

**Teaching in Higher Education in Foreign Lands: Challenges and  
Implications. An Interview-Based Study of International Academics  
Teaching in Oman**

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## **Abstract**

Higher education institutions provide staff support within an increasingly internationalised global higher education context. One aspect of this context is the increasing international mobility of academic teachers. Academic teachers may face considerable challenges in navigating cross-national and cross-cultural contexts of higher education teaching and learning but there is limited understanding of these challenges and associated institutional support is typically underdeveloped. This thesis addresses this issue by generating theoretical insight into academic teachers' transitions into international teaching roles. The research uses an in-depth qualitative interview research design involving twenty-one international academics teaching in Oman, a country heavily dependent on international academic teachers.

The theoretical concept of teaching and learning regimes (TLRs) helps to reveal deep-rooted sociocultural underpinnings of the academics' teaching experiences. These experiences reveal how departmental teaching cultures that TLRs describe are embedded in wider societal culture – a link that the research theorises through the concept of institutional logics. In turn, the thesis proposes a concept of “teaching cultural distances” to help understand the experiences and support requirements of international academic teachers.

The research identifies teaching-cultural-distance-related tensions and challenges and reveals pronounced experiences of accompanying negative emotions. The research indicates a consequential relationship between these emotions and isolation, with the latter leading to individualised “coping” teaching

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practices. These elements are conceptualised as potentially forming a “transition trap”. The research suggests that experience of a transition trap may contribute to teachers departing prematurely from their role or continuing but without genuine engagement. Factors and behaviours are identified that, instead, facilitate some teachers embracing their new teaching role.

The research calls for institutional support for international academic teachers that: recognises teaching cultural distances being navigated; promotes associated productive surfacing and questioning of individuals’ basic assumptions and values about teaching; recognises teaching-related emotional vulnerabilities of individuals; and overall, is theoretically and sensitively conceived.

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## List of Abbreviations

EQA	External Quality Assurance
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NCSI	National Centre for Statistics and Information, Oman
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
RQs	Research Questions
TCs	Tensions and Challenges
TLR	Teaching and Learning Regime
TNE	Transnational Education
TNHE	Transnational Higher Education
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Transnational teachers are expected to work in environments, climates and classrooms which are culturally very different to their own. Assumptions about university education are shaken and teachers find themselves having to return to and question the fundamentals of their teaching, learning and assessment practices. (Smith, 2009, p. 111)*

This study is situated within the broad area of how higher education institutions (HEIs) respond to the increasingly globalised and internationalised environment in which they operate. One aspect of this environment is increased mobility of academic teachers. This aspect has received much less attention than other aspects of internationalisation, such as the increased mobility of students. As a result, although academic teachers may face considerable challenges in navigating cross-national and cross-cultural contexts of higher education (HE) teaching and learning, there is limited theoretical understanding of these challenges. Correspondingly, institutional support for teaching for new international teachers is typically underdeveloped.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of institutional support requirements for international teachers through its focus on academic teaching cultures, transitions between these, and teachers' emotional responses to challenges of navigating "teaching cultural distances". Oman's heavy dependence on international academics to staff its teaching-intensive and

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highly internationalised higher-education sector confers its suitability as an empirical case for the research.

This chapter sets out: details of the research context; the research questions; a summary of the methodology and methods used; an introduction to the theoretical framework; an outline of the originality and significance of the research; and the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 Research Context**

Increasing international connectedness in HE is giving rise to increasingly diverse institutional teaching-in-HE contexts in which various aspects may be unfamiliar to academic staff and students (Bovill et al., 2015; Montgomery, 2014; Walker, 2015). One such context includes academics who cross national and cultural borders into new teaching contexts – generating potential for the scenario described in the quotation above to play out. Such international movement of academic teachers is increasing (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017a; Green & Myatt, 2011; Williams & Berry, 2016). This increase is being promoted, in particular, by the spread of transnational education/higher education (TNE/TNHE) (Caurana & Montgomery, 2015) and the expansion of HE in developing countries in which there may be a shortage of local staff (Austin et al., 2014; Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017b). This latter context is exemplified in Oman, a “developing” country (Boughanmi & Al-Riyami, 2019, p. 1) in the Arabian Gulf.

There are potential “problems, confusions, contradictions and tensions” that academics working overseas might experience in their professional work

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(Walker, 2015, p. 63) but there is also potential for positive outcomes. The way in which academics navigate cross-national and cross-cultural contexts of HE teaching and learning, however, remains a relatively under-researched field (Fonkem, 2016; Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017a). Correspondingly, as demonstrated through the Literature Review in Chapter 2, institutional support for international academic teachers appears underdeveloped both as an area of research and as a practice. In turn, there is concern about the lack of institutional support for international teachers (Walker, 2015) and the efficacy of support where this is provided (Keevers et al., 2014; Pherali, 2012).

White (2016, p. 16) has asserted that:

*One significant element of the internationalization process that has been consistently over-looked is the faculty. Very little has been written about the lived experiences of academics working transnationally ....*

Research to date has also tended to skirt around actual teaching practices and focus on wider issues. While this research has potential to inform some aspects of institutional support for international academics, it has focused on areas such as: motivations for academics to work transnationally (Cai & Hall, 2016); employment conditions and experiences of expatriate academic staff (Austin et al., 2014); and international academics' transitions to work and community life in a broad sense (Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010). The research presented within this thesis, through its more specific focus on support for academic teaching, addresses this gap.

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### 1.1.1 International academics: terminology and research focus

International academics are defined by Altbach and Yudkevich (2017a, p. 1) as those who hold full-time academic appointments in a country that they are not citizens of and “where they were not born and/or where they did not receive their first postsecondary degree”. For Walker (2015, p. 61), international academics are those “educated and enculturated in one system of education and currently teaching and researching in another”.

Collectively, the above definitions define the research participants. The empirical focus on international academic teachers in Oman serves to differentiate these teachers from their Omani-national counterparts who may also experience challenges on transitioning into a new HE teaching context in Oman, but are teaching within their own national and broad cultural context. This categorisation enables examination and theorisation of teachers’ transitions into teaching contexts across national and cultural borders. In turn, this focus supports the overarching aim of the research – that is, to inform conception of institutional teaching support initiatives for international academic teachers.

The term *international academics* exists alongside, and in some cases subsumes, other terms used to describe academics who are working overseas. These terms include *expatriate academic staff/faculty/professors* (Cai & Hall, 2016; Austin et al., 2014; Romanowski & Nasser, 2015) where the term *expatriate* emphasises individuals’ non-citizenship in the country in which they are working; *sojourner academics* (Walker, 2015) where the term *sojourner* emphasises the temporary (albeit possibly extensive) period that the individual

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may stay in the country in which they are working; *transnational academics* where the term *transnational* is typically used in a broad sense, akin to *international* as defined above (Pherali, 2012), but sometimes used to indicate an academic from a “home” HEI working at a partner overseas institution (Smith, 2009); and *immigrant academics/professors* (Hutchinson, 2016a) where the term *immigrant* emphasises the permanency of an individual’s stay in the country in which they are teaching.

While not *immigrants*, the academics who participated in the research could also be described as *expatriate*, *sojourner* and *transnational* (as used in the broad sense). The term *international* was chosen as the main term to describe them because of its increasingly common use (as collectively defined above) in discourse about the internationalisation of HE (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017a). The research uses all the above terms where appropriate, however, and is informed by studies of academic teachers described by these. This is because the key element of national and cultural border crossing that is central to the transition of academic teachers into a new international teaching context is inherent in the meaning of each.

### **1.1.2 Higher education in Oman**

Academic teaching in Oman takes place within a national context characterised by: an absolute monarchy system of government; a large youth population; an HE system that has developed very rapidly; generous state funding for students; and, as identified above, an HE system that is heavily dependent on international academics and highly internationalised.

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When Oman's leader from 1970-2020 came to power, the only educational provision in the country was three boys' primary schools (Al-Lamki, 1998). The first university was established in 1986. According to Oman's Education Council (2018), in 2018 Oman had a range of public and private HEIs totalling 63 in number. This rapid development of the sector has been fuelled by demand from Oman's young population; in 2017 over 45% of Oman's population of 2.51 million (excluding expatriates) was under the age of 20 (National Centre for Statistics and Information - NCSI, 2018). Public HEIs do not charge fees and most Omani students attending private HEIs are funded through government scholarships (Ismail & Shanfari, 2014).

As evidenced in national institutional quality audit reports (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority – OAAA, 2009-2019), in most HEIs in Oman, at least 80% of teaching staff are international. A key reason for this is the shortage of appropriately qualified and experienced Omani academics to staff the HE sector. The majority of Oman's international academic teachers are from developing countries in Asia and Africa and employed on short-term, renewable contracts. Data reported by Oman's Ministry of Information (2018) indicate that in 2014-2015, the majority of international academics in both public and private institutions were from India (48.2 and 41.1 percent respectively). Other nationalities each comprised less than 11% indicating that some international academics may be working alongside few, if any, fellow nationals.

Oman's HE sector is internationalised in other ways too. First, while the national language is Arabic, HE is predominantly English-medium. Second, although Oman has only one branch campus (of an Arabian Gulf based University),

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many HEIs provide academic programmes with some kind of support from one or more foreign universities. In 2018, such arrangements involved universities from around 15 countries. Some programmes lead to foreign awards through TNE/TNHE arrangements. TNE/TNHE is defined as:

*All types of higher education study programmes or sets of courses of study, or educational services, (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a different country from the one where the awarding institution is based.*

(UNESCO/Council of Europe (2000, p.2)

Types of TNE/TNHE include: institutions establishing a physical presence in the form of a branch campus in another country, as in the one example in Oman mentioned above; distance/online learning, either with or without support from a local TNE partner; and local delivery partnerships (Smith, 2017). Most TNE/TNHE in Oman involves UK-based universities operating through local delivery partnerships. These partnerships variously operate through recognised TNE/TNHE arrangements that include programme validation, programme franchising and the awarding of dual degrees (ibid). Some of these arrangements, including the validation arrangements in operation in the HEI offering UK awards that was directly involved in the study (see Section 4.4.4), have developed from earlier 'twinning arrangements' whereby students completed the first part of their degree programme in Oman and completed their studies at the degree-awarding institution. Most of Oman's international partnerships with HEIs from countries other than the UK lead to local awards; in these cases, the international university typically provides support to the

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Omani HEI partner through means such as the provision of curricula, teaching and learning resources and consultancy, and through these means the international partners exert varying levels of influence (OAAA, 2009-2019). Several different academic systems are thus in operation across Oman.

Third, Oman's HEIs are also now subject to a mandatory national institutional accreditation system (OAAA, 2016). As such, they are striving to meet a set of standards for which practices from the UK, Australia and the US are key benchmarks.

An academic taking up an international teaching position in Oman is likely to face multiple unfamiliar aspects. Oman therefore provides a rich context for the study of social processes involved in academics' transitions into teaching roles across national and cultural borders. In turn, insight into these processes can inform theoretically-based conceptions of institutional support for international teachers.

### **1.1.3 Personal position**

My interest in the research stems from my long-term residency in Oman (for over thirty years as an expatriate), my former work as an academic manager in a local private HEI, my current work for Oman's national external quality assurance agency for HE (the OAAA) and my aspirations for future research in the field of internationalisation of HE. My management of this positionality in the research is detailed in Chapter 4 (Methodology and Research Design).

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## 1.2 Research Questions (RQs)

The research was underpinned by the following questions:

1. What tensions, challenges and opportunities do international academics experience in their role teaching Omani students, in Oman, on English-medium HE programmes, how do they respond to these, and why?
2. What support for teaching in higher education do international academics teaching Omani students, in Oman, on English-medium HE programmes, receive, how do they experience and respond to this, and why?
3. What are the theoretical and practical implications of the findings?
  - 3.1 *How do the findings relate to what is known about why academics enact the teaching practices they do?*
  - 3.2 *What are the implications for institutional support of academics taking up international academic teaching positions?*

## 1.3 Methodology and Methods

The research is underpinned by an understanding of teaching as a social practice (Bamber et al., 2009). In line with this, and reflecting a constructivist ontological and interpretative epistemological orientation, an empirical, qualitative research design was adopted. Central to the design was a series of individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty-one international academics each teaching in one of four HEIs in Oman. The interviews were supported by use of a small number of flashcards and yielded rich data in the form of participants' experiences, feelings and thoughts. The data were

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analysed through an inductive coding strategy to support identification of themes. This analysis was supported by use of qualitative data analysis software, namely NVivo™.

Management of research ethics included specific attention to: my need to use gatekeepers to gain access to the research participants in order to respect local norms; the fact that international academics in Oman, like all expatriates (including myself), have limited job security and may fear “speaking out”; and the fact that I work for Oman’s national quality assurance agency for HE. Measures taken to address associated concerns are discussed in Chapter 4.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

The concept of *teaching and learning regimes* (TLRs – Trowler, 2008) provided the core of the theoretical framework for the study. As detailed in Chapter 3 (Theoretical Framework), TLRs comprise a set of dynamic and interrelated cultural components, or “moments”, through which social processes flow within a given teaching context and teaching practices are constructed and enacted. This theoretical lens was chosen because of its direct relevance to the “what’s and why’s” of teaching practices.

This framework was then theoretically expanded to include a relational classification of the different TLR moments and conceptualise the embeddedness of TLRs in wider societal culture.

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## 1.5 Significance and Originality

The research contributes to an understanding of how HEIs might best conceive and construct their teaching support for international teachers in two key ways.

First, the research proposes a concept of the “teaching cultural distances” that international teachers need to navigate on transitioning into a new international teaching role. This novel concept is derived from the study’s empirical work and associated expansion of the theoretical framework. Examination of these cultural distances helps to reveal how some tensions and challenges (TCs) experienced by international teachers are grounded in basic assumptions and values about teaching in HE which are deeply-rooted in teaching cultures developed in “home”/other national teaching-in-HE contexts and which conflict with those underpinning prevailing or desired practices in the new teaching context. What the research emphasises is that these conflicting assumptions and values may not be readily surfaced by the teachers themselves, or readily understood by either teachers or institutions who may be seeking to provide support. The research supports the notion that such assumptions and values may engender resistance to change (Trowler & Cooper, 2002).

Second, the research finds that teachers’ *emotional responses* to teaching-related TCs, and effective management of these, or not, appear critical to their international teaching transition experiences and outcomes. As such, the research furthers understanding of what is an underdeveloped theme that is evident in the literature about negative emotions characterising the experiences of international academic teachers. The research hypothesises a consequential

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relationship between such negative emotions and *isolation*. It then identifies potential for new teachers to become caught in a “transition trap”, a novel concept developed through the research that comprises TC-induced negative emotions, isolation, and (potentially undesirable) coping teaching practices. The research suggests that teachers’ isolation hinders their ability to address teaching-related TCs and alleviate associated negative emotions. This scenario generates potential for a vicious circle to take hold.

The research reveals how some new international teachers undertake journeys that lead to active engagement with their new teaching context. The research identifies profile characteristics and behaviours of teachers, as well as a range of informally-generated support mechanisms, that appear to facilitate this engagement. Alternative outcomes of teachers leaving their posts prematurely or retreating into a relatively disengaged (“under the radar”) mode of teaching are also revealed. The identification of these divergent pathways contributes to an understanding of the potential consequences of a lack of effective institutional support for academics taking up international teaching positions.

The research suggests that institutional support for international academic teachers should centre around creating conditions that will counter isolation from peers and encourage individuals’ productive surfacing and questioning of basic assumptions and values about teaching that they hold. Access to “safe spaces” and time are identified as requirements for teachers’ engagement in this work. The research indicates that deliberate and sensitive nurturing of “informal support” of and among teachers may promote such conditions.

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The research makes the following additional contributions.

Theoretically, since the research foregrounds individual academic teachers transitioning from one teaching-in-HE context to another (foreign) context, it applies TLR theory to a somewhat novel context relative to the context of its origins – that is, relatively stable groups of academic teachers working within specific academic disciplines (Trowler, 2005). The expanded theoretical framework allows for more nuanced understanding and more explicit conceptualisation of how newcomers to teaching groups may impact and be impacted by prevailing TLRs. This expanded framework has the potential to support other educational research.

Empirically, the research contributes to the small number of studies about academic teachers' lived experiences of teaching abroad. The empirical findings invite comparative studies in other contexts.

Methodologically, the data collection was supported, to good effect, by the use of flashcards. This contributes to evidence of the potential value of using visuals to build rapport with interviewees.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

This chapter has provided an overview of the research. Chapter 2 considers relevant literature. It highlights that greater attention to, and theorisation of, the experiences of academics transitioning into new international teaching roles is needed if, in these cases, HEIs are to provide effectively what is typically much needed staff support for teaching. Chapter 3 elaborates the TLR-centred

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theoretical framework. Chapter 4 details how the research was conducted and its philosophical basis. It clarifies how the rigour of the research was assured and explains why the knowledge generated is subjective, partial and situated. This knowledge is developed through the data analysis and discussion presented in Chapters 5–7. Chapter 8 concludes the research.

