new grammar, new words. [TP: Eng Focus/Skills]	

## Appendix B: Sample of Classroom Observation Notes and Coding

<b>Date:</b>	February 14, 2013	<b>Location:</b>	English Room
<b>Teacher:</b>	T2 - Nura	<b>Class:</b>	Grade 12
<b>Register:</b>	24 students	<b>Attendance today:</b>	17 students
<b>Time:</b>	9.05-9.50 (second period)	<b>Duration:</b>	45 minutes

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">CONTEXT</div> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Example of Hospitality</div> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I arrive at the school 20 minutes early. I greet the receptionist and immediately she asks me if I am visiting Ms. Nura. I confirm her guess so she invites me to a small room, across from the Principal's office, in the Administration area where I have met with the teacher before. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><i>Ex of Hospitality</i></span></li> <li>2. I sit down and a lady walks in, greets me in Arabic and serves me a cup of tea. As I wait for the teacher, I prepare my file for the observation. A few minutes prior to the lesson, Nura comes to the room to invite me to go the classroom.</li> </ol> |
|--|--|

### ***Informal Conversation 2***

- Nura greets me with a friendly smile and asks how I have been doing. She shares that today the schedule has been modified to create an extra period for a special activity (a lecture/talk on proper behaviour given by a policewoman visiting the school today). The class periods and the lunch break have been shortened. She is unclear about when the bell will ring or how long the class period will be but she has planned for a 40 min-long lesson.

### ***Classroom Observation***

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">PRACTICE</div> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Tg Strategy</div>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. We walk together to the second floor and into the English room -which is right next to the stairs. When we walk into the room, there are no students inside. The desks are arranged in groups –desks are designed for group work (6 hexagonal tables put together in a circle, with 6 chairs each). <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><i>TP: Tg</i></span><br/><span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><i>Strat/Group</i></span></li> </ol>                                      |
| <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">CONTEXT</div> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Resources</div>     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. There are 10 computers on individual desks located at the back and on the right side. The Tr's desk is at the front, next to the whiteboard and a projector screen. There is a computer and a printer on it. There is a display board on the left wall with some papers.</li> </ol>  |
| <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">PRACTICE</div> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Wall Phrases</div> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. On the walls there are some motivational phrases (<i>Actions speak louder than words; You fail only when you give up; and Everything is possible, it just needs motivation</i>). As the Tr shares that they were painted by the students. <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"><i>TP: Wall Phrases/St Motiv</i></span></li> <li>6. As I explore the room, the teacher is busy installing the computer, checking the projector, and preparing her material. The bell rings at 9.00 am.</li> </ol> |

	7. While we wait for the students, the Tr writes on the board the date, name of the unit and the focus of today's lesson [Unit 4. 'Who's smarter?' Focus: Listening and Speaking].
CONTEXT St Characteristics	8. The students arrive bringing their books and materials and as they come in, they say <i>hello</i> to the Tr and ask why she was absent yesterday, whether she was sick. The Tr explains she had to attend a conference. <span>CF: Tr Resp</span> She enquires who took them in her absence. They reply that they had biology instead. They add, "We missed you, teacher." <span>CF: St Char/Caring</span>
PRACTICE Tg Strategy	9. They sit down in groups, following the layout of the classroom. The Tr greets the students with a friendly <i>Hello Girls</i> asks them to form equal groups, not overcrowded groups. There is a group with only 2 girls and others with 5. She asks them to form 4 groups of 4/5 each. The students redistribute themselves and form 3 groups of 4 and 1 group of 5. <span>TP:Tg Strat/Group</span> 10. In the meantime, the Tr checks attendance by asking the students about the absentees. There are 17 students today. The Tr also informs them that today the winners of the English Speaking competition will be announced. <span>TP: Tg Strat/Rew</span>
PRACTICE Greetings	11. Once they are all sitting, the Tr says, "Let's start the lesson formally" and she greets them again, <span>TP: Greet/Manners</span> Tr: <i>Good Morning</i> Class: <i>Good morning teacher.</i> (Ss reply in unison. They do not stand Tr: <i>How are you today?</i> Class: <i>Very well, thank you. And you, teacher?</i> (in unison) Tr: <i>Fine, thank you.</i>
PRACTICE Revision	12. The Tr asks questions to the whole class to review the unit under study. Every time she asks a question, students raise their hand and say 'teacher, teacher.' Then she selects a student to answer the question, <span>TP: Rev/Start (Qs)</span> Tr: <i>What is the name of the unit we are studying? Shada*?</i> Shada: <i>'Who's smarter'</i> Tr: <i>What is it about? Afra*?</i> Afra: <i>Cats and Dogs</i> Tr: <i>And who is smarter? Salma*?</i> Salma: <i>Dogs</i> Tr: <i>Why? What can they do?</i> The Tr asks more questions to help students remember a reading passage from the previous lesson. Random students answer. <span>TP: Rev/Start (Qs)</span>
PRACTICE Instructions	13. The Tr gives the instructions for next activity. She shows a slide on the board with the instructions: 'Watch a video and make notes about the reasons why dogs are smarter than cats.' She asks a student to read the instructions and then she asks them to explain the task. <span>TP: Insts/Oral-Visual-Parap + Who-class App</span>