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter draws on the research fields of *internationalisation of HE* and *teaching in HE* in order to consider what is known about requirements for institutional support of academics undertaking international teaching roles. It also considers the *academic development* literature because of its focus on the theory and practice of supporting academics in their teaching.

This review shows that institutional support for international academic teachers is typically much needed but often found to be wanting. I argue that, at least in part, this is because: the demands on international academic teachers of crossing cultural divides, or distances, of teaching and learning have tended to be underestimated; and the associated teaching experiences and practices of these teachers have tended to be under-theorised. More specifically, the literature reveals a lack of research into the cultural distances that academics must navigate when transitioning into a new international teaching role and an underdeveloped theme about teachers' emotional responses associated with such transitions. It is to these two areas, in particular, that this research contributes.

This chapter has three main sections. In the first section, I elaborate on how the global context of HE makes institutional support for international teachers an area that warrants further research. In the next section, I consider what is known about the teaching experiences of international academics across a range of different teaching contexts. This section reveals the kinds of issues that institutional support for international academic teachers needs to address but also the limited

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extent to which requirements for institutional support are currently understood. In the third section, I highlight insights from the *academic development* literature with particular apparent relevance to institutional support for international academic teachers.

## **2.1 International Teaching in HE – The Global Context**

Three interrelated aspects of the current global teaching-in-HE landscape underpin the research. First, there are increasing numbers of academics teaching in HE transnationally (Bovill et al., 2015; Green & Myatt, 2011; Kim 2017). Second, *teaching* in HE now has a more prominent status globally than it once had (Gourlay & Stephens, 2017). Third, the internationalisation of HE is generating increasingly complex teaching-in-HE contexts and there is recognition that academics teaching in foreign HE contexts can face significant challenges (Walker, 2015). These three aspects are elaborated below.

### **2.1.1 Increasing numbers of academics teaching in foreign lands**

In 2011, Green and Myatt (2011, p. 33) anticipated that the global movement of academics would “rise dramatically”. While there are less data available on the global mobility of academic staff than on the global mobility of students (International Association of Universities, 2017; Morley et al., 2018; Teichler, 2015), this anticipated rise has occurred. Movement of academic teachers is being promoted, in particular, by the expansion of HE in “developing” countries in which there may be a shortage of local staff (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017b) and by the spread and “recent unprecedented growth” (Caruana & Montgomery,

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2015, p. 7) of TNHE through, for example, the continuing establishment of what are typically teaching-intensive international branch campuses.

National data reveal an increase in international academic teachers in “developed” nations too. For example, according to Universities UK International (2017), following continued increases over the previous decade, in 2015–2016, 29% of all academic staff in UK universities were from overseas, with 22% of these fulfilling teaching roles. This increase in the UK is set to continue (Kim, 2017; Minocha et al., 2019).

Some movement of academics is driven by the needs of research-intensive universities (Altbach, 2010). Even international academics recruited for research-intensive roles, however, are likely to engage in some teaching. The considerable movement of academic teachers resulting from the continued expansion of HE in “developing” countries includes academics from a range of nations taking up short-term teaching-in-HE contracts in countries across Africa (Altbach et al., 2010; Altbach, 2010) as well as in Oman and other Arabian Gulf States (such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar). In these countries, mass HE provision is being driven by demand from young populations, supported by government policy, and facilitated by the spread of TNHE (Altbach, 2010; Austin et al., 2014; Malete 2016). In the Arabian Gulf States, shortages of local staff are likely to remain for the foreseeable future, despite government efforts to promote nationalisation of their respective workforces. In Oman, for example, government stipulated “Omanisation” requirements for private HEIs for 2014 were that 16% of academic staff should be Omani (OAAA, 2014, p. 61). The 2040 target for Omanisation of academic staff is still only 40%.

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### 2.1.2 Teaching in HE in the spotlight

Teaching in HE has a higher profile than was once the case. First, it is now a more widespread activity given the growth of HE globally. This growth is set to continue in “developing” countries (Mok & Jiang, 2018). The massification of HE has also resulted in some HEIs having teaching rather than research orientated missions; globally, most academics spend most of their time teaching (Altbach, 2016). Second, the current culture of more globalised and management-driven HE has brought increased focus on teaching (Hibbert & Selma, 2016; Trautwein, 2015). Alongside this is enhanced attention to the scholarship of teaching (Kong et al., 2017; Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015) and theorising of learning to teach in HE (Leibowitz et al., 2017). While this thesis is not concerned with teaching excellence *per se*, it is concerned with how “good quality” teaching can be promoted within increasingly complex teaching contexts. Strong calls for the quality of teaching in HE to be improved underpin the field of academic development (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015) and accompany the growth of TNHE (Wang, 2008).

Efforts to evaluate “teaching excellence” have been criticised for having an associated tendency to reduce what is complex and contextual to simplified indices (Gourlay & Stevenson, 2017). In its focus on teaching as a social practice and the importance of context, this thesis adds to this and other calls (McCune, 2018) to resist reductive conceptions of teaching in HE.

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### 2.1.3 Increasingly complex teaching-in-HE contexts

Teaching-in-HE contexts are becoming increasingly complex (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015; Walker, 2015). Reasons for this include HEIs' pursuit of internationalisation agendas as well as TNHE arrangements between countries and institutions becoming ever more complex (Henderson et al., 2017; Knight, 2016). With respect to TNHE, for example, the student body in a "receiving" country may no longer be only from this country as some "developing" countries, including Oman, also aim to recruit "international" students. Academic programmes may be taught by a range of staff who are mainly from neither the "sending" nor the "receiving" country but, rather, from a range of other countries (as is typically the case in Oman). It might also be that while an academic programme is developed by the "receiving" country HEI, the award is made by the "sending" country HEI via a validation agreement. Within such arrangements, factors such as power relations, and perceptions of "us" and "them", and how these might impact teaching practices, become ever more complex.

Wang (2008, p. 57) observed that:

*Despite a growing body of literature on transnational education in recent years, some scholars argue that the current understanding of offshore students' learning situations is often general, fragmented, and sometimes confusing.*

By association, this observation also relates to transnational teaching. This thesis argues that part of this confusion results from a lack of appreciation of different transnational teaching-in-HE contexts with respect to who and what is "foreign"

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to whom and a lack of theorisation of the cultural divides, or distances, that international teachers need to be navigate and their lived experiences of doing so.

## **2.2 The Need for Support for International Academic Teachers**

Academics' experiences of teaching in foreign HE contexts and the implications of these for institutional support are under-researched relative to, for example, research focussed on the experiences of international students, (Achankeng, 2016; Minocha et al., 2019; Montgomery, 2014; Skyrme & McGee, 2016), or the internationalisation of HE more generally.

Existing studies are commonly of three types. The first type comprises autobiographical accounts (for example, Ferguson, 2011; Garson, 2005; Hutchinson, 2016a, who brings together 18 such accounts of immigrant professors in the US). As such, and in contrast to this study, they tend to be orientated towards individuals' welfare and the generation of practical advice for other would-be international academic teachers rather than towards seeking theoretical insight about teaching that might inform institutional support for teachers. The second type comprises a body of work about international/transnational academics from "home" institutions teaching overseas within TNHE arrangements, perhaps as "fly-in faculty" (for example, Dunn & Wallace, 2006, 2008; Smith, 2009, 2013, 2014; Szkornik, 2017). These studies typically include focus on the need for enhanced institutional support for such teachers although less focus on what form this support might take. The third type comprises studies of "independent" international staff joining teaching

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workgroups comprising a majority of local staff (for example, Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Hsieh, 2012; Thomas & Madu- Aduli, 2013). But these studies too are light on theoretical insights about teaching that might inform institutional support initiatives. As such, the body of work in this area, as a whole, appears relatively fragmented. Arguably this is because the TCs experienced by individual international teachers are so context-specific and theoretical insight is underdeveloped. Collectively, however, these studies provide evidence that academics may face considerable challenges when undertaking an international teaching position and that institutional support for such teachers is typically inadequate. These two issues are elaborated below.

### **2.2.1 Tensions, challenges and opportunities**

TCs experienced by international academic teachers typically arise from a lack of shared norms, views and expectations within their new teaching context (Bovill et al., 2015; Hutchinson, 2016b; Szkornik, 2017) and have been shown to surface in relation to: fundamental pedagogic paradigms (Achankeng, 2016; Garson, 2005); grade expectations (Hutchinson, 2016b); understandings of the teacher's role and staff-student relationships (Hsieh, 2012); and linguistic differences (Gimenez & Morgan, 2017; Green & Myatt, 2011; Hsieh, 2012; Hutchinson, 2016b; Pherali, 2012). An additional but arguably understated source of TCs relates to technology; examples include limited access to it (Szkornik, 2017) and expected use of unfamiliar technology (Jun et al., 2016; Achankeng, 2016; Ndemanu, 2016). These studies highlight the common occurrence of significant context-specific TCs experienced by international academics. These largely descriptive studies invite the further examination of the sociocultural roots of such

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TCs that this research addresses through its focus on teachers' navigation of cultural distances between former and new international teaching contexts.

The "plethora of challenges" potentially experienced by fly-in faculty (Szkornik, 2017, p. 528) arise despite the fact that such academic teachers are typically fully familiar with the academic programme they are teaching on, the academic system in operation and the language of instruction. In contrast to such contexts, however, as in Oman, many international teachers are essentially "third parties" (Lamers & Admiraal, 2018; Quansah, 2017; Saudelli, 2012), foreign to both the country in which they are teaching as well as the country from which the academic programmes and systems in operation may have originated. In Oman's case, most international academics also teach in English as a second language. It is reasonable to suggest that such contexts have enhanced potential for TCs to arise. This study's inclusion of such "third party" academics contributes at an empirical level to what is currently a limited number of studies about this sub-group of international academic teachers.

A theme of negative emotions experienced by international academic teachers is also evident in the literature. Emotional responses such as anxiety and confusion are touched on in a number of studies (Hoare, 2013; Walker, 2015) and experiences of isolation are mentioned across a range of others (Ferguson, 2011; Green & Myatt, 2011; Hutchinson, 2016a; Leask, 2004; Mählck, 2016; Qansah, 2017; Romanowski & Nasser, 2015; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010; Thomas & Malau-Aduli, 2013; Wilkins & Neri, 2019). There is an indication in this literature that experiences of isolation may result at least in part from individuals' lack of shared local history, culture and language

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with others. There is, however, a lack of studies that move beyond mention of these emotional responses to focused engagement with this theme. This finding reflects a general lack of attention to emotional dimensions of teaching in HE that is only recently starting to be addressed (Quinlan, 2016). That further research in this area is warranted is supported by tangential studies from an international school education context (Roskell, 2013) and from the experiences of academics on home ground teaching international students (Daniels, 2013). This thesis is attentive to this gap in the literature. That is, it is attentive to potential requirements for support that HEIs may need to address that relate to teachers' emotional responses to their new international teaching role.

Despite prevalent TCs, empirical studies reveal a high level of consensus about the potential opportunity for professional and personal development that academic teaching in foreign lands provides to those who engage in it. Opportunities recognised by international academic teachers include those for cultural enrichment and personal growth (Garson, 2005; Hoare, 2013) as well as for building professional networks and developing new teaching-related knowledge and skills (Hamza, 2010). In the next section, however, I demonstrate that views on how professional development opportunities for individual academic teachers might best be realised appear limited, divergent, and often unsubstantiated by theoretical reasoning. Also, arguably, much of the research that considers the experiences of international academics focuses on ultimate success stories rather than what might perhaps be a considerable number of failures – for example, cases of academic teachers giving up or being asked to

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leave their international teaching posts. The literature nevertheless hints at the possibility of such negative outcomes (Szkornik, 2017).

### **2.2.2 Institutional support**

Concern with the inadequacy of induction practices for international/transnational academic teachers is identified in a range of studies (Dunn and Wallace, 2006; Fonkem, 2016; Keevers et al., 2014; Pherali, 2012; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010; Walker 2015). These studies reveal an expectation that desired academic norms relating to teaching will simply be obvious to new international academics – a tacit assumption by institutions that new international academic teachers will somehow just know what is expected of them and how to cope in their new teaching context (Thomas & Malau-Adali, 2013; Walker, 2015). In turn, this reflects assumptions about the transferability of pedagogic skills across national and cultural borders (Hutchinson, 2016b). Keevers et al. (2014) found this lack of induction to be compounded by a lack of ongoing professional development and underpinned by poor appreciation of the complexities of transnational teaching.

Scholars argue that TCs of the kinds described above can trigger reflection and stimulate international teachers' receptiveness to change (Bauder, 2015; Hoare, 2013; Smith, 2009, 2013). Smith (2014, p. 117) summarised such experiences as "disorientating dilemmas that can stimulate transformational learning". In considering teaching as a social practice, Boud and Brew (2017) also identified how academic teachers' learning may be driven by new groups of students with different needs and expectations.

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However, while both a need for support for international academic teachers and the potential for positive outcomes in terms of their professional development are identified clearly, studies typically remain relatively light on how such positive outcomes might actually be realised. For example, in light of American academics encountering unfamiliar and potentially challenging classroom environments and student learning styles and behaviours in the Arabian Gulf, Hamza (2010, p. 67) asserted that therefore “these academics need to be informed about the classroom environment to prepare themselves for such an educational setting ...”. Dunn and Wallace (2004, p. 301) found that Australian academics teaching in Singapore learned by professionalism and trial-and-error and asserted that “an induction for academics that draws on current literature and the experiences of other teachers would have helped them be more prepared.” Leask (2008, p. 129) also reported on academics teaching transnationally who had their long-held views of teaching and learning challenged. She asserted (*ibid*) that “Transnational teachers need to be willing and able to adjust their teaching, to do things differently in some situations ...”.

The assertions cited above have intuitive merit. This thesis suggests, however, that given the complexity of teaching as a social practice, consideration of how and why individuals may or may not change their teaching practices in response to a new foreign teaching context warrants deeper consideration than these assertions imply. This position is supported by a recent study which challenges the notion that an international academic teaching experience will (essentially, automatically) lead to critical reflection and ultimately transformation and change of practice: in an Oman-based study, Lamers and Admiral (2018) provided

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empirical evidence that this did not automatically seem to be the case for all international academics. Building on the work of Blackie et al. (2010), they called for an approach to professional development and support that is much more attentive to individuals' specific needs. The work of these researchers feeds into concerns about the efficacy of standardised, up-front induction for any new teacher (Billot & King, 2017) and particularly for academics teaching in highly internationalised teaching contexts ( Keevers et al., 2014). Pherali (2012) also warned of the potential threat to international academics' professional status and identity of generic staff support schemes, and the problems of these when set against the heterogeneous experiences of international newcomers.

Building on O'Mahony's (2014) study of teaching and learning in UK-led TNHE initiatives, Keay et al. (2014, p. 255) identified:

*... a need for a greater understanding of the cultural context within which TNHE programmes of study are being delivered, and for improved means of communication, training and support for both home-based and local staff who collaborate in the delivery of TNE.*

Again, this assertion no doubt has merit, but falls short of saying what it would be best for HEIs to do, and why, to impact what actually goes on inside classrooms and other learning spaces. There is also concern that undue attention to cultural differences inherent in TNHE initiatives can be problematic: Egege and Kutieleh (2008) warned that such attention can lead to confusion among teachers and students and vagueness about pedagogy. Clearly there are no one-size-fits-all

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answers to what type of changes (if any) to pedagogic practices academics taking up an international teaching position might be encouraged to make, or indeed to how they might be encouraged to make them (Sutherland, 2019). But if an academic's previously conceived and enacted teaching practices are not a good fit in a foreign teaching context, a nuanced appreciation of the reasons underpinning this may better equip an HEI to provide appropriate direction and support. Further, this understanding may also help HEIs to capitalise on the opportunities that international academics afford institutions. Such opportunities include: how a teacher's "foreignness" itself can enrich the teaching of some subjects (Alberts, 2008); how TNE teaching has the capacity to improve teaching capacity within home and associated offshore universities (Hoare 2013); and the wider positive role that international academics play in the internationalisation of universities (Minocha et al., 2019).

### **2.3 Academic Development**

Alongside the rise in the profile of teaching in HE, there is a rapidly growing body of work on *academic development* which, while not specific to academics working internationally, does pertain to the ongoing development of academic teachers' teaching practices (McMillan & Gordon, 2017). In light of the need for support for teachers taking up international teaching positions indicated above, this field is relevant to the research.