*Appendix C: Sample of Themes Inventory*

DIMENSIONS	T1 – THEMES	CATEGORIES
<b>VIEWS</b>	Nature of Teaching Teaching-Learning Goals ELT { EL Nature EL Goals EL Learning Teaching Strategies Successful Lesson	<b>TEACHING</b>
	Teacher Role & Responsibilities Teacher Traits Teacher Relationship with Sts	<b>TEACHER</b>
	Student Role Student Traits Student Responsibilities	<b>STUDENT</b>
	School Concept School Environment	<b>SCHOOL</b>
<b>STATED PRACTICES</b>	Tr-St Interaction Student Support Student Participation Games Tg Strategies      Grouping Use of Internet Tg Approach      Instructional Flexibility Task Simplification	<b>STUDENT-ORIENTED</b>
	Curriculum Delivery (Textbook) Teacher Instructional Autonomy	<b>SUBJECT-ORIENTED</b>
<b>CONTEXT FACTORS</b>	Student Negativity towards English Student EL Proficiency Student Commitment Student Background	<b>STUDENT-RELATED</b>
	ELT { Approach Prominence of the language Marking System & Assessment School Activities { Lack of Resources Lack of Facilities Lack of Activities School Administration	<b>SCHOOL-SYSTEM RELATED</b>
<b>OTHERS</b>	Teacher Workload Teacher Memories (school experience) How teacher learned to teach Reason to become a teacher Proper behaviour for girls Man/Woman Relationships	
	<b>SINGLE EPISODES</b> Teacher Anecdote (Grading) Getting teaching Job Student Behaviour Issue Problem with Principal	



## *Appendix D: Directed Conversations Guide – Background Interviews*

### **Conversation 1**

*First of all, I would like to thank you for accepting to be part of this research study. As you know, I'm doing research on teaching in the Emirati context. The main objective is to explore female Emirati teachers' beliefs and understandings about teaching and examine the contextual influences affecting your teaching practices.*

*It is my hope that the findings of this study will yield insight into the Emirati teachers' views and understandings about your professional life and the problems and challenges that you face in your teaching practice. This information may offer a new perspective on how to involve teachers in innovation efforts and may contribute to consider the unique characteristics of the Emirati context in future education improvement efforts.*

*If it is OK with you, I would like to record our conversation. That will allow me to grasp all the details of the conversation and, at the same time, be able to follow your ideas and comments attentively. This is our first conversation, so I would like to ask some questions about your background. Please feel free to ask me questions as well. We can exchange questions as we along.*

1. Describe your school years as a student. Share any detail you like.  
*Prompt questions:* What were your teachers like? What type of student were you?
2. If I ask you to describe an early memory of your school days, what comes to your mind? What is it about? Can you describe it?
3. Do you remember any teacher in particular from the time you were a student?  
*Prompt question:* Why do you remember her?
4. Did you have a favourite teacher? What made this teacher special?
5. Why did you become a teacher?

### ***Teacher's Background Information***

6. Where did you study?
7. What is the title of your degree?
8. What grade levels are you teaching now?
9. How many teaching periods do you have?

*These were my questions for today. Would you like to add anything? Thank you very much.*

## Conversation 2

*Last time we talked about your school experience back in the days when you were a student. I thank you for sharing. Today I would like to talk about your perspective on teaching.*

### On the topic of ‘teaching’

1. When you think about teaching, what do you think about?  
*Prompt question:* What related words or ideas come to your mind?
2. Define teaching. What is teaching for you?
3. What is the purpose of teaching?

### On the topic of ‘teachers’

4. What, do you think, are the roles of the teacher?  
*Prompt Question:* What does a teacher do? Which do you think are the responsibilities of a teacher?
5. What is like being a teacher?
6. In your opinion, what is a good teacher like?

### On the topic of ‘subject matter’

7. What is it like to teach English?

### On the topic of ‘students’

8. What words do you relate to ‘student’?
9. What are the responsibilities of a student?  
*Prompt question:* what does a student do?
10. What is a good student like?

*Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. I enjoyed the conversation.*

### Conversation 3: Practice and Context

*Today I want to talk more in-depth about being a teacher and how you teach. Sometimes I may ask you for further details after you answer a question. I do that to ensure I understand your point of view. We can always go back to questions and ideas at a later point.*

1. Describe one of your lessons. A typical lesson of yours.
2. Do you use a specific approach to teaching?  
*Follow up questions:* Do you emphasise specific skills in your lesson?
3. Describe a successful lesson.  
*Prompt question:* What makes you say, at the end of a lesson, “That was a good lesson!”?  
*Follow-up:* Could you expand on ...? What do you mean by ....?
4. Describe yourself as a teacher.
5. What are your students like –the ones you are teaching now?  
*Prompt questions:* How would you describe your students? What are their characteristics?
6. When preparing a lesson, what do you think about?  
*Follow-up:* Do you decide what to teach, how and when? Are there any requirements or guidelines regarding classroom teaching?
7. Describe your classroom.  
*Prompt questions:* What [e.g. resources] do you have in it? How is it arranged?
8. If you could make changes to your classroom, what would you change and why?
9. Are there any factors that make your job more difficult?  
*Follow-up:* are there any factors or variables that make your job easier?

*Those are all the questions that I have for you. But before we end the conversation, is there anything you'd like to add regarding any of the questions? Anything that may help understand your perspective?*

*Thank you very much for your help in doing this research. This conversation has been very useful and helpful.*

## *Appendix E: Directed Conversations Guide – Post-Observation*

### **Post-Observation Conversation Guide**

1. What do you think about the lesson?  
*Follow-up:* Talk a bit more about [quote from teacher's answer]. Did the lesson go as planned?
2. What did you like about the lesson? Why?  
*Follow-up:* What did you like less? Why?
3. You did [activity, action event that may stand out], can you elaborate on that?
4. Tell me about your students in this lesson. What are your impressions?  
*Prompt:* Describe them in terms of performance, behaviour or any aspect that you wish. What can you say about them in this lesson?
5. Did a student or group of students call your attention for any reason? Positively or negatively.
6. What about yourself? What do you think about your own performance in this lesson?
7. Imagine you had the possibility of doing this lesson again, what would you do? Why?

*Thank you for sharing your thoughts.*

## *Appendix F: Guidelines for Follow-up Questions*

### **Follow-up Questions**

*I have learnt several things from you about your understandings about teaching in the previous conversation; can we go through them to make sure I understand them correctly?*

1. I'd like to share what I have learnt about [quote teacher statement], may I ask some questions to check whether my interpretation represents what you meant?
2. You stated earlier that [quote teacher statement/idea], in what way or situations does this happen?
3. You said in the previous conversation that [quote teacher statement], can you give me an example of when/how [quote the statement again]?
4. Previously you said that [quote teacher statement], can you clarify what you meant by that?
5. You've indicated that [quote teacher statement], I'd like to explore with you this idea a bit further.
6. You stated that [quote teacher statement or phrase], would you explain that further?
7. You used the following statement [quote]. I am not sure I understand what you mean by that. Can you elaborate on that idea?