Despite growing interest in teaching in HE and associated interest in academic development for teaching (McCune, 2018; McMillan and Gordon, 2017; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2017; Turner et al., 2016), there is limited evidence about the actual

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impact of academic development initiatives (Stes et al., 2013). Moreover, while the literature reveals significant buy-in to understanding teaching as a social practice, the work of Turner et al. (2016) suggests that implicit assumptions about training new lecturers (inherent in approaches to training) typically do not reflect this understanding. There are indications that knowledge about how to help academic teachers improve their teaching lags behind knowledge about effective teaching. As such, there are calls for more scholarship of academic development (Ashwin, 2017) and associated theorisation in this area (Boud & Brew, 2013).

Although still underdeveloped, recent attention to *informal* developmental processes (McCune, 2018) has relevance to the research. Out of the general concern about how best to support academic teachers and promote effective teaching, the notion of “spaces” in which social processes significant to prompting change in teaching practices occur is becoming increasingly visible. These spaces are identified variously as, for example: “spaces for “disruption” (Loads & Campbell, 2015, p. 256); “spaces with emancipatory potential” (McMillan & Gordon, 2017, p. 788); and “spaces for open dialogue” (Willis & Strivens, 2015, p. 341).

This attention to spaces and the social processes they support foregrounds the importance of informal learning in shaping teaching practices. This informal learning is identified as important for both new and mid-career academic teachers (Thompson, 2015) and identified as particularly important for experienced academic teachers (McCune, 2018). This latter finding has specific relevance to the research because academics who take up international teaching positions may well be experienced academic teachers. In this study all the participants

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were experienced academic teachers: in order to take up an HE role involving teaching in Oman, a formal requirement for prior experience of academic teaching must be met by teachers coming from overseas.

In relation to informal learning, Mårtensson and Roxå (2015, p. 109) emphasised the importance of “backstage” conversations during which “teachers negotiate, formulate, and maintain their beliefs about teaching” and asserted that:

*It is in interaction with those who are significant to him or her that a teacher decided to teach differently.*

There is thus an increasing call for the promotion of policies that might encourage conversations about pedagogy that in turn inspire and support the development of new practice (Haig, 2005; McCune, 2018; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2017).

Informal conversations that potentially have significant impact on academics’ teaching practice may extend beyond academics’ local academic context and beyond academia (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2017). This finding is potentially important for the research because, as demonstrated above, feelings of isolation are likely among new international academics and as such, it is reasonable to pre-suppose that they might seek support in “significant networks” (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009a, p. 547) that include individuals outside their immediate teaching context. A possible risk with informal development processes, however, is the danger of beliefs and practices that a given university may not wish to encourage being reinforced (Hoare, 2013).

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The academic development literature reviewed above hints at potential ways forward to address inadequate support/professional development for academic staff in their teaching role, whether these individuals are teaching on home ground or in a foreign land.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has elaborated the research context by highlighting five key points: the number of academic teachers teaching overseas is increasing and set to continue to do so; academic *teaching* is seen as increasingly important in its own right; the cultural complexity of academic teaching contexts is increasing; even experienced academic teachers often face daunting TCs while undertaking an international teaching role; and institutional support for international teachers in managing these TCs is typically underdeveloped.

The cultural distances between former and new international teaching contexts, and teachers' emotional responses to TCs faced in navigating these, are identified as under-researched and under-theorised areas that can contribute to an understanding of institutional support requirements.

The *academic development* literature contributes to the thesis through its advocacy of theoretically-informed support for teaching and the potential importance of *informal* support for academic teachers. This need for theoretically-informed institutional support for international academics is reflected in the study's theoretical framework that is elaborated in the next chapter.

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## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research is underpinned by the conception that teaching is a social practice. This understanding holds that the construction and enactment of teaching practices are socially mediated (Bamber et al, 2009; D'Eon et al, 2000). In turn, this implies that any institutional/departmental interventions aimed at supporting teachers and promoting specific approaches to teaching and learning need to influence social processes at the meso level – that is, at the level of teaching workgroups. By focusing on individuals within their social and collegial contexts, the research was able to foreground TCs and opportunities experienced by individual international academic teachers in their new teaching contexts as well as retain focus on meso-level interactions. The concept of teaching and learning regimes (TLRs – Trowler, 2008) was employed as the core theoretical framework to enable this focus. Care was taken, however, for this theoretical lens not to restrict analysis of the data and as this analysis progressed the significance of TLRs being embedded in and shaped by the wider culture in which they operate emerged as an important factor in understanding the academic teachers' experiences. This called for the link between TLRs and their wider cultural context that is implicit in the core TLR framework to be made more explicit.

This chapter has five main sections. These serve to: explain how the research relates to teaching conceived as a social practice; elaborate on TLRs and their constituent moments; evaluate TLR theory for application to the research; draw on the concept of institutional logics to suggest how TLRs are embedded in their

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wider cultural contexts; and, in conclusion, summarise how the suggested expansion of TLR theory supported the research and has the potential to support other studies concerning academic mobility.

### **3.2 Understanding Teaching as a Social Practice**

What constitutes social practice remains contested (Boud & Brew, 2017) but it can be conceived in simple terms as activity that addresses a common need in a community, involves shared and mutually understood ways of behaving or acting, and is effected through a complex array of norms and social standards (D'Eon, 2000). Teaching is consistent with this conception in terms of its purposive and communal nature, its characteristic activities and the various norms – often implicit and institutionalised – that influence it.

Elaborating on this conception, Boud and Brew (2017) identified that teaching is characterised by the overlapping features of embodiment, material mediation, situatedness, emergence, relationality and co-construction. This complexity is reflected in McCune's (2018, p. 319) identification of "the rich, tangled webs of the social and the material from which academics' pedagogic practice in higher education emerges". This conception of teaching emphasises that teaching is not simply an act of individual teachers engaging with students in a classroom or the context of a course; rather, it is a set of practices that are socially located and framed by structures and expectations of different parties. It follows that academic teachers develop values, attitudes and practices that are context-dependent and shaped through a range of social interactions.

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In the case of academic mobility, depending on their prior teaching context, international academic teachers may introduce radically different elements (in the form of beliefs, values, expectations and behaviours, for example) into the new social context. This scenario brings to the fore the inherent potential for changes in teaching practices – inclusive of the potential for such changes to emerge in unanticipated and unpredictable ways (Boud & Brew, 2017).

The next section elaborates on TLR theory. It demonstrates how the theory's deconstruction of social processes inherent in teaching practices provides both a means to better understand how academic teachers experience a foreign teaching context as well as a means to inform support initiatives.

### **3.3 Teaching and Learning Regimes**

TLR theory assumes that cultures in HEIs are “multiple, generated and sustained at the level of the workgroup within departments” (Trowler, 2008, p. 15). As Hannon et al. (2017, p. 2010) have elaborated, TLR theory is “grounded in a socio-cultural practice view of how academic workgroups operate to instantiate particular ideas, practices and norms about university teaching and learning over others”. TLR theory holds that individual teachers are knowledgeable agents in constructing their teaching practice but that in doing so they are influenced by colleagues and students, and by the culture in which they teach (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009b). This suggests that while individual faculty members interact with and support the construction of the local teaching culture, at the same time they negotiate tension between this culture as they experience it and their own agency.

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TLRs are conceived as a set of dynamic and interrelated cultural components, or “moments”, through which social processes flow within a given teaching context and teaching practices are constructed and enacted (Trowler, 2008). Trowler’s (2008) comprehensive account of TLRs identifies eight such components. As derived from illustrated accounts of these (Papier, 2008; Trowler & Cooper, 2002; Trowler, 2005; Trowler 2008), TLR components of a given teaching context can be described as follows (Trevor-Roper, 2017): **recurrent practices** - the taken-for-granted ways of doing things that have been developed through the workgroup engaging in practice; **implicit theories of teaching and learning** – theories of teaching and learning, such as perceiving teaching as the construction rather than the transmission of knowledge, that inform practice (and are perhaps generated outside the workgroup); **tacit assumptions** – collective assumptions about teaching and learning which are generated by the workgroup and underpin practice; **conventions of appropriateness** – behaviours in the teaching context that the workgroup has generated a shared understanding of as being appropriate, and thus behaviour that feels normal in terms of practice; **discursive repertoires** – terms that frame teaching practices and how they are conceptualised, developed and used by the workgroup; **codes of signification** – connotations of a particular feature or aspect of a workgroup’s teaching context developed and attributed by the workgroup; **power relations** – the power relations that develop and continue to flow through the workgroup and impact on practices; and **subjectivities in interaction** – the individuality that workgroup members bring to their interaction within the workgroup and the construction of TLRs. While TLRs remain dynamic and conditioned by agency and structure (Trowler, 2008), in a given faculty workgroup engaged in teaching in a given

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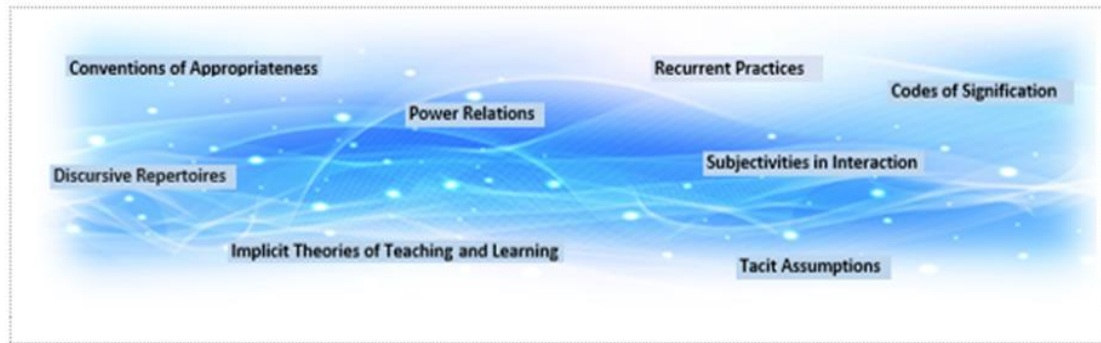
context over an extended period of time, the components acquire relative stability.

Based on findings in the literature (see Chapter 2) and an unpublished pilot study for the research (Trevor-Roper, 2017), it was anticipated that the participant academics may find their taken-for-granted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving as academic teachers, as shaped within previously constructed and enacted TLRs, challenged by their new international teaching context in Oman. As reflected in the RQs (see Section 1.2), this potential scenario leads to questions about the responses to support initiatives that such challenges might engender. Trowler (2005, p. 26) asserted that:

*[TLRs] act as “filters”, conditioning the reception and implementation of change, as well as generating their own changes or acting as a brake on it.*

Empirical evidence supports the notion that the receptiveness of participants to educational development programmes depends in part on the extent to which such programme aims align, or not, with assumptions and practices rooted in existing TLRs (Trowler & Cooper, 2002).

Figure 3.1 below provides an introductory visual representation of TLR moments. It aims to aid the discussion that follows about how TLR theory supports the research.



*Adapted from visual designed by Harryarts / Freepik: <http://www.freepik.com>*

**Figure 3-1:** "Moments" of a Teaching and Learning Regime

This visual portrays the continuous flow of social processes through the (theoretical) TLR moments. The theory suggests that, individually and relationally, the forces flowing through the moments remain in a constant state of flux that may be more or less turbulent as they are impacted by, and subsequently impact, other forces. At any given time, such forces, emanating from individuals as well as a range of contextual factors, can be envisioned along a range of continua: for example, from harmonising to dissonant, from restraining to enabling, from mild to intense and from broad to more specific in their impact. Newcomers to teaching groups – such as new international academic teachers – will provide influx to existing TLRs through these moments as their values, beliefs, attitudes and practices are funnelled into their new social context. As Trowler (2009, p. 181) observed, academic staff “bring their worlds to teaching contexts”, inclusive of their desires and emotions (Boud & Brew, 2017). The illuminated spots in Fig 3.1 help to portray impacts of significance within or between forces flowing through different moments. The visual illustrates how change is an inherent feature of TLRs. The soft border indicates TLRs’ embeddedness in wider social contexts (as discussed further below). So while

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the nature of a TLR is that there will be some degree of stability and harmony in the overall flow of social processes, TLRs remain natural, open and contested systems (Trowler, 2008). The visual also illustrates the complexity of how responses to teaching and learning directives will be mediated, with attendant implications for academic development/support initiatives.

TLR theory has the potential to provide insight into the experiences of individuals who enter and become members of teaching groups by unpacking their experiences in relation to the different TLR moments. This provides the potential to identify more specifically the sources of TCs that arise. In turn, this has the potential to provide insight into how individual teachers within these groups might best be supported as well as how their potential to enrich teaching cultures might be nurtured.

TLR theory does not develop how the different moments relate to each other (Fanghanel, 2009) although consideration of this has the potential to strengthen the theory's explanatory power. To help realise this potential, I suggest that the moments could be conceived along a range of dimensions, such as whether a given moment is: potentially directly observable or not; more or less deep rooted than others and thus, perhaps, more or less likely to be surfaced; more or less focused on individuals than others; more immediately bound to the local context than others; more likely than others (in relation to individuals) to harbour carryover from former regimes in other (perhaps overseas) HEI departments; and/or more or less likely to undergo more rapid change than others.

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Culture is manifested at different layers of depth (Schein, 1984; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In his work on organisational culture, Schein (1984) identified three such levels or domains that, I suggest, provide a framework that can helpfully inform a relational analysis of TLR moments. The domains comprise: **basic assumptions** which he described as taken for granted, invisible and pre/unconscious; **values** which he described as overt and espoused values of which individuals are aware; and “artefacts and creations” although I have chosen to use the title **visible and audible behaviour patterns** that he included under this domain name. He described things within this third domain as being visible but often not decipherable.

While the research did not set out to investigate the relationships between TLR moments *per se*, the considerations above suggest the following possible groupings, hierarchies and tendencies.

- **Recurrent practices and discursive repertoires:** These can be considered as the more overt, and thus potentially directly observable moments. As such they can be broadly linked to Schein’s **visible and audible behaviour patterns**. There is likely to be ready self-awareness of these and associated potential for “shock” if a newcomer finds that these moments of former TLRs are not a good fit in a new teaching context. In turn, this may reveal characteristics of other underpinning moments not normally surfaced. Because of their complex underpinnings, change in these moments is unlikely to be swift or uncontested. TLR theory, however, supports the view that teachers could very well teach

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differently if they believed in a given alternative (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009a).

- **Codes of signification and conventions of appropriateness:** These moments can be conceived as operating in a conceptual space below the potentially directly observable *recurrent practices* and *discursive repertoires* and broadly aligned to Schein's **values**. It is likely that individuals/the group will have some awareness of these. This awareness might be heightened if a newcomer enters a teaching context where TLRs include expressions of these moments that conflict with those of their former teaching contexts and associated TLRs. There is, however, less likely to be ready awareness of any underpinnings of these in the form of *implicit theories of teaching and learning* and *tacit assumptions*.
- **Implicit theories of teaching and learning and tacit assumptions:** These moments can be conceived as those least likely to be surfaced by long standing members of workgroups but which underpin other moments that are more overtly expressed. As such, they can be conceived as the most deep rooted of the moments. This relational status suggests that changes within these moments may be fundamental to substantive changes in teaching practices. This conception provides further possible explanation of how TLRs serve to regulate as well as generate change. These moments can be broadly linked to Schein's **basic assumptions**.
- **Subjectivities in interaction:** While all the TLR moments allow for interaction between structure and agency (Trowler, 2008), this moment

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focuses in particular on individuals within a teaching group. Different individuals will likely express, both verbally and through action, their individual beliefs and opinions about teaching to a greater or lesser/more overt or more covert extent within the social functioning of the workgroup – with the ways in which individuals express these beliefs and opinions perhaps shaped significantly by prevailing power relations.

On the basis of its potentially visible and audible expression and its likely significant underpinnings in the form of moments broadly reflecting values and basic assumptions held by the teacher, this moment (*subjectivities in interaction*) could be located conceptually alongside *recurrent practices* and *discursive repertoires*. In light of the focus of the research, however, this moment is separated out: within a new teaching context, there is significant scope for carryover from former regimes to be channelled through this moment and as such, this is arguably a critical moment for considering the experiences of individuals within their group.

- **Power Relations:** This moment is strongly bound to both the immediate and the wider context of given TLRs and may emanate, for example, from structure in the form of policy or resources, or from the direct influence of groups or individuals. The latter may relate to issues such as gender and prevailing social inequalities (Trowler, 2008). Power relations within a TLR may be either more overtly manifest or more covert but are likely to be particularly significant to international newcomers for reasons that include the following. First, because of this moment's very context-specific nature, power relations may be experienced in very different ways than

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experienced within former TLRs. Second, as is the case in Oman, international academics may lack rights (for example, concerning residency or freedom of speech) that they enjoy in their home countries. This moment's relationship with others is broad and it has potential to exert considerable constraining or enabling forces.

Different conceptions and thus groupings of TLR moments, and if or how they might be broadly linked to Schein's different domains/levels of culture, are clearly possible and more complex analyses of how these moments relate to each other could be developed. This further level of scrutiny of TLR moments, however, has the potential to enhance understanding of how newcomer academic teachers transition into new teaching groups, and thus how these teachers might shape and be shaped by their new teaching context. It follows that TCs as well as opportunities that newcomers experience in relation to local TLRs have the potential to reveal characteristics of moments at play that have been rendered invisible to those enculturated into the local system, thus providing for greater understanding of these TLRs. In turn, this understanding has the potential to inform support or change initiatives.

### **3.4 Strengths and Limitations of Core Theoretical Framework**

A strength of TLR theory for this research is its potential to allow nuanced insight into "street level" teaching practices (Hannon, 2017; Trowler, 2005, p. 21), that is the everyday, on-the-ground practices that academic teachers enact in their teaching role.

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TLR theory, however, originates from the study of *groups* of academic teachers that are relatively stable (Trowler, 2005) rather than the somewhat different empirical focus of this research project that foregrounds *individual* academic teachers transitioning from one teaching-in-HE context to another, international, context. Moreover, it has been observed that within TLR theory, attention to the individuals' agency and behaviour is understated (Fanghanel, 2009; Hannon et al., 2017). The research on which this thesis is based, however, pre-supposed that Oman's context of typically less stable academic workgroups, and the study's foregrounding of experienced, individual international academic teachers entering these, did not undermine the legitimacy or value of using the theoretical lens of TLR theory as a core theoretical framework. It has been demonstrated above how individuals' experiences can be apprehended, in part, in terms of different TLR moments – with the moment of *subjectivities in interaction*, in particular, accommodating the potential for focus on what individuals bring to the social context. Moreover, TLR theory has no inherent relative weighting with respect to which “moments” may be more dominant than others. TLR theory thus provides clear potential to illuminate theoretical understanding of the teaching experiences of international academics.

As the research progressed (see Chapters 5–7), the question of how the wider prevailing culture links to the construction and enactment of TLRs emerged as significant in understanding the experiences of the international academics in their teaching role. This link was highlighted by the way that aspects of societal culture such as religion, language and student behaviours and expectations influenced the international academic teachers' meso-level engagement and

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associated teaching practices. TLR theory recognises but does not elaborate how TLRs link to wider societal culture. The next section offers an elaboration of this link.

### **3.5 An Expanded Cultural Perspective**

TLRs are subject to influences from the macro level (Fanghanel, 2009; Trowler, 2008) and thus operate within their respective macro socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. If a newcomer academic to a teaching group comes from a former teaching context within the same wider (say, regional or national) cultural context, how the wider culture impacts the local meso-level cultures in academic departments that TLRs describe may be rendered more or less invisible through familiarity and thus taken-for-grantedness. For an international teacher, however, this embeddedness of TLRs in their wider cultural context may be exposed through a lack of familiarity; what is strange will be foregrounded.

While the concept of national cultures is contested (Jabbar & Mirza, 2019), there are nevertheless often clear differences between national cultures as commonly understood and their associated impact on organisations (Hofstede, 1984; Klinger & Mallon, 2015; Rubenstein, 2006). Similarly, national systems of education are found to encompass and transmit the particular values and priorities articulated by nation states (Walker, 2015; Rubenstein, 2006). The concept of societal level ***institutional logics*** provides a theoretical understanding of the linkages between wider societal or national cultures and cultures within organisations (Hinings, 2012). In turn, how TLRs are linked to

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wider societal cultures can be theorised through institutional logics. Institutional logics are understood to be:

*socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices and symbolic systems (including assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules) by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their social reality, organize time and space, and guide their daily activity. (Jacks, 2017, p. 3)*

From an institutional logics perspective, societies are conceptualised as comprising a system of core institutions that act as distinct cultural subsystems. Typical institutions include **family, religion, the state, the market, professions, community, and corporations** (Jacks, 2017; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). The overall societal culture within which these cultural subsystems are embedded can be conceived as a particular set of values or beliefs within a given “civilization”, with civilization conceived as a larger historical and cultural entity within which people share a common geographical space (that may span nations and regions) as well as common values (likely embodied in a given religion), codes of conduct, social institutions and historical memory (Wei, 2011). Within civilizations, different societal cultures and associated societal logics are generated through collective memory of historical events (Ocasio, et al., 2016).

As systems of supra-organisational cultural elements, institutional logics legitimise social order and help individuals to make sense of the world (Haveman & Gualtieri, 2017); they also help to explain human behavior (Jacks, 2017). The central logic of each core societal institution both constrains behaviour at

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individual, organisational and societal level but also enables agency and change through contradictions inherent across different institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutional logics are instantiated recursively through communication, practices, and vocabularies and while prevailing institutional logics comprise “meaningful and durable principles”, they change over time and in their respective influence (Ocasio et al., 2015, p. 28). An example logic which in many contexts impacts HE as well as society more broadly is neoliberal logic through which HE is legitimised as an industry (Gumport, 2000).

Cultures within organisations are thus embedded within wider, and sometimes conflicting, institutional cultures that are in turn rooted in the wider cultures of different societies. Figure 3.2 below shows this conceptual linkage of TLRs to the wider/national cultures in which they operate.

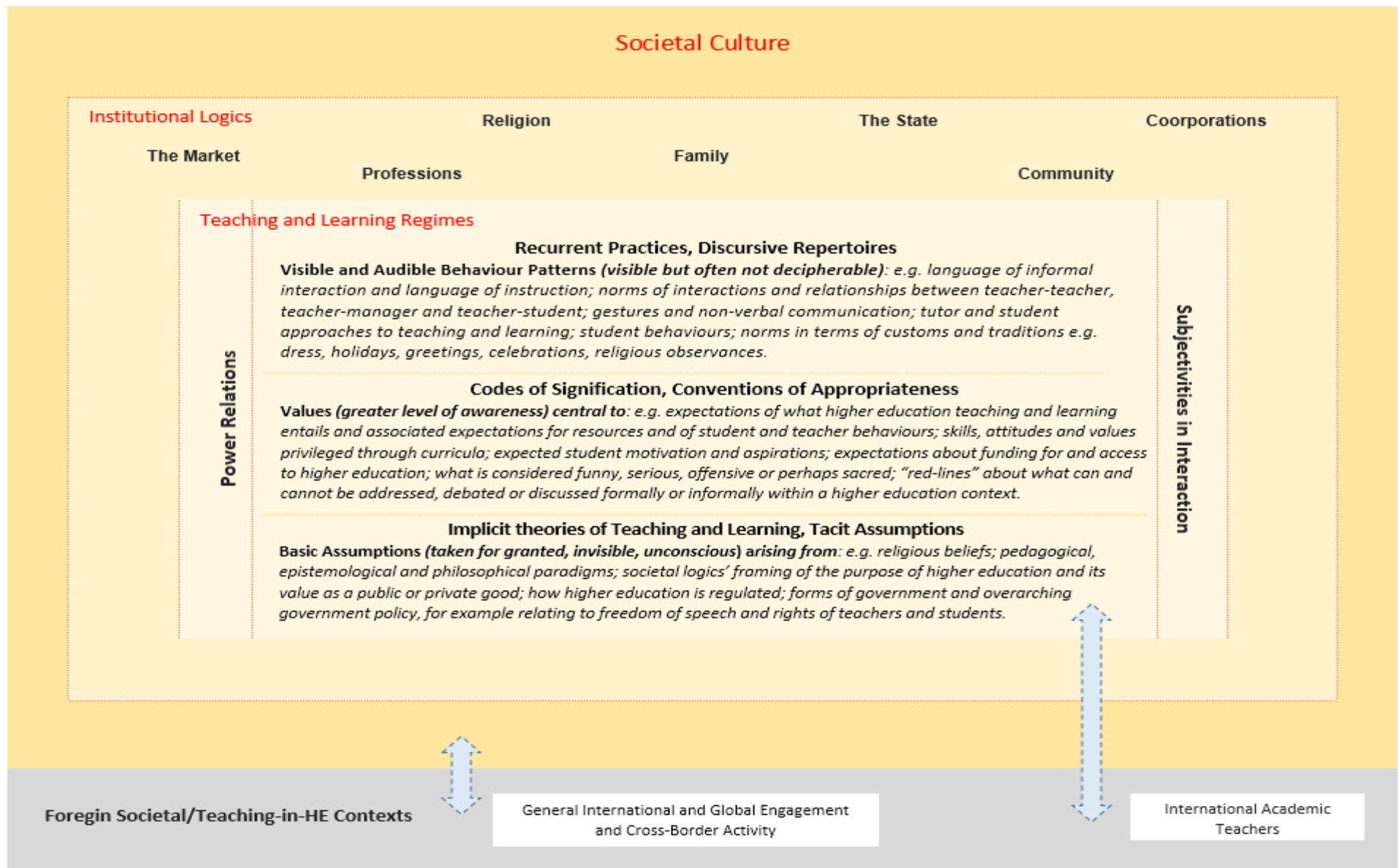
This figure first embeds the cultural system that TLRs describe within the wider cultural system. This wider cultural system comprises the historically-constituted societal culture and associated logics of core social institutions within which a given HEI and its departmental TLRs operate. In no particular order, typical social institutions are identified (the market, religion, the state etc.). There are no hard inner borders and the outer border is assumed to be porous (Kosmützky, 2015): societal culture and associated institutional logics are subject to permeation from cultural forces through, for example, a nation’s international and global engagement and the cross-border activities of its organisations and citizens. HEIs as organisations are not shown; as stated above, TLR theory assumes that cultures in HEIs are generated and sustained at the level of workgroups within departments (Trowler, 2008, p. 15).

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The figure then draws on the interrelated hierarchy of TLR moments developed in the previous section, with the moment of *subjectivities of interaction* – which is understood as foregrounding individuality – and the moment of *power relations* operating at a relatively broad level. The lack of any hard borders indicates interrelationships between the TLR components as well as the interrelationship between TLRs and the prevailing institutional logics.

The figure also includes examples of aspects of TLRs likely to be impacted significantly by the wider culture in which they are situated. These examples are not exhaustive or assumed to be definitively and discretely located. Rather, the examples are extrapolated from the research and the literature in an attempt to identify aspects likely to be applicable across different national/regional contexts and linked to identifiable prevailing (and potentially conflicting) institutional logics. These examples are elaborated below, working up through the levels shown in the figure.



**Figure 3-2:** Teaching and Learning Regimes, Institutional Logics and Societal Culture  
 [Figure created by author, building on teaching and learning regimes theory (Trowler, 2008) and Schein's (1984, p. 4) figure of levels of organisational culture.]

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There is potential for institutional logics derived from a dominant religion to permeate TLRs at different levels (Rubenstein, 2006) and, in particular, to permeate at the level of basic assumptions to which I have linked the TLR moments of *implicit theories of teaching and learning* and *tacit assumptions*. While there is little research on the influence of religion on teaching and learning, the significance and broad impact of this in some national/regional contexts is recognised (Bovill et al., 2015; Kadiwal & Rind, 2013; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Moore-Jones, 2015; Warner-Søderholm & Kriger, 2014). A prevailing dominant religion may influence TLRs in ways that are rendered all but invisible to those enculturated within the given wider culture. Areas affected might extend from timetabling (to accommodate religious observances and holidays) to curricular and course materials and even to theories of teaching and learning and epistemologies. With respect to the latter, for example, Eickelman (1992) identified that, by analogy with the divine text of the Qur'an, the idea of books conveys for many Muslims the idea that valued knowledge is fixed and memorised. Logics arising from a prevailing religion are likely to also influence social interactions that teachers engage in as well as norms of student behaviour. Where there is a prevailing state religion, associated institutional logics are likely to exert a broad and powerful influence on TLRs.

A combination of societal logics is likely to shape pedagogical, epistemological and philosophical paradigms inherent in TLRs (Walker, 2015). National curricula set at the school level, for example, may enculturate local teachers and students who will progress into HE, into given approaches to teaching and learning that then become taken for granted. Similarly, beliefs and assumptions derived from forms of

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government and overarching government policy are likely to shape TLRs in some ways that are rendered invisible to those enculturated in a given context. Teachers and students enculturated within a given system may automatically assume that students will pay for their HE, or not, tacitly reflecting societal logics about whether HE is a public or private good. As a result, teachers may hold associated assumptions about, for example, the source and nature of student motivation to study and students may hold taken-for-granted assumptions about their role in relation to their HE (perhaps consumer-oriented, or not). Prevailing external regulatory and evaluation mechanisms may, for example, promote a range of agendas such as graduate employability or good citizenship that then feed into curricula in a taken-for-granted way. Logics derived from forms of government (from liberal democracies to autocratic regimes) and associated prevailing legislation will possibly shape assumptions about academic freedom, freedom of speech and rights of teachers and students. Taken-for-granted assumptions about this might, in turn, shape assumptions underpinning associated values, expectations and practice relating to student and staff feedback on teaching and learning matters, for example.

Moving to the next level, I suggest that social processes flowing through the TLR moments of *codes of signification* and *conventions of appropriateness* will reflect values rooted in basic assumptions. These might include values derived from the pedagogical, epistemological and philosophical paradigms that prevailing TLRs reflect and the given skills, attitudes and values that are privileged through curricula as a result. In turn, these might give rise to values and associated expectations of students and teacher behaviours, as well as expectations for

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resources. Values derived from basic assumptions about the purpose of HE are likely to underpin expectations about funding for and access to HE as well as students' motivation and aspirations, and teachers' expectations of these. In relation to more general meso-level interaction, *conventions of appropriateness* shared by teachers and students from the "home" national/regional culture might include what is considered funny, serious, offensive or perhaps sacred (Straubhaar, 2006) as well as "red-lines" about what can or should not be addressed, debated or discussed formally or informally within an HE context. *Codes of signification* are likely to be similarly influenced but highly localised (Trowler, 2002).

The top level of Figure 3.2 links the TLR moments of *recurrent practices* and *discursive repertoires* with Schein's (1984) *visible and audible behaviour patterns*. Previous sections in this chapter have highlighted the centrality of interaction and relationships to the construction and maintenance of TLRs. Many overt aspects of this interaction, probably visible through *recurrent practices*, will involve verbal or written communication. Similarly, language is fundamental to discursive repertoires. The official language (or languages) of communication will most probably be a reflection of the wider culture in which the TLR is embedded rather than something developed by an academic workgroup (although norms of unofficial communication may be locally generated). Within some wider cultures, the official medium of instruction in an HEI may be determined by such a basic assumption that it is rendered invisible to those enculturated within that wider culture; in other contexts, the medium of instruction may reflect a governmental policy decision and, as is the case in Oman, may differ from the national language. Norms of teacher-teacher,

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teacher-manager and teacher-student interactions and relationships, inclusive of associated gender aspects, and use of gestures and non-verbal communication are likely to reflect the wider dominant culture. Social interaction will also accommodate norms of greetings as well as bring into view, for example, norms of dress. Recurrent practices in teaching and learning are likely to visibly accommodate national/regional celebrations, holidays and religious observances. The examples above show how visible aspects of classroom practice (such as lectures or students working in groups) and associated assessment practices, and how these are framed by teachers, are likely to stem from the values and basic assumptions about pedagogy, epistemology and the purpose of HE that are in turn embedded in the wider culture.

Figure 3.2 indicates academic teachers crossing borders into a foreign teaching-in-HE context and highlights how the consequences of such transitions can be envisaged from two key perspectives. The first perspective is the potential TCs that international academic teachers might face in negotiating unfamiliar local teaching norms that themselves are deeply embedded in the prevailing immediate and wider local culture. The second perspective is the potential for enrichment of the local teaching culture as well as local societal change and enrichment. While the first perspective remains the empirical focus of the research, it can be envisaged how the latter might be promoted over time through international academic teachers' negotiation and co-construction of local TLRs and the reciprocal (albeit one-sided) relationship between TLRs and wider societal culture.