*Those are my questions for today.*

*Is there anything else you would like to add regarding any of the topics discussed?*

*Do you have any questions for me? Please, don't hesitate to ask anything you would like to know.*

*Thank you very much for your time. This conversation was very interesting and useful.*

## *Appendix G: Classroom Observation Guide*

**Observation #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Class:** \_\_\_\_\_

**St. Register:** \_\_\_\_\_ students

**In attendance:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Elements to be observed:**

---

#### **A. Descriptive Observation of teaching**

- **Actors:**
  - a. Teacher: teacher role, teacher behaviour, teacher language, other expressions (e.g. music, songs, dance, art, poetry, recitation).
  - b. Students: overall performance in terms of participation and behaviour.
- **Acts and Activities:**
  - c. Goals associated to activities and behaviours: learning objectives, expected outcomes, lesson introduction, connections (previous lesson and/or student prior knowledge).
  - d. Activities and tasks: content, type of activity, duration, teaching method, assessment, instructions, space occupied, actors involved, objects or material used.
  - e. Unplanned events: actors involved, reactions, language, outcomes.
- **Environment:** student attitude, teacher-student interaction, expressions of emotions or feelings.

#### **B: Descriptive Observation of social setting (classroom)**

- f. Classroom location.
- g. Classroom set up (learning-centres, rows, groups, setting), number of students.
- h. Classroom decorations and wall displays, equipment and resources available.
- i. Space utilized for activities, organization of the spaces.

#### **C: Researcher Reflection**

- j. Researcher reflective notes and thoughts.

## *Appendix H: Transcription Conventions, References and Abbreviations*

### **Transcription**

All conversations were transcribed verbatim. A recording system was developed using conventional forms of punctuation and symbols:

R	researcher
T	teacher
<b>Bold</b>	researcher's questions and remarks
	overlapping speech e.g. R: What kind of project    T: One project out of 30.
“ ”	verbal quotes
(...)	unintelligible speech
...	unfinished sentence or phrase e.g. If we give them the real... Now everything has changed.
[ ]	added information

### **Reference System**

The reference system facilitated the recording and retrieving of information for the analysis and for presentation of empirical evidence.

For identification purposes, each participant was assigned a number:

<i>Core Data</i>	<i>Ancillary Data (incomplete datasets)</i>
T1: Samah	T5i
T2: Nura	T6i
T3: Symia	T7i
T4: Hala	Tn

Each dataset was coded with a capital letter:

- A. Back ground Interviews
- B. Classroom Observations
- C. Post-Observation interviews
- D. Informal Conversations

The transcribed interviews (conversations 1, 2 and 3), pertaining to the same teacher, once segmented were numbered sequentially. The same procedure was

applied to the classroom observations, post-observation interviews, and informal conversations.

For example, (T2.B14) indicated that the text cited was from Teacher 2, Nura, based on the classroom observation dataset, specifically meaning unit number 14.

## Abbreviations

For the identification of themes and categories, abbreviations were used to facilitate the coding process.

The three overarching dimensions were coded:

TV	Teacher Views
TP	Teaching Practices
CF	Contextual Factors

Abbreviations commonly used for the themes and categories:

Tr	Teacher
St	Student
Lg	Learning
Tg	Teaching
Sc	School
Lg	Listening
Rg	Reading
Wg	Writing
HW	Homework
GW	Group Work
w-	with
Eng	English

For less frequent categories, the first letters of the word were used, e.g.

Ind	Individual
Comp	Comprehension
Inst	Instruction
Resp	Responsibility
Curr	Curriculum
Strat	Strategy

Thus, TP: Tg Strat/GW indicated that text analysed was coded as Teaching Practice, Teaching Strategy: group work.