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### 3.6 Teaching Cultural Distance

In considering how similar or different a foreign culture is to that which an international newcomer is used to, the concept of *cultural distance* is often employed (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Zhou et al., 2008). In the context of international students, Kelly and Moogan (2012) employed the concept of an *education system distance* to conceive the gap between the student's host and home country educational systems, inclusive of aspects such as beliefs about what constitutes knowledge and how it should be learned, taught and assessed. These researchers (ibid, p. 41) observed that:

*The gap or **education system distance** between the IMS [internationally mobile student] and the higher education institution may in some cases present itself more as a crack whilst in other cases it will be a distinct crevice; the size of the differences will impact upon the duration of the transition period and the changes made by either entity to close the gap.*  
[emphasis added]

Building on these concepts, and in light of the theoretical framework set out above and the research results, I suggest that the concept of a “teaching cultural distance” can be helpful in considering the nature and extent of TCs that might be experienced by an international academic teacher. I take “teaching cultural distance” to mean the difference, and thus the distance, between the departmental teaching culture (TLRs) in a new teaching context as experienced by an academic teacher, and the teaching cultures of former

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teaching contexts experienced by that teacher. This concept explicitly recognises that it is within these former teaching contexts that teachers' routinised ways of thinking, feeling and behaving in a teaching environment, and basic assumptions and values underpinning these ways, will have been shaped up to the point of them taking up their new international teaching position.

While the theoretical work above demonstrates how TLRs are embedded in the wider culture within which they emerge and evolve, it cannot be assumed that a general cultural distance and a teaching cultural distance would be the same, particularly when TNHE arrangements are in place. For example, as elaborated in Chapter 5, the research finds that international academic teachers from countries quite similar to Oman in a number of wider aspects of societal culture faced significant TCs relating to the navigation of complex nested cultural issues inherent in teaching in Oman on programmes which lead to British HE awards. Even in the absence of such overt international influences, local TLRs will reflect their unique local social, political and economic contexts and are therefore likely to present international academic teachers with a considerable number of unfamiliar norms of practice to negotiate.

What can be known about TLRs in current and former teaching contexts and the meanings that different individuals attach to their experiences of these will remain limited, partial and subjective. Moreover, the new context that the new teacher enters and becomes an integral part of will remain dynamic, as will the co-construction and enactment of TLRs. Therefore there can be no absolute determination of teaching cultural distances. The proposed value of this novel

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concept, however, lies in its potential to encourage focus on, and therefore better appreciation and understanding of, the cultural border-crossing profiles inherent in different individuals' transitions into a foreign teaching-in-HE context, and thus the complexity of such transitions. It is not intended to generate reductive determinations of and correspondences between distances and expected TCs and transition outcomes. It can be envisaged that such a focus could also help to reveal more specifically the potential for enrichment of local teaching cultures that international academic teachers offer.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the social-practice-based theoretical concept of TLRs (Trowler, 2008) and justified its somewhat novel application to the research. It has also offered a more explicit articulation of how TLRs are embedded in the wider cultural contexts in which they operate. The resulting wider framework of institutional logics and societal culture provides potential to better understand the cultures that TLRs describe by framing them within wider forces and “historically situated webs of meaning” (Jacks, 2017, p. 3) that shape them. This wider framework includes a relational classification of TLRs moments based on the cultural-domains framework of *visible and audible behaviour patterns*, and *values* and *basic assumptions* underpinning these, developed by Schein (1984). It is suggested that this wider framework affords potential for the experiences of international teachers to be theorised as a function of the novel concept of “teaching cultural distance”. In addition to expanding the explanatory power of TLR theory for application to the research, this work has potential to support other studies about academic mobility.

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## **Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design**

This chapter begins with an overview of the research methodology and design. The subsequent sections provide details of key research elements. Measures taken to address ethical issues and help ensure the robustness of the study are embedded within these sections but also summarised in subsequent, dedicated sections. The conclusion is preceded by an evaluation of the knowledge claims generated by the study.

### **4.1 Research Design Overview**

The study was carried out within an empirical qualitative research design framework, underpinned by a constructivist ontological and interpretative epistemological research orientation (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). A purposeful sampling strategy (Marshall, 1996; Malterud 2001, Yilmaz, 2013) was used to recruit twenty-one international academics each from one of four different HEIs. Data about the participants' experiences of teaching were collected through individual, semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were supported by use of a small number of flashcards. The data were first analysed using a relatively open coding strategy guided by the RQs. From these codes a smaller number of thematic categories and, ultimately, overarching themes and sub-themes were derived. The expanded TLR framework, inclusive of the relational classification of TLR moments and as detailed in Chapter 3, was used to theoretically interpret data. From this analysis, conclusions were drawn about the requirements for institutional support of academic teachers transitioning into an international teaching role.

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## 4.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

Research approaches to understanding social phenomena depend on a range of factors including the researcher's beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology) and the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology) (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 1). Based on the assumption that teaching is a socially constructed endeavour (Bamber et al., 2009), this research is underpinned by a constructivist ontology – a philosophical orientation which asserts that “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2004, p. 17). This worldview holds that (social) reality is socially constructed and that therefore, there are multiple realities.

Given this constructivist ontological orientation, the research sought an understanding of the meanings that individuals attach to their perceived realities. This choice is aligned with the epistemological orientation that the uncovering of subjective meaning of social action through interpretation of others' actions and social world constitutes acceptable knowledge when studying the social world (Bryman, 2004). In turn, this interpretative epistemological orientation determined my choice to adopt a qualitative research strategy through which I sought to “reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). Yilmaz (ibid) observed that qualitative research “explores what it assumes to be a socially constructed and dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context-sensitive”. An important theoretical consequence of this in terms of research design and

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methodology is that the “knower and the known are inextricably connected” (ibid). A qualitative study underpinned by an interpretative research stance means that the study will involve a considerable amount of interpretation: the researcher interprets others’ interpretations, and then interprets these interpretations in terms of relevant concepts, theories and the literature (Bryman, 2004). Correspondingly, the findings of the study have been generated through my interpretation of participants’ perceptions of their experiences. The knowledge generated by the study is thus subjective, partial, and situated. Various measures were taken to ensure the rigour of the research (see Section 4.7).

These philosophical underpinnings of the study, and the demands of the research questions, determined the choice of an empirical, qualitative research design centred on in-depth interviews. This type of qualitative interviewing provides potential for research participants’ thoughts and feelings to be surfaced and is well suited to social research which has a specific focus (Bryman, 2004, p. 341) as this research has. The study’s empirical focus on the “tensions, challenges and opportunities” experienced by the teachers and their experiences of any support for teaching then enabled theorisation of these experiences in a way that can inform institutional support initiatives.

My participant sampling strategy (see Section 4.4.1) was premised on the belief that consideration of the experiences of academics from a range of different backgrounds teaching in a range of different institutions would serve to generate rich data that could aid understanding of relevant social constructs. As a result, the study included a range of identifiable categories and variables

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relating to individuals and their HEIs. Care was taken in the data analysis, however, to remain focused on seeking understanding of social processes rather than on seeking reductive, superficial correspondences between variables. In other words, my aim was that aspects of diversity among the participant academics and HEIs would enrich and illuminate the findings within the constructivist, interpretivist qualitative research paradigm of the study, and in this way support focus on explanatory theory which could lead to theoretical generalisation (Hammersley, 2010).

### **4.3 Personal Position in the Research**

The “status, legitimacy and limitations” of research and associated knowledge claims are a function of researcher positionality (Kelly, 2014, p. 262). Malterud (2001, p. 484) echoed this position in her proposal of reflexivity – “an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process” – as a standard for qualitative enquiry. As the researcher, I am an integral part of this study.

My personal feelings, thoughts and values about teaching and learning in HE are shaped in part by: my long term residency in Oman – having been born, brought up and educated in the UK; my former work in Oman’s HE sector; and my current work for Oman’s national external quality assurance agency for HE (the OAAA). For twelve years, I was a senior academic manager in a private Omani HE college. Like the research participants whose teaching experiences are the empirical focus of this study, almost all academic teachers I worked with

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in this college were expatriates. Since 2009, I have worked as a Review Director for the OAAA. Through this work I have encountered many of Oman's international academic teachers and have engaged in scrutiny of interview accounts of their practice alongside documentary evidence of institutional activities. As such, while I remained formally positioned as an *outsider* in conducting this research with respect to my relationship with my research sites and participants, I nevertheless shared a degree of closeness. This position potentially limited for me possible advantages in apprehending social processes at play that a researcher who was more of an outsider may have had – such as the ability to bring a freshness of perspective and see as strange what might be familiar to me (Kelly, 2014). By contrast, my familiarity with the local culture provided me with potential for nuanced insight.

While I did not know personally any of the research participants, they all knew of my position at the OAAA (this was indicated in the Participant Information Sheet which supported the Consent Form that participants signed to confirm their willingness to participate in the study). In Oman, the OAAA is powerful: its mandate results from a Royal Decree. In line with this decree, it is mandatory for all Oman's HEIs to undergo applicable OAAA review processes, and it is evident that HEIs' preparations for OAAA reviews, and the OAAA's subsequent publication of review results, have significant impact on entire HEI communities. As such, I remained aware of the potential for bias in my participants' responses, potentially consciously or unconsciously generated by desire for their HEI to be reflected in a positive light (or even a negative light). Corresponding to this was the ongoing potential for bias in my interpretation of

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participants' responses based on my own experiences, feelings, thoughts and values.

In order to understand and manage how I have impacted the research and shaped the findings (as far as this is possible within the complexity of the social world), from the outset of the study I maintained a reflective log and engaged in regular reflective discussions with my supervisor. The aim of this was to support deliberate effort to surface and reflect on aspects of my positionality, including the power relations emanating from these, and how they might engender bias, and influence my pre-suppositions (Ryan, 2005). In particular, this reflection was key to consideration of ethical issues (see Section 4.8) and my preparation for conducting the interviews.

#### **4.4 Research Participants**

The research participants comprised twenty-one purposefully selected international academics from four different HEIs in Oman.

##### **4.4.1 Sampling strategy**

I used a non-probability, purposeful sampling strategy (Marshall, 1996, Malterud 2001, Yilmaz, 2013) with the aim of recruiting international academics with a range of personal profiles in terms of nationality/countries of prior educational and teaching experience, first language etc. (see Section 4.4.5). My assumption, based indirectly on the literature, personal experience and an unpublished pilot study, was that such aspects of given individuals' profiles might impact significantly on their experience of, and responses to, their new

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teaching-in-HE context in Oman. Similarly, recruitment of participants from four different HEIs allowed for different types of institutions to be included. The aim of this planned diversity of research sites and participants was to enrich and illuminate the findings within the constructivist, interpretivist research paradigm of the study.

#### **4.4.2 Participant numbers**

In light of relevant research methodology literature (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Mason, 2010), the number of participants, at twenty-one, is reasonable in relation to the overall scale and nature of the study, including in relation to expected “saturation”: more participants may have been of increasingly diminishing value in revealing greater insight in relation to the RQs. I recruited five participants from each of three of the HEIs and six from the other HEI. The original intention was to recruit twenty participants; the inclusion of one more participant resulted simply from the availability and willingness of this teacher to participate.

#### **4.4.3 Participant recruitment**

I employed local knowledge and personal contacts to approach a senior manager from each of the four HEIs I had identified as having a profile suitable for the study. In Oman, there is a cultural expectation that institutional approval for staff to participate in a research study will be sought, even if formal contractual arrangements between an HEI and its staff members do not specify this. My negotiations with each HEI about how, exactly, I would identify and approach potential participants was informed from my side by a range of

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potential options. In order to minimise potential ethical concerns (outlined below), the most desirable of these options were those that included minimum involvement of gatekeepers within the HEI. In practice, in each case, the participants were selected by the HEI following discussion with me about the desired broad profile characteristics of interviewees. In one institution the recruitment process was mediated by the head of the HEI but in the others this mediation was delegated to lower level management staff and administrative assistants. Two of the HEIs asked for the interview questions to be sent in advance but were satisfied with provision of only the broad areas of discussion to be covered. In one case I was able to communicate directly with the participants via e-mail prior to the interviews.

This use of gatekeepers to gain access to potential participants was necessary in order to respect local cultural norms; it was, however, methodologically undesirable and it raised a number of ethical issues. First, I needed to address potential HEI perceptions that support for my study – or not – may in some way affect OAAA external quality assurance (EQA) reviews that the HEI would subsequently undergo. I countered this by ensuring that the Participant Information Sheet provided to the HEIs confirmed the study's independence from the OAAA, and reiterating this point verbally. I was also careful to select institutions that would not be undergoing any OAAA EQA review at the time of data collection. Further, I needed to address the possibility of academics being coerced to take part and/or put under pressure to respond to interview questions in a particular way. Addressing this included me reiterating, prior to each interview, the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw

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from the study that were emphasised in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form. The actual interviews gave me confidence that all the participants had participated willingly and none of them chose to withdraw.

I had also considered the possibility that participants may have been motivated to participate in order to promote themselves as potential locally-based External Reviewers for the OAAA on the understanding that if I were involved in this selection process, they might be able to secure a competitive advantage. This concern proved unfounded as far as I could tell, but these ethical concerns were among those considered during the ethics approvals process for this study. A summary of the ethical issues raised by the study's methodology is provided in Section 4.8 below.

#### **4.4.4 Participant HEIs**

Although the HEIs involved in this study were not participants *per se*, they had a clear role in it through their contribution to the specific teaching-in-HE context experienced by each of the participants (as well as through their sanctioning of their own international academics taking part in the study). As shown in Table 4.1 below, I selected HEIs with different profiles in terms of: location (capital area or interior region of the country); whether public or private; whether working in affiliation with a foreign university or not; and whether offering programmes leading to foreign or local academic awards. I also selected HEIs with different profiles in terms of institutional classification ("*college*", "*university college*" or "*university*") and date of establishment. Two of the HEIs were colleges, one was a university college and one was a university. The HEIs'

dates of establishment ranged from 1984 to 2010. To help protect the identity of each HEI, these classifications and dates are not included in the table. My selection of institutions that would not be undergoing any OAAA EQA review at the time of data collection served to support management of bias and any concerns about potential conflict of interest.

HEI	Public / Private	Location	Academic Affiliation	Academic Awards
HEI-1	Private	Capital	UK	Foreign
HEI-2	Public	Capital	None	Local
HEI-3	Public	Regional	None	Local
HEI-4	Private	Regional	US	Local

**Table 4-1:** HEIs from which the international academics participating in the study were drawn

More specifically, the following assumptions underpinned these particular characteristics:

- *Public or Private:* In Oman’s context, a private HEI is one that is set up and run by non-governmental individuals or bodies, and many are for-profit organisations. In 2015-2016, Oman’s private HE sector catered to approximately 44% of its HE students (NCSI, 2018). While OAAA research suggests that “quality is not related to whether HEIs are publicly or privately funded” (Goodliffe & Razvi, 2012, p. 1) there is scepticism among the public and in the literature about the extent to which private HEIs are driven by desire to make a profit (Al Lamki, 2006). There is a possibility that individuals’ teaching experiences may be impacted by factors which emanate from whether their HEI is public or private.
- *Location:* Oman’s HEIs are located across its eleven different regions that together cover an area approximately twenty-eight percent larger

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than the UK. The capital city of Muscat, however, remains the most liberal, modern and densely populated area. Public EQA reports (OAAA, 2008-2019) suggest that the international academics in regions outside the capital area may face specific challenges in their teaching. For example, students from these regions are likely to have much less exposure to English in their day-to-day life and as a result may tend to have lower levels of English language competency than their counterparts living and studying in the capital area. They may also have less exposure to foreigners in their day-to-day life and be more conservative. The two regional HEIs were located at distances of approximately 100 and 350 kilometres from the capital.

- *Academic Affiliations and Academic Awards:* National policy established in 1995 requires private colleges and university colleges in Oman (but not universities) to have an academic affiliation with a foreign university for its provision of programmes. Some universities also choose to have such affiliations. In some cases, academic awards are conferred by the foreign university. In these cases, it is likely that support for teaching may be directed by the foreign university, thus adding another dimension to the teaching context.
- *Institutional Classification:* In Oman, “colleges”, “university colleges” and “universities” are distinguished from each other on the basis of size (in terms of number of students), range and level of programme offerings, and requirements for research. As such, these different intuitions provide different teaching contexts.

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- *Date of Establishment:* My assumption was that HEIs that had been established for longer would have had more experience of dealing with international academics and that this may impact the experiences of more recent arrivals.

#### **4.4.5 Participant academic teachers**

As with my selection of the HEIs, my attention to given profile characteristics in the selection of participants aimed to ensure a range of teaching-in-HE and transition experiences. As explained below, I sought to recruit participants who were different in terms of: nationality/national context(s) where they had been educated and had taught in HE prior to coming to Oman; years of experience of teaching in Oman; academic discipline; first language; and religion. I also sought diversity in terms of gender. The age of participants did not inform the selection process although the interviews confirmed among the participants a range of years of experience as academic teachers.

- *Nationality/national context(s) of education and teaching in HE experience:* This is an important element in the categorisation of someone as “international” (or not) as defined in this study.
- *Time spent in Oman/at the HEI:* I sought to recruit participants who had been teaching in HE in Oman for only a short period as well as those who had had a longer period of experience to reflect on. I anticipated that experiences of teaching and any support provided for this would change over time, as would participants’ perceptions of these experiences.

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- *Academic Discipline:* It is reasonable to assume that academic disciplines have some impact on teaching practices (Trowler et al., 2012); seeking a range of academic disciplines among participants aimed to contribute to the richness of the data set as a whole.
  - *First language:* A significant characteristic of Oman's HE sector is that while the national language is Arabic, HE is predominantly English-medium, and so most Omani HE students, in their home country, undertake their HE in a foreign language. If an academic teacher's first language is not English, then they too will be working in a foreign language and this may significantly affect how they experience their teaching role.
  - *Religion:* Oman is a Muslim country and associated religious practices are highly visible. When international academics are unfamiliar with local religious practices, this can present a range of potential challenges (Bovill et al., 2015). Therefore, foreignness with respect to religion also has the potential to contribute significantly to how an academic experiences his or her teaching role.

The resulting group of nine female and twelve male participants included one or more academics from each of eight countries, namely India, Sudan, Iran, the Philippines, Pakistan, Malaysia, Sri-Lanka and Russia. Seven of the twenty-one were from India (the majority of international academic staff in Oman are from India). The other nationalities were represented by between one and three participants. Periods of teaching experience in Oman among the group ranged

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from eight months to seventeen years although most had spent no more than five years in Oman and in the HEI in which they were teaching. The participants' broad-field academic disciplines included Engineering, Information Technology, English Language and Management.

#### **4.5 Data Collection**

The data were collected through individual, face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each of approximately one hour duration. The interviews were audio-recorded.

As a method of data collection, in-depth interviewing is useful for understanding the lived experience of others and the meanings that they make out of these experiences (Seidman, 2006). If participants are to share personal experiences and feelings openly, however, there is a need for the interviewer to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for interviewees and to establish a good rapport with them (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Legard et al., 2003). To achieve this I needed to consider, in particular, the power relationships between the participants and their HEIs: all international academics in Oman have limited job security and, as such, participants may have been nervous of any negative repercussions of being heard to "say the wrong thing". So, for example, while Tight (2012) has suggested that focus-groups are under-used as a method of data collection, for this particular study, I considered a series of individual interviews to be more appropriate so that privacy could be ensured.

In all cases, the interviews took place at the respective HEIs. I ensured that each interview location was appropriately private to help participants feel free

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from any anxiety of being overheard (by colleagues for example). I also used a small number of flashcards to help establish a rapport with my interviewees and facilitate interaction.

#### **4.5.1 Interview schedule and flashcards**

The “semi-structuring” of the interviews was supported by an interview schedule comprising six sections. Each section reflected a broad phase of the interview. Each phase was aligned to the RQs and the constituent moments of the core TLR framework. The schedule was developed to support the breadth and depth of questioning required, but the detailed content was used as a guide, not a script, to allow for the flexibility and genuine interaction that is required to access participants’ social worlds, meanings and experiences (Bryman, 2004; Legard et al., 2003).

I aimed to avoid too direct an approach to my questioning in order to avoid what might sound like OAAA review questions; I did not want to prompt participants to mentally transition to this frame of reference and provide institutional review-type responses. Rather, I aimed to encourage participants to provide a reflective recount of their teaching experiences through which they surfaced their thoughts and feelings. An excerpt from the interview schedule is provided as Appendix One.

The broad phases of the interviews comprised the following: ***personal profile and arrival in Oman*** – that included opportunity for participants to reveal perceptions of the wider social context in which TLRs are constructed and enacted and, for example, perceptions of *power relations* emanating from this

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wider context; ***first experiences of current teaching-in-HE context*** – that included opportunity for participants to reveal perceptions relating to a range of TLR moments; ***teaching practice*** – that in particular provided opportunity for social processes flowing through the moment of *subjectivities in interaction* to be revealed; ***institutional support for teaching*** – that created opportunity for experiences of prevailing *power relations* to be revealed as well as how previously enacted TLRs may have engendered resistance to/engagement with support initiatives; ***meso-level teaching context*** – that included more specific focus on participants' interactions with colleagues at the meso level at which TLS are constructed and maintained; and a final section to allow for ***overall/final reflections***.

There has been something of a resurgence of using visuals in qualitative interviews (Bates et al., 2017; Comi et al., 2014; Cox & Benson, 2017; Torre & Murphy, 2015). In this research the flashcards were used to support the data collection rather than drive it. Such *projective* use of visuals to help elicit responses from participants has been found to relieve tension by enhancing rapport between the participant and researcher (Bates et al., 2017, Comi et al., 2014). This was the case in this research too. This was effected in particular by the first two of the three flashcards that highlighted Oman as a foreign context, thus surfacing something I shared with my participants – I am also in a foreign land in Oman, albeit one that is very familiar to me. When the flashcards were handed to the participants, this allowed for a modest but arguably significant readjustment of the power dynamic; as observed by Bates et al. (2017), this gave participants some control over the pace and to some extent the direction

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of that part of the interview – privileging participants’ authority, and supporting a “gentle” approach to conducting the interviews (Kvale, 1996). The flashcards did not, *per se*, inform analysis of the data.


I piloted the flashcards to ensure that they would be unlikely to constrain responses or generate bias in any significant way. To do this, I simply showed them to different colleagues and asked “What do you think?” In each case, their responses were sufficiently neutral to reassure me that the visual content of the three cards would support rather than compromise the data collection. I nevertheless scheduled the first set of interviews well in advance of the other interviews to allow time for post-interview reflection on how well both the flashcards and the interview schedule had worked. While this provided time for amendments to be made, no reason to make any changes arose.

The three, two-sided flashcards comprised A4 laminated pictures, screenshots of which are shown and described below. In each case, the visuals were sourced/purchased with due attention to copyright restrictions. The interview schedule identified the points at which each flashcard was introduced.


## Flashcard 1

Visual	Notes
 <p>Source: <a href="http://ontheworldmap.com/oman/oman-location-map.jpg">http://ontheworldmap.com/oman/oman-location-map.jpg</a></p> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.worldatlas.com">www.worldatlas.com</a></p> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/Oman/Map">http://www.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/Oman/Map</a></p>	<p>Shows Oman from a world, regional and local perspective. I anticipated that this flashcard may support participants' reflection on Oman's geographical location and their perceptions of the foreignness of this location to them.</p> <p>Introduced in the first phase of the interview: <i>Personal Profile and Arrival in Oman.</i></p>

## Flashcard 2

Visual	Notes
 <p>Source: Alamy Limited, UK (<a href="https://www.alamy.com/">https://www.alamy.com/</a>)</p>	<p>Shows female and male students that could represent HE students anywhere in Oman. While classes in HEIs are not segregated by gender, HEIs may have some gender-specific provision of learning spaces or other facilities. I anticipated that this flashcard may support participants' general reflection about their teaching.</p> <p>Introduced in the second phase of the interview: <i>First Experiences of Current Teaching-in-HE Context.</i></p>

### Flashcard 3

Visual	Notes
 <p data-bbox="309 920 603 943">Source: Alamy Limited, UK (<a href="https://www.alamy.com/">https://www.alamy.com/</a>)</p>	<p data-bbox="874 315 1380 712">Shows groups of teachers in seminar/professional development sessions. I anticipated that this flashcard may support participants' general reflection about the meso level of their teaching context – so including their interactions and relationships with colleagues in relation to their teaching and also any professional development activities for teaching which they may have undertaken with peers.</p> <p data-bbox="874 750 1380 853">Introduced in the fourth phase of the interview: <i>Institutional Support for Teaching</i>.</p>

Following each interview I made field notes to complement the audio-recording. I captured my immediate views on how the interview had gone and recorded any relevant non-verbal matters. In a number of cases I noted how it had been necessary for me to take considerable time to reassure participants of my personal position in the research and the confidentiality of the data. In the main, participants subsequently engaged generously and candidly with the interview process.

#### 4.6 Data Management and Analysis

To help ensure the confidentiality and security of the research data, I encrypted the electronic data on my personal computer and stored all hard copy data securely at my residence.

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I conducted the analysis of the data over a period of about four months using an overarching framework provided by the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2). The analysis involved: coding the transcripts (i.e. labelling relevant parts) as per my interpretation of interview responses; creating categories/themes from groups of codes; and conceptualisation/theorising themes and links between them. Qualitative data analysis is non-linear (Bazeley, 2013) and the analysis was iterative, involving cyclical coding and repetitive interplay both within and across the different stages of analysis. This iterative work was supported by ongoing documentation of thoughts and ideas – described by Saldaña (2013, p. 43) as “analytic memo writing” – and as the analysis progressed, reference back to the literature. The analysis progressed from an initial focus on the more descriptive elements of the research questions (underlined below) to then probing the data at a more conceptual level to address the “why” elements of these research questions and then, in response to RQ3, considering the practical and theoretical implications the findings.

1. What tensions, challenges and opportunities do international academics experience in their role teaching Omani students, in Oman, on English-medium higher education programmes, how do they respond to these, and why?
2. What support for teaching in higher education do international academics teaching Omani students, in Oman, on English-medium higher education programmes, receive, how do they experience and respond to this, and why?

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First, I fully transcribed each interview, adding notes of any non-verbal responses (particular facial expressions that I recalled, laughter, a lowering of the voice, etc.). The resulting transcripts ran to over 200 pages (approximately 137,840 words). The repeated playing of each audio-recording that was necessary to carry out and check the verbatim transcriptions was labour-intensive. This intensive focus on both what each participant said (and didn't say), and how they said it, however, provided for real immersion in the data. In parallel with the transcription process and a follow-on listening of all the interviews, I documented thoughts and ideas and electronically highlighted parts of the text that appeared notable in relation to the RQs (as well as, for example, points that were expressed with a particular strength of feeling). In doing so, I identified some potential codes and emerging themes. I then imported the transcripts into NVivo™ and set up the preliminary codes and hierarchies.

In the second stage of the analysis, the codes and potential themes were further developed through iterative rounds of coding, theming and conceptualising supported by discussions with my supervisor. At this stage I made use of the query and matrix functions of NVivo™ to help interrogate the data and enable potential codes and themes to be considered systematically rather than instinctively.

The third stage of the analysis involved a refinement of the codes and more holistic consideration of the themes and how they related to each other. The theoretical framework was employed as an explanatory framework. As such, its role in the development of the codes and themes was implicit while its role in

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explaining the results is explicit. An excerpt from the final data coding “codebook” extracted from NVivo™ is provided in Appendix Two.

The initial coding generated over a hundred potential codes as well as some broad ideas about overarching themes that I documented in a conceptual diagram. At this stage, the codes lacked coherent linkages and hierarchies and had yet to be tested to see, for example, if or how broadly each particular “code” was shared and how each might need to be refined. Initial codes of “*Islam*” and “*feeling foreign among foreigners*”, for example, both proved significant but were ultimately subsumed conceptually under other codes. The broad overarching themes reflected some sense of a journey at this stage, in line with how the interviews were conducted. The first potential broad theme was entitled “*here and there*” and comprised around sixty codes but at this stage some codes were not developed beyond broad areas like “*curriculum*” and “*cultural misunderstandings*” while others such as “*personal security*” ultimately proved marginal. By the end of the analysis, the experiences and meanings that these particular codes were intended to capture had been conceptualised under the theme ***Experiencing Shock*** which ultimately included a hierarchy of eight plus twenty sub-themes.

The second main stage of the analysis was supported by running multiple NVivo™ matrix coding queries to test how given codes were distributed across participants and their HEIs. Under the first theme of ***Experiencing Shock*** that was now becoming firmly established, I initially worked to develop sub-codes under higher level codes of “*overall shock*”, “*academic shock*” and “*sociocultural shock*” – and at micro (classroom) meso (departmental/collegial) and macro

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(institutional) level in relation to each of these. This generated an overly complex interim coding scheme but helped conceptually in refining the codes in this area. This interim stage also informed subsequent discussion of the results. The other four main themes and underpinning codes that were starting to become firmly established during this second main stage of the analysis were also developed through repeated matrix coding enquiries, although the overall number of codes was still high.

The third stage involved refinement of the codes and themes. For example, in the earlier stages, I had identified “*Positioning and Transitioning*” as a main theme underpinned by a hierarchy of four, plus four, plus four, plus thirty-eight codes. As it became apparent that a considerable number of international academics do not actually transition to their new teaching context (rather, they leave) this main theme was ultimately renamed ***Onward Journeys***. Other examples of refinement included the following. One of the sub-themes under the ***Onward Journeys*** theme entitled ***Towards Active Engagement*** was supported by four plus thirty-six codes at the beginning of this stage. Drawing these codes together generated a hierarchy of just three plus thirteen codes with greater conceptual clarity. It became apparent, for example, that the codes *push factors* and *pull factors* that I had identified could not be easily differentiated between and that my participants’ experiences appeared closer to *pull factors* only (so the code *push factors* was dropped). Further coding queries revealed that my code of *financial need* was not as broadly applicable as I had thought and so this was dropped too. Codes of *survival anywhere* and *teaching takeaways* were drawn together under a code of *recognition of*

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*opportunities to learn* – one of three final codes under *pull factors*. Sample excerpts from this iterative coding and theme development are shown in Appendix Three.

I coded very little of the transcript of Participant 11 – and have not included quotations from this participant in the thesis. While this participant also experienced many TCs – and this added to the general weight to the findings – most experiences recalled by the participant related to teaching English to students preparing for their HE rather than actual HE students.

With respect to my own world view and biases, I became aware that Flashcard 3 reflected a particular view of formal support for teaching – i.e. an activity involving a number of teachers engaged in a formal activity such as a workshop. Despite this, the data revealed, for example, the importance of support through more informal conversations with peers, something that could also be promoted deliberately/formally by an HEI.

#### **4.7 Robustness of the Study**

The quality of qualitative research can be evaluated according to its “robustness” – that is, how well designed it is to achieve its goals and how securely it was carried out (Trowler, 2016). This robustness is dependent on factors such as “the influence the researcher has had on the collection and interpretation of the data; the genuineness of the findings with regard to the respondents they claim to represent; and the assessment of competing interpretations of the data” (Simco & Warin, 1997, p. 662). These factors reflect accepted evaluation criteria for qualitative research such as *relevance* and

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*reflexivity* (Malterud, 2001) as well as *trustworthiness* – an overarching criterion comprising *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability* (Bryman, 2004, p. 273). In considering these criteria in more detail, the study can be said to have strength in terms of *relevance* as established in the Literature Review (see Chapter 2). Attention to *reflexivity* was built into the study from the outset and supported by maintenance of a reflective log and ongoing reflective discussions with my supervisor. My “insider knowledge” of different teaching-in-HE contexts in Oman contributed to the study’s *credibility* at a broad level; the findings “ring true”. Sufficient details have been included to provide a high degree of transparency and allow readers to evaluate possible *transferability* of given aspects to other contexts. This transparency, coupled with the formal supervision of the research, serve to support the study’s *dependability* and *confirmability*.

#### **4.8 Ethical Issues**

Three aspects of the research in particular gave rise to potential ethical issues: the use of gatekeepers to access research participants required by local cultural norms; the fact that I work for Oman’s national quality assurance agency for HE; and the fact that international academics in Oman have limited job security. These issues generated the potential for associated power dynamics, real or perceived, between myself and HEIs, myself and the academics, and the gatekeepers/HEIs and the academics. In turn, it was possible for such power dynamics to generate participant anxiety, generate bias in the data, and even put participants at risk of facing punitive action should they be identified as having been critical of, for example, their institution, Omani students or

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colleagues, or the country itself. The ethics approvals process for the study was escalated to an appropriate level to allow for in-depth consideration of these issues.

Measures taken to address these issues included: efforts to minimise the involvement of gatekeepers; emphasising the independence of the research from the OAAA and taking practical steps to help ensure this (such as ensuring that participant HEIs were not undergoing any OAAA process at the time of the data collection); and prioritising protection of participants' anonymity.

As a first measure to protect participants' anonymity, I have referred to each participant by a randomly assigned number only and used gender-neutral language in reporting and discussing the research results. I considered using pseudonyms but this presented a double dilemma: I did not want to insult any participants by assigning an inappropriate pseudonym, for example assigning a non-Muslim/non-Christian name to a Muslim/Christian but assigning an appropriate name could have revealed information regarding both religion and gender, either of which could support deductive disclosure of participant identity.

Second, I avoided references to each HEIs' institutional classification and employed "an ongoing working compromise" (Saunders et al., 2015) to manage reference to characteristics of participants that were relevant to the research (such as their nationality) but which might support deductive disclosure of identity. That compromise means that some quotations are not directly

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attributed – including those that I deemed to touch on particularly sensitive areas.

The participants were all non-native speakers of English and, as in other studies (Amirul, 2012), many quotations reported in the thesis contain non-standard use of English. While a given use of English could also support identification of participants, I considered that any editing of the quotations would have compromised the data.