## *Appendix I: Ethics Approval Application Letter*

Date: September 20, 2011

***Dr. Abdullah Alshamsi***  
*Vice Chancellor*  
*British University in Dubai*  
*P.O. Box: 345015*  
*Dubai*

Dear Dr. Abdullah,

I'm submitting this application form to request ethics approval for my doctoral research project, under the supervision of Prof. Mohammed Dulaimi.

My research project is entitled *Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their Relationship to Classroom Practices: A Hermeneutic study*. To carry out this research, I will invite a small number of female Emirati English language school teachers as research participants. Two to three in-service teachers, working in public schools located in any emirate, will be interviewed about their teaching beliefs, understandings and experiences and will be observed during classroom lessons. Field work is estimated to last approximately 8 months.

Please find attached the Ethics Form, outlining the research process to be carried out and all relevant details.

Sincerely,

Soledad Valenzuela  
(Researcher)  
Doctorate in Education  
Email: 90007@student.buid.ac.ae  
Faculty of Education,  
British University in Dubai, UAE  
1st & 2nd Floor, Block 11, Dubai International Academic City (DIAC),  
PO Box 345015  
[www.buid.ac.ae](http://www.buid.ac.ae)

## *Appendix J: Participants' Information Sheet*

### **Research Project:**

*Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their Relationship to Classroom Practices: A Hermeneutic study*

Dear Madam,

My name is Soledad Valenzuela and I am a doctorate student from the British University in Dubai (BUiD) in the United Arab Emirates. As part of the Doctorate programme, I wish to do research in the area of teaching in the Emirati context and would like to invite female English language school teachers to participate in this study. This research has been assessed and approved by the University Ethics Committee.

The purpose of my study is to explore teachers' beliefs and understanding about teaching and their teaching context. The outcome of this study will, on the one hand, fulfill the requirement for qualification and, on the other, it will provide useful information for educators and government authorities concerning planning, designing and implementing culture-sensitive and context-fitted training programmes and improvement initiatives that consider teachers' worldviews and the unique features of Emirati teachers' educational context. It will also add to the extant literature on the significance of teacher beliefs and contextual influences for teaching practices and improve our understanding of the specificity of teacher effectiveness factors.

The main data collection methods for this research project are interviews and classroom observations. Multiple interview session and classroom observations will be carried out with each participant, during a period of time of approximately six months.

Since teachers will be involved, it is a requirement of the British University to adhere to ethical principles and standards, therefore, consent is sought for your participation in this study. Your participation will be protected by:

The following procedures:

- Your name and personal information will be treated confidentially and anonymously;
- The information you provide can be used as quotations or reported narratives;
- The interview and observation information will be used only for purposes of this study and will be safely stored in my personal computer;
- Once the study is concluded, all interview and observation data and materials will be destroyed.

And the following rights:

- You have the right not to answer any interview questions;
- You have the right to verify or check the interview and the observation notes and transcripts;

- You have the right to request clarification and introduce modifications;
- You have the right to ask for feedback on the results;
- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage and if you choose to do so, any data collected from you will not be used in this study.

The final results of this study will be published as a thesis and will be available at the library of the British University in Dubai, Academic City, Dubai, and possibly in subsequent publications in academic journals.

If you agree to participate in this research study, I would kindly request your signature and date the attached consent form.

I will gladly answer any questions regarding this proposed research study. If you need additional clarification, my supervisors can also be contacted at the following addresses:

**Prof. Mohammed Dulaimi**

Professor of Project Management and Innovation

Faculty of Business

British University in Dubai

Email: [mohammed.dulaimi@buid.ac.ae](mailto:mohammed.dulaimi@buid.ac.ae)

Thank you very much.

Yours faithfully,

Soledad Valenzuela

*(Researcher)*

*Doctorate in Education*

Email: [90007@student.buid.ac.ae](mailto:90007@student.buid.ac.ae)

*Faculty of Education, British University in Dubai, Dubai, UAE  
1st & 2nd Floor, Block 11, Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), PO Box 345015  
[www.buid.ac.ae](http://www.buid.ac.ae)*

## *Appendix K: Participant Consent Form*

**Name of the Study:** *Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their Relationship to Classroom Practices: A Hermeneutic study.*

**Name of the researcher:** *Soledad Valenzuela, EdD Programme, BUiD, UAE.*

### **Consent to participate in the research:**

- ☐ I understand that the aforementioned study involves my participation and contribution to provide accurate information based on my beliefs, knowledge, practices and experience related to teaching.
- ☐ I also understand that:
  - I am well-informed about the purpose of this research study.
  - My identity and personal information will be treated confidentially and anonymously.
  - Interview and observation information will be collected which can be used as quotations or reported as narratives.
  - I have the right to leave any interview question unanswered.
  - I have the right to check or verify my interview and observation notes and transcriptions.
  - I have the right to request deleting or leaving specific information out for personal or professional reasons.
  - I have the right to ask for feedback on the results.
  - I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
  - The data collected will be used exclusively for the purposes of this study.
  - The data collected will be safely stored and all the interview and observation data materials will be destroyed upon conclusion of the study.

With full understanding of the information provided above, I agree to participate in this research project.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix L: Ethics Form*

**Date:** September, 2011

**Name of researcher:** Soledad Valenzuela

**Student identification number:** 90007

**Email address:** 90007@student.buid.ac.ae

**Project title:** *Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their Relationship to Classroom Practices: A hermeneutic study.*

**Duration of proposed project:** September 2011-June, 2013

**Date you wish to start data collection:** October 1, 2011

### ***Brief outline of project:***

This research project is being conducted as part of the qualification requirements established by the Doctoral Programme of the British University to obtain the degree of *Doctor in Education*.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs and understanding about teaching and their relationship to teaching practices and their teaching context. The paper will report on in-depth interviews and classroom observations with two/three female Emirati English language teachers and will explore teachers' beliefs and understandings about teaching and examine contextual influences in terms of how shape their conceptions of teaching and their practices. The specific characteristics of the environment may help reveal the complex dynamics of the relationship between teacher beliefs and contextual influences which has an effect upon teachers' classroom performance. By examining these beliefs and influences, valuable and relevant information for education practitioners may be found that could lead to improvements in teaching practice, taking into consideration teachers' perspectives and the uniqueness of the Emirati educational context, and hence improve our understanding of the specificity of teacher effectiveness factors.

**Main ethical consideration(s) of the project** (e.g. working with vulnerable adults; children with disabilities; photographs of participants; material that could give offence, etc):

Implicit in the methodological approach selected, teacher participants will be involved in seeking understanding and reaching agreed-upon meanings. Thus, they are entitled to check interview and classroom observation transcripts, introduce modifications, clarify interpretations and delete information, if they wish to do so.

### ***Please provide details on the following aspects of the research:***

#### ***1. What are your intended methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis?***

Regarding recruitment,

- a) Through the purposeful sampling strategy, specific teachers are recommended for participation. To increase probabilities of gathering a group of participants that meet the sample inclusion criteria, a 'big net' approach will be used.
- b) For the final selection, a purposeful sampling strategy will be used.

Regarding data collection methods, in-depth interviews and classroom observations will be used.

- a. A minimum of five 30-60 minute interviews will be carried out with each participant. Notes will be taken and interviews will be recorded, if the participants agree. The open-ended questions included in the protocols for the initial interviews are literature-based and flexible. Consecutive questions will be derived from the themes and ideas expressed by the participants.
- b. Classroom Observations will focus on teacher classroom practices. Multiple classroom observations will be carried out with each participant, depending on the richness of the information gathered and the participant's willingness. Non-participatory and participatory roles may be adopted, depending on teachers' disposition. An observational guide will be used to log information and record descriptive and reflective notes.

The process for data analysis will be based on a qualitative decision trail and the hermeneutic analysis, which includes idiographic and nomothetic stages to be followed to derive themes and categories from the data in order to describe a systemic network of teachers' beliefs and practices.