As a final measure to safeguard the well-being of participants in the study, I have formally requested a five-year embargo on publication of this thesis. This intention was indicated in the Participant Information Sheet.

#### **4.9 Knowledge Claims**

The study has generated answers to the research questions which reflect the interpretivist epistemological orientation of the study and its constructivist ontological underpinning. The answers to RQ 1 and RQ 2, which have an empirical as well as theoretical focus, provide rich detail about how the study's purposefully selected international academics experienced their teaching-in-HE in Oman, and any support for their teaching. The broadly accepted position about whether the empirical findings of such studies can be generalised to wider populations (in this case, generalised to other international academics teaching in HE in Oman or elsewhere) is that in general they cannot and that such research is not designed for empirical generalisation (Bryman, 2004). This overall position holds true for this study. The data analysis was underpinned by

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theoretical reasoning, and through this the research findings substantially externally generalise to theory rather than to other contexts.

The research nevertheless offers potential for what Bryman (2004, p. 285) terms “a modicum of [empirical] generalization”. From the detail provided, readers may draw potential, tentative comparisons about the kinds of ways in which other international academics might experience their transition into a new teaching-in-HE context. Sufficient detail is provided to allow readers to relate to some extent to given “cases” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556). RQ 3.2 asks about the theoretical and practical implications of the research and discussion of these implications both includes and provides for a modicum of empirical generalisation.

The main aim of the research was for the empirical findings to enable better understanding of the social constructs underpinning the participants’ experiences of their teaching role and thus allow generalization to theory, or “theoretical inference” (Hammersley, 2012). The research aimed for this theorisation to contribute to a basis on which HEIs can conceive support initiatives for new international teachers.

In this regard the research has resulted in building on TLR theory to elaborate both the way in which TLRs are embedded in the wider culture of the contexts in which they operate and how newcomers to existing TLRs impact and are impacted by these teaching cultures. In turn, the research has theorised TCs experienced by teachers as being a function of teaching cultural distances with attendant scope for TCs to be grounded in basic assumptions and values about

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teaching in HE that are deeply-rooted in teaching cultures developed in “home”/other national teaching-in-HE contexts. Through examination of individuals’ emotional responses to the TCs they encountered, the research also identifies a theoretical, potential “transition trap” whereby teachers may become caught in a TC-induced cycle of isolation and potentially undesirable coping teaching practices.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive account of the research design and how the research was carried out. It has explained how the rigour of the research was ensured and clarified the nature of the knowledge claims. It has also highlighted distinguishing aspects of the study which include the particular attention paid to ensure the well-being of the potentially vulnerable participants and the use of flashcards to support the data collection. The results of the data analysis detailed in this chapter are presented and discussed in the next three chapters.

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## Chapter 5: Shock and Emotion of International Teachers

### 5.1 Introduction

The research interviews were structured to encourage the participants to engage in a broadly chronological reflection of their experiences as international academics teaching in Oman. Analysis of the data led to the identification of five themes that broadly reflect this journey over time: experiencing shock; emotional responses; coping teaching practices; onward journeys; and support for teaching.

As a first step towards better understanding institutional support requirements for international academic teachers, the research examined TCs experienced by the participants in their teaching role in Oman. TCs were experienced by all the participants, particularly during the early part of their teaching experience in Oman. These are described and analysed below under the theme **experiencing shock**. Further interrogation of the data revealed a corresponding supporting theme of negative, and sometimes isolating, **emotional responses**. This chapter focuses on these two themes. The remaining three themes are discussed in subsequent chapters.

### 5.2 Experiencing Shock

I have conceptualised TCs experienced by the teachers as “shock”. Adoption of this term aligns with its use across a range of studies to describe the responses of international academic teachers (and students) to unfamiliar social and academic environments (Hutchinson, 2016b; Ryan & Carroll, 2005).

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All participants experienced some form of shock in relation to perceptions of most, if not all, of the following interrelated areas:

- 1) loss of authority and status
- 2) lack of student preparedness for higher education
- 3) unfamiliar student behaviours and expectations
- 4) unfamiliar academic system
- 5) peer diversity and interaction
- 6) technological infrastructure and demands.

Shock in these areas is discussed below. This is followed by a short discussion of various “disorientating experiences” that were also revealed.

The extent of shock experienced was very considerable in some cases, particularly in the early stages of individuals’ transitions. As Participant 8 observed:

*Sincerely speaking, the starting point was really tough, really, really tough.*

TLR theory helps to illustrate how the teachers’ experiences of shock can be conceived in terms of how their routinised ways of thinking, feeling and behaving with respect to teaching were suddenly not a good fit in their new teaching context in Oman. In light of different TLR moments, and the study’s relational classification of these, these experiences reveal a range of deeply rooted basic assumptions and values developed in previous teaching-in-HE contexts that conflicted with prevailing TLRs and student behaviours in the new

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context. Analysis of these experiences shows how wider societal culture and prevailing institutional logics influence TLRs and how individuals' experiences of the new context reflect teaching cultural distances. In turn, this examination of teaching cultural distances highlights the need for institutional support initiatives to recognise that TCs may be deeply rooted in values and basic assumptions that vary considerably from those underpinning prevailing teaching cultures or desired teaching practices.

### **5.2.1 Loss of authority and status**

None of the participants explicitly stated that they had experienced a loss of authority or status in their new teaching context in Oman but I interpreted a range of TCs experienced by different individuals as reflecting this. Included were TCs that arose in relation to: student-teacher and institution-teacher power relations; level of autonomy in assessment; and institutional expectations of an academic teacher's role. An overarching sense of job insecurity appeared to contribute to shock in this area.

#### ***Student-teacher and institution-teacher power relations***

Teacher-student power relations are strongly impacted by local and wider culture (Wong, 2016) and in many Asian and African countries (including those from which most of the research participants were drawn), as well as the Middle East, students typically show high levels of deference to teachers (Brooks, 2016). However, an unexpected student-teacher power dynamic in which students were perceived as having more power than expected, or was deemed

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appropriate, was keenly felt across the participants. As Participant 16 observed in relation to their shock that students would question assessment marks:

*I will say that teachers are powerful in my country.*

Shock arose from some teachers encountering, for the first time, quality assurance systems that formally privilege student views. The following (deliberately unattributed) experience of students' evaluation of teachers provides an example:

*At the beginning, I felt that this is too much of freedom given or power given to give to students. They are empowering students too much. And sometimes I will say, OK how can my students can judge me, with all my experience and all my qualifications? [...] I can never imagine that a student will judge me – say OK he is good or he is not good! [...] And then also maybe in panels they will discuss that. They may say, OK the students feel your teaching is not appropriate and you may need to do this and do this and then you feel that, you feel that students are not that qualified to judge you and that makes you a little bit upset.*

For the participant quoted above, coming face-to-face with this institutional practice had evidently raised *tacit assumptions* and associated *conventions of appropriateness* about pedagogy and the relationship between teachers and students with which this new practice conflicted. The teacher's basic assumptions and values about teacher-student power relations appear to have

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been shaped through practice rooted in a form of professional academic logic that privileges academics' authority and autonomy (Brooks, 2016).

Within Oman's HE sector, however, the logic of "new public management" (Canhilal et al, 2016), and associated tools that aim to enhance transparency, accountability and performance in HE is being promoted by the state and this serves to challenge some aspects of authority and autonomy. Through the influence of this logic on local TLRs, student evaluation of courses and teachers is tending to become normalised.

The fact that this practice of student evaluation of teachers experienced by the participant quoted above also involved colleagues (who provided feedback based on students' views) appeared to contribute to this participant's TCs through loss of face. Although the participant's reflection was prefaced with "At the beginning", there was an indication that the practice of student evaluation of teachers had remained a personal challenge for this teacher. Even after a considerable number of years in Oman, the teacher still evidently subscribed to a dominant logic from a former teaching context that did not accommodate evaluation of teachers by students. This practice was therefore not just an unfamiliar practice within a new academic system that this teacher needed to understand the mechanics of. Rather, any embracing of this new practice would essentially demand a shift in the teacher's basic assumptions and values and, perhaps, underlying teaching philosophy.

This overall experience reflects the extent to which TLRs established in a given context are deeply rooted and can underpin resistance to change. It also

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provided an example of a teacher experiencing a relatively small general cultural distance between Oman and both their home country in which they had been educated and a nearby country in which they had gained their HE teaching experience, but a large teaching cultural distance.

Loss of authority relative to students was experienced within a wider context of relative loss of power in relation to institutions. As Participant 19 explained:

*A student comes [...] and says, if you don't do this thing, you will be on the next flight back home. Now you see that kind of thing, it doesn't work in our countries. [...] Back home there is a lot of security for you. I mean nobody is going to sack you because your results were not good.*

The overall sense of job insecurity indicated in the quotation above was widely experienced across the participants, together with a sense of there being a prevailing culture of leniency towards students in which “the student is always right”. In Oman’s context, I suggest that the latter does not arise principally from a state-promoted belief that HE is a private good and an associated “student as customer” (and therefore “always right”) metaphor prevailing as it now does in some contexts (Laing & Laing, 2016). While Oman has an emerging neoliberal logic that privileges student satisfaction, it is more likely that the overall sense of loss of authority relative to students and institutions experienced by participants resulted principally from the differing rights of expatriates relative to nationals that state logics confer. While Omani academic teachers have a very high level of job security in Oman, there is no equivalent of tenured

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appointments for international academic teachers. By contrast, the participant quoted above had come from a teaching culture characterised by tenured faculty positions as well as high levels of teacher authority over students.

The first part of the quotation above that implies that students might directly threaten international teachers, however, was a minority view. This may be because it is experienced just by a minority of international teachers or that other participants were reluctant to admit this. More widespread general perceptions of students were exemplified in Participant 2's observation that "they are very humble, they are very down to earth, very polite, when it comes one-to-one". This latter finding contrasts with TCs in the form of micro-aggression around colour, language proficiency, accent and religion experienced by some international academics and an associated general experience of being considered "second best" (relative to local academic staff) (Odhiambo, 2016). There are aspects of the local Omani context that probably underpin this. First, Oman is very tolerant of other religions (Aycan et al., 2007) as explicitly mentioned by some participants' and reflected in participants' positive views about living in Oman. Second, students have their own struggles with working in English as a foreign language (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Third, there is no local majority of HE teachers against whom international teachers can be compared. These observations highlight the very nuanced and context-specific nature of TCs that an international HE teacher might face.

A fear of speaking out was nevertheless evident across participants. This invites comparison with Chapman's (2014) account of international teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reportedly having their contracts terminated for

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expressing opinions different from those of institutional leaders, or for asking too many questions. The following (deliberately unattributed) quotations from two different participants exemplify this:

*Sometimes, in certain things, especially when it's anything about management, of course we have to [pause] be a little careful when we give any statement. [...] we have like a little fear [pause] – we have certain restrictions, things we are not supposed to talk.*

*When you formalise it, people will not open up [...] because, you know, again to be honest, for fear of losing your job [...] formally most of the people will be keeping silent.*

This apparent loss of authority to express views freely as academic teachers was particularly frustrating for some. Stark conflict with *conventions of appropriateness* rooted in a former teaching context is evident in the following (deliberately unattributed) quotation:

*In [home country] we are very open, whereby we are given chance to express what we have, our ideas, what we want, what we think we should do, and things like that. Here it's more like you open your mouth like then you will be targeted next. So people do not do that. People [say] OK, OK, OK – so the system doesn't change!*

These experiences indicate a likely contrast in wider societal norms about

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“speaking out” between former teaching contexts and Oman underpinned by tacit assumptions about people’s rights. As an absolute monarchy, state logics in Oman do not encourage “speaking out” and reinforce the limited relative rights of expatriates. Further, with its recently established system of HE, Oman does not have historically-embedded logics of academic freedom and associated security of employment for academics in universities that countries such as India (Sundar, 2018), the US (Curnalia & Mermer, 2018), and the UK (Traianou, 2015) have and are striving to protect. There is some concern that in these contexts, the faculty voice that academic freedom and security of employment serve to promote is under potential threat from managerial modes of university organisation (Traianou, 2015). In Oman, however, managerialism is an increasingly dominant logic that is being promoted through its national EQA regimes and the linking of state funding for HEIs to these regimes.

The frustration with not being able to speak out about teaching matters evident in the quotation above suggests that this teacher still subscribed to logics that value the freedom of academics to do so, and without the fear of reprisal.

### ***Level of autonomy in assessment***

Assessment was a key area in which experiences of a loss of authority relative to former teaching contexts were evident. Participant 14 explained TCs around preparation of assessments:

*If I may compare it with [home country], I have full control – being the lecturer, I have full control – so I have full control in that I can*

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*put whatever I want, I can design the assessments of any type according to what I want or what I feel is best.*

Participant 4 experienced the local quality assurance systems for assessment in their new teaching context in Oman as “someone breathing, breathing down your neck” and went on to explain:

*In [names of two countries] in one way you have freedom – you have freedom in marking. When you mark the paper, nobody is going to check it again, so whatever you decide on, that’s it.*

In more “traditional” educational systems, teachers are generally expected to behave in a formal, authoritarian manner (Rubenstein, 2006). Where such behaviour is the norm, prevailing community and professional logics are likely to promote basic assumptions and values held by teachers that underpin assessment practices in which teachers have significant authority and autonomy. But in the arguably more “modern” US too, academic teachers typically have considerable autonomy in assessment. The US context is relevant because some HEIs across the wider region, and in Oman too, work in affiliation with US universities. Prevailing professional logic of academic freedom in the US typically supports practice whereby, as explained by Clements (2005, p. 3) a professor “may create an exam paper on Monday, give it to the students on Tuesday, and grade it on Wednesday”, essentially with complete autonomy. As indicated in the quotations above, academics from cultures where such practice is the norm are likely to hold corresponding *tacit assumptions* about academic teachers having a high level of “control” in

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assessment that have developed alongside associated *conventions of appropriateness* and *recurrent practices* in former teaching workgroups.

By contrast, assessment in HE across Oman is strongly influenced by assessment practices from the UK. In contrast to the system described above, these practices are typically characterised by values that emphasise transparency and accountability and practices that involve internal and external peer scrutiny that work to counter teacher autonomy (Bloxham et al, 2016). These systems are promoted through Oman's national EQA regimes and as a result, associated practices of second-marking and pre- and post-assessment moderation are becoming normalised locally.

The TCs experienced by research participants in this area reveal how assessment approaches that are unfamiliar or unexpected to a new academic teacher do not necessarily just present a superficial challenge about learning the steps involved in a new process that an HEI wishing to provide support can simply set out. Rather, as indicated in the examples above, it may be that the basic assumptions and values inherent in the local approach clash with those held by a new teacher. In such cases, TCs are rooted at a deeper level than visible steps in assessment practices.

### ***Expectations of an academic's role***

A lack of support for research was also experienced as a loss of authority and associated status as an academic teacher. For one participant, TCs in this area were exacerbated by what was perceived to be an inappropriate requirement

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for academics to undertake given administrative tasks; this teacher likened their teaching role to the role of a maid:

*There [home country], faculty is elite, here the lecturer is (laughs) just like a maid, he has to do everything [...] He is responsible for this, this, advising, registration and all those things and issues, the whole year, and lecturers get pissed off with these things – nonsense. [Participant 9]*

The reference to maids is culturally meaningful. Foreign domestic workers, including maids, play a central part in the lives of local families across the Gulf States (Malet et al., 2019). Nationals of a low socio-economic status play a similar role in the homes and lives of middle-class families in African and Asian countries from which many of Oman's international teachers are drawn (Gurtoo, 2016). The perceived lower status of work undertaken by these workers, and the workers themselves, is likely to be embedded in community and family logics. It appears from the experience of Participant 9 that a similarly hierarchical division of labour may extend into HEIs in some contexts, perhaps reproduced partly through prevailing logics of the academic profession.

HE in Oman, however, is heavily influenced by academic teaching norms from countries such as the UK where it is not unusual for, for example, academic advising to form part of an academic teacher's role. The quotation above suggests that this clash of different *conventions of appropriateness* about the role of an academic teacher inherent in the former and new teaching culture experienced by the teacher has the potential to continue to engender TCs.

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### 5.2.2 Lack of student preparedness for higher education

A perceived lack of students' preparedness for HE was a dominant source of TCs. More specifically this related to perceptions that students often exhibit inadequate levels of English language proficiency, a lack of relevant pre-requisite subject knowledge and skills and a lack of learner independence.