**2. *How will you make sure that all participants understand the process in which they are to be engaged and that they provide their voluntary and informed consent? If the study involves working with children or other vulnerable groups, how have you considered their rights and protection?***

The purpose of the study will be explained to each participant as well as the conditions for their involvement, explaining that no personal details will be required and that their names will be kept anonymous. Second, those teachers that accept to take part in the study will be provided with an informed-consent form that states their right to turn down their participation or withdraw if they please to do so.

**3. *How will you make sure that participants clearly understand their right to withdraw from the study?***

This right will be explained to them, and stated in the informed-consent form. If they choose to do so, data or information provided by this teacher will be deleted.

**4. *Please describe how you will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Where this is not guaranteed, please justify your approach.***

The participants' names, the name of the school and all personal information that may lead to the identification of the participants will be omitted. Pseudonyms and codes will be used to enter the data.

**5. *Describe any possible detrimental effects of the study and the strategies for dealing with them.***

If delicate information or detrimental unforeseen consequences emerge from the study, the use of specific data or a specific participant may be left out as a way to ensure their integrity and job security.

**6. *How will you ensure the safe and appropriate storage and handling of data?***

All information will be stored in an external hard-drive in my personal computer. Hard copies of data will be kept locked and stored in my own premises.

**7. *If during the course of the research you are made aware of harmful or illegal behaviour, how do you intend to handle disclosure or nondisclosure of such information (you may wish to refer to the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2004; paragraphs 27 & 28, p.8 for more information)?***  
Not applicable.

**8. *If the research design demands some degree of subterfuge or undisclosed research activity, how have you justified this?***  
Not applicable

**9. *How do you intend to disseminate your research findings to participants?***  
A summary of the research will be shared with the participants, if they desire.

### **Declaration by the researcher**

I have read the University's Code of Conduct for Research and the information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I am satisfied that I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations as researcher and the rights of participants. I am satisfied that members of staff (including myself) working on the project have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached document and that I, as researcher take full responsibility for the ethical research conduct in accordance with the Faculty of Education Ethical Guidelines, and any other condition laid down by the BUiD Ethics Committee.

***Print name:*** Soledad Valenzuela

***Signature:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Date:*** September, 2011

### **Declaration by the Chair of the Ethics Committee**

The Committee confirms that this project fits within the University's Code of Conduct for Research and I approve the proposal on behalf of BUiD's Ethics Committee.

***Print name:*** \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of the Ethics Committee)

***Signature:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Date:*** \_\_\_\_\_

### *Appendix M: Letter to School Administrators*

Dear Madam,

My name is Soledad Valenzuela and I am a doctorate student at the British University in Dubai (BUiD), currently working on my research project. The title of my study is: *Exploring Emirati EL Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching and their Relationship to Classroom Practices: A hermeneutic study.*

Given the crucial responsibility placed upon teachers to improve education outcomes in the UAE, the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs and about teaching, their teaching practices and their teaching context. The findings of this study will, on the one hand, fulfill my purpose for qualification and, on the other, will provide useful information for educators and government authorities concerning teachers' worldviews and the unique features of Emirati teachers' educational context. This information may be used for planning, designing and implementing culture-sensitive and context-fitted teacher training programmes conducive to bring about improvement. It will also add to the extant literature on the significance of teacher beliefs and contextual influences on teaching practices.

The main data collection methods for this research project are interviews and classroom observations. Multiple interview session and classroom observations will be carried out with each participant, during a period of time of approximately six months.

Enclosed in this envelope are copies of the Participant's Information Sheet, The Consent Form to be signed by the participating teacher, the Ethics Approval that demonstrates this research study has been approved by the BUiD Ethics Committee, and the Instruments that will be used for Classroom Observations and for the One-on-one Interviews.

Participation is voluntary and all information provided by the teachers will be anonymous. Your support to the participating teacher is highly appreciated. Thank you very much for considering allowing your teachers to participate in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Soledad Valenzuela  
(Researcher)

*Doctorate in Education Programme  
Faculty of Education, British University in Dubai, UAE  
1st & 2nd Floor, Block 11, Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), PO Box 345015.*