Shock in this area appeared underpinned in some cases by assumptions and values held by teachers being rooted in HE systems in which competition drives entry standards up and students are typically well qualified academically and highly motivated independent learners. For example, while not all teachers from India who come to Oman will have had direct experience of India's most selective institutions, India has some of the most selective HEIs in the world (Altbach, 2014). In addition, although the Indian teachers who participated in the study were used to students in India undertaking their HE in English as a second language, most of the participants had had no prior experience of working with students who might have struggled with the language of instruction. As such, these teachers apparently held *tacit assumptions* and *conventions of appropriateness* that underpinned expectations about HE student academic profile characteristics – expectations that were not met in their new teaching context in Oman.

Globally, there are increasing numbers of students facing challenges in their English-medium HE because of their limited proficiency in English language (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). In contrast to Oman's national language of Arabic, state policy determines that HE is typically English-medium and most Omani

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HE students find this a significant challenge. Associated TCs ranged from issues to do with teachers' writing on the whiteboard ("the first thing I came to know is that I have to write "big" not running script" – Participant 6) to participants experiencing students' lack of English language proficiency as a major obstacle in the teaching and learning process. As Participant 17 recalled:

*I mean, at the beginning, I started my lecture in English and considering, assuming that they are listening to me and understanding the meaning, they are converting it in their minds and translating it in Arabic and they are understanding – but this was a wrong assumption.*

TCs arising from students' perceived lack of prerequisite subject knowledge and skills are exemplified in the following recollection:

*Obviously, the standard of education is high over there – when I came here and, um, initially, it was difficult for me to come from that level to the lower level, to come to understand their mind, because when I was teaching back to my country, I do not need to explain, you know, the minor things, they already know about all those things. [Participant 9]*

This experience suggests that Participant 9's *tacit assumptions* about students' pre-requisite knowledge and *conventions of appropriateness* about what need and need not be covered in class by the teacher, both established in a prior home country university teaching context, underpinned the TCs they experienced in this area.

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In contrast to countries from which the research participants were drawn, prior to 1970 Oman had no national system of education, even at primary level (Barwani & Bailey, 2017) and many Omani HE students today are still the first in their families to study at tertiary level. Academic standards of secondary school graduates lag by international standards (UNESCO, 2018) and pedagogical, epistemological and philosophical paradigms inherent in the national school education system are deemed to promote teacher-dependence (World Bank, 2013). This historical context suggests why Omani students may be differently prepared for HE relative to students the international teachers were used to.

Participant 9's expectations, however, appeared rooted in societal culture and associated logics permeated by a long history of HE and a high level of competition and learner independence among students. Similar expectations gave rise to TC's about the perceived lack of learner independence of many students. The following quotation appears to reflect an associated challenge to a central tenet of Participant 8's routinised ways of thinking and feeling about teaching and learning in HE:

*I think in HE it is supposed to be independent learning but here it doesn't seem to be like that.*

In other words, this quotation appears to reflect a deep-rooted *tacit assumption* regarding pedagogy, and associated values in the form of *convention of appropriateness*, being surfaced in this new teaching context.

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### 5.2.3 Unfamiliar student behaviours and expectations

TCs relating to unfamiliar and/or unexpected student behaviours and expectations were most evidently related to: a perceived general lack of student motivation; religious observances and gender barriers; students memorising texts; and student attempts to cheat in exams.

#### ***Lack of student motivation***

Perceptions that students lack motivation were an ongoing source of TCs for some participants. Others had come to appreciate that the harsh socioeconomic conditions and competition for university places that contribute to both the calibre and motivation of students in many of the participants' home countries and prior teaching contexts were not a feature of Oman's wider HE context. For example, Participant 18 explained:

*In [name of country], people are very studious. Their interest rate is around 98% in our country, and parents, even if they don't eat they will try to educate their children – so we come from a different culture. [...] Like in our country, to progress in life, you need education, so everyone is focussed towards that, but if you take any other countries, it may be not at that level; if you want to survive, to grow, you don't need – you don't need to be an excellent student – the culture and the environment doesn't demand from you.*

People's beliefs and attitudes regarding the place of competition in society are shaped by a web of interconnected factors including cultural history, emerging

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cultural values, and individual social position (Hayward & Kemmelmeier, 2007). It can be envisaged that former TLRs experienced by Participant 18 were rooted in aspects of wider societal culture promulgated through state, market and other logics that normalised the culture of competition described. In turn, such logics would be likely to underpin the generation of *tacit assumptions* about HE being more of a private rather than a public good (Williams, 2016) and associated *conventions of appropriateness* in the form of teacher expectations about (heightened) student motivation and aspirations.

Such a culture contrasts sharply with the Gulf States' alleged implicit social contract with their citizens whereby pursuit of a socially and economically satisfying life is provided by the state in exchange for the acceptance of state control of politics (Peterson, 2012). Free education has traditionally been part of this social contract (Rugh, 2002) and, as many of the participants noted, most Omani students receive a government scholarship for studying and in some cases a monthly stipend too. There was a sense among some participants that, where applicable, receipt of this stipend rather than acquisition of knowledge and skills was sometimes a primary factor motivating student attendance. Even where participants experienced a small general cultural distance between Oman and their "home" countries, this contrast was experienced as a considerable *teaching* cultural distance.

### ***Religious observances and gender barriers***

For non-Muslims teaching in HE in a Muslim country (such as Oman), there is clear potential for TCs to arise that relate to students' religious observances (Bovill et al., 2015). The following quotation exemplifies this.

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*First of all, we know we are expats and so we should be very careful and one time, one girl, she fainted in my class, that was during Ramadan time, and I was panicked like what to do, and immediately I rushed to my room and I took a water bottle and was about to give her water, then the students said [title of teacher] don't give her water because she is fasting so I was like, Oh my God, she's fainted and I wanted to give her a little drink [...] so I felt no, yeah, OK you are fasting but this is an emergency!*

[Participant 21]

This quotation also reveals the sense of general job insecurity experienced by the participant (“we are expats and so we should be very careful”) in line with similar experiences of other international teachers discussed above. Other TCs concerning religion related to the censoring of teaching materials. For one teacher this meant taking steps to ensure that video materials for teaching marketing subjects that were culturally appropriate “at home” were free from content which may cause offence in Oman’s context, such as pictures of alcohol.

These examples can be interpreted as revealing the weight of what Aysan (2017, p. 51) referred to as “Islam logic” on the teaching and learning context. The experiences described above hint at how this logic might shape TLRs generated by local workgroups. Islam is central to Omani identity (Aycan et al., 2007) and it can be envisaged that, in particular, this logic permeates family and community logics of the wider culture in which TLRs are embedded.

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Associated TCs arose from some teachers experiencing ongoing uncertainty about how to handle periodic student objections to male and female students working together – students objecting to giving presentations to mixed gender peer group audiences, for example. Participant 5 observed:

*You can always hear students saying it's – what's the word, they were saying – it's – it's forbidden, they are saying it's forbidden to mix up the boys [with girls].*

Academic teachers' basic assumptions and values about gender interaction inherent in TLRs are likely to be deeply embedded in wider institutional logics and societal culture. Whatever assumptions and values they might hold, however, international teachers coming to Oman are likely to face challenges. This is because in Oman there appear to be conflicting state and religious institutional logics at play in this area: while Omani state logics promote the mixed-gender HE experienced by the participants, it was evident that Participant 5 was referring to students' use of the Arabic word "*haram*" that means "forbidden" in Islamic law. This implies that some students may subscribe principally to religious logic that is consistent with Oman's gender-segregated schooling system but inconsistent with its mixed-gender HE.

### ***Memorisation***

Some participants experienced TCs in relation to students' tendency to see the memorisation of prescribed text as a key "learning" strategy. Participant 17's frustration in this area was very apparent:

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*I have always been telling them that look, engineering study doesn't mean that you take this book, go home, memorise and come back and finish – No!*

Whilst perhaps unknown to some participants, a tendency for local students to aim to memorise text is unsurprising: memorisation is a widely used technique in schools in the region (Malcolm, 2013). A 2013 World Bank report on education in Oman confirmed that curricula and examinations in Omani schools allowed success through memorisation at that time (World Bank, 2013). As a Muslim country, where religious education pre-dates other forms of education, it is likely that this culture of learning is rooted in the logics of “mosque pedagogy” (Schweisfurth & Elliott, 2019). This pedagogy emphasises memorisation along with the inculcation of Muslim religious values and is itself rooted in the belief in wider societal culture that, by association with the divine text of the holy Qur'an, valued knowledge is fixed and memorised (Eickelman, 1992).

Some participants were clearly enculturated in more contemporary and contrasting pedagogical and epistemological paradigms in which learning is viewed as the construction of knowledge and behaviours such as critical thinking and problem solving are promoted (Charikova & Zhdanov, 2017). TCs in these cases were therefore rooted in *implicit theories of learning* held by some participants that generally aligned with desired institutional approaches to teaching but conflicted with basic assumptions and values underpinning practices that students may have been enculturated into.

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### ***Cheating in exams***

TCs were experienced in relation to students' perceived pre-occupation with marks/grades over the pursuit of knowledge and their associated conduct in exams. This was evidently a sensitive area for participants to talk about. By way of contrast with their current context, however, mention was made of how competitiveness among Indian students typically ensures that these students do not seek to help each other during examinations and how in one non-Indian participant's home country cheating in examinations was taboo – “like committing murder”.

How academic integrity is understood is deeply rooted in cultural assumptions, values and behaviours (McCabe et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2014). In Oman's regional context, support (by either staff or other students) for cheating is often framed as “helping” and management of this is complicated by contested interpretations of religious logics and complex and conflicting wider societal logics and meanings. In contrast to the moral judgement evident in the second participant response quoted above, it appears that academic cheating in Oman, as in some other Arab states, is not necessarily perceived within society in terms of immorality. Rather than being understood in terms of religious logics, Buckner and Hodges (2016) suggested that academic “cheating” may sometimes be rooted in students' opposition to, and aim to survive within, wider state systems that are less meritocratic than they are purported to be.

Against this possible backdrop, and in light of stringent demands for academic integrity being implemented through state-sponsored EQA protocols

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underpinned by “Western” values and assumptions, this area presents a complex aspect of Oman’s internationalised HE sector for international academics to navigate.

#### **5.2.4 Unfamiliar academic system**

TCs were experienced across various academic programme arrangements, including in relation to associated terminology, teaching resources, and academic advising. These TCs variously bring to the fore how teaching practice is mediated by structural factors, situated in a given language and discourse and embedded in teachers’ relationships with material aspects of a given context (Boud & Brew, 2017).

##### ***Foreign Awards and Terminology***

In their new teaching role in Oman, some participants, for the first time, were faced with teaching on programmes leading to UK awards. It follows that prevailing TLRs will be a function of what might be considered a nested culture – that is, a UK programme imbued with the local and wider culture of its origins nested in the local and wider culture of an Omani HEI. For one participant, the associated academic system represented an overall challenge of what the participant perceived to be greater expectations of academic teachers. The participant had found their repertoire of *recurrent practices* enacted in their previous teaching context inadequate in this new context:

*In the British system, the expectations from staff is more. In [home country] everything is prescribed – you have textbooks and you start from page 1-10 and next class from 11 to 20 and everything*

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*is clear and guided and structured. OK. But here it's not structured. You have only some structures – you have the guidelines, you have the module outcomes and then you have more freedom but this freedom has more responsibility as well [...] It was challenging for me because this was not the way I was, you know, used to teach in [home country], when everything was given to me.*

[deliberately unattributed]

Another participant was similarly challenged by systems and terminology associated with the UK system. The participant explained how it had taken at least a year to get to grips with these:

*... because there were many things, like you have pre-Boards, you have Exam Boards [...] you have Module Meetings, I mean you have, what is that, Board of Studies, all these it was new to me.*

[deliberately unattributed]

This experience hints at how context-specific vocabulary and jargon potentially act as “gatekeepers” to effective engagement of new teachers with others who can “talk the talk” and engage fully in prevailing *discursive repertoires*. A lack of familiarity with this language could disempower and isolate newcomers and also threaten their identity and sense of worth. Such feelings might be exacerbated in cases where the arrangements represented by given terms are also unfamiliar to the teacher. The combined impact of the UK and Omani cultural contexts presented teaching cultural distances for the international teachers in this HEI to navigate that were both considerable and complex.

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## **Teaching Resources**

For participants from other HEIs teaching on programmes leading to local awards, TCs included those arising in relation to perceptions of curricula being limited and formal systems whereby students were provided with handouts/notes rather than being referred to textbooks. As Participant 8 explained:

*They don't even look at textbooks – so they focus on the notes that we have – which is so, so little – and they are not used to textbooks and things like that – so it's very difficult to teach them.*

From a different institution, Participant 1 experienced a similar use of handouts as undermining efforts to get students to engage with other learning resources:

*The students are cultured into that, if I can say, they are cultured that I will be finding around 45 pages, my final exam, each and everything, is going to be from these 45 pages. They will not be having any chance, or interest rather, to go and search Internet sometimes, go to the library.*

In both cases it appeared that local TLRs had been established that centred on the use of handouts that in turn helped to address students' struggles with English language. For the international academic teachers concerned, this approach clearly conflicted with basic assumptions relating to pedagogy and even epistemology thus challenging *implicit theories of teaching and learning*, associated *tacit assumptions* about what teaching and learning involves, *conventions of appropriateness* about, for example, teaching resources (e.g.

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textbooks and library resources) and associated expectations of student learning behaviour.

Whether surfaced or not, also integral to these assumptions and values will be tacit assumptions about what purpose HE actually serves and what is to be valued and by whom. The apparent disappointment that the quotation above resulted from suggested that this teacher's philosophy of education centred on the intrinsic good of learning (Walker, 2006) and that this conflicted with their perception that students value certification over learning. The value of certification in Oman is endorsed by HE qualifications forming the basis of civil service pay scales.

### ***Academic Advising***

Different "academic advising" systems operate across Oman. Some are more characteristic of the pastoral model of personal tutoring traditionally practised in the UK and which, according to Grey and Osborne (2018), is rooted in UK 16<sup>th</sup> century practices in which Oxford and Cambridge university academics also took on a parental role in relation to their students. Others are more characteristic of US-style systems which have traditionally had less of a pastoral care function. In both the US and the UK, while continuing to evolve (ibid; Omiros et al, 2017), these systems are likely to be sustained through professional logics. A number of participants experienced teaching cultural distances between academic advising systems they were familiar with in their former teaching context(s) and those operating at their new HEI in Oman. Participant 20, for example, described the experience of encountering for the

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first time a US-style academic advising system focused on students' individual study plans as:

*This is the really challenging thing in my life; even, even now I have a lot of trouble in advising.*

While TCs in this case were ongoing, they appeared to arise more from Participant 20's lack of familiarity with the system than with this system conflicting with any basic assumptions or values held by this teacher. Another participant engaging with the same new academic advising system, however, was experiencing TCs through insisting on providing pastoral support to students, in line with previously enacted practices within a UK-TNE system, despite engagement with colleagues and criticism by them that this was not appropriate. This behaviour shows the embeddedness and tenacity of former TLRs (rendered through the beliefs inherent in these) and reflects the individuality – or *subjectivity in interaction* – of this participant in engaging with the new context.

### **5.2.5 Peer diversity and interaction**

The fact that Oman's HEIs are predominantly staffed by international teachers, the majority of whom are from India, is not something that all participants were aware of prior to their arrival at their new HEI in Oman. Example quotations from participants from different HEI (deliberately unattributed) reflect this:

*I came to the [HEI classification] I got so shocked because, that was my expectation probably, because my expectation was*

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*coming to Middle East I expect to see Omanis, I expect to see Arabs working with me.*

*This was something new to me. When I was in [foreign country] I have never seen someone in the highest rank which is from a foreign country. In [home country] I have never seen a VC or a Dean from a foreign country and then HoDs and so many colleagues. You know, that is really amazing.*

A range of TCs were experienced in relation to the international-teacher dominated institutional academic staff profiles experienced by the participants. Experiences of TCs were particularly evident among teachers from minority national groups or who were single representatives of a given nationality. The following quotation reflects TCs in this area at a broad level:

*And then I realised that there are so many colleagues from India, Philippines, Pakistan, some African countries, European countries, American countries. [...] So now it is not only one culture – it is so many cultures – and then you need to be cautious to understand how you deal with the people [...] And then, even the way that people deal with students and staff also, because everybody reflects his culture, and maybe it takes time to understand the differences so that you become, you know, appropriate. [...] In one way it is enriching to work with people of different nationalities, but we are shattered at the same time – because everybody has his own background. [Participant 4]*

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In particular, TCs involved exclusion of teachers from engagement with others about teaching matters. This variously resulted from: groups of teachers switching into their own language; uncertainty about acceptable norms of interaction in informal settings; and conflicting norms of interaction in meetings. With respect to the latter, one participant explained how their own, minority, cultural norm of interacting in meetings was “drowned out” and ineffective in this new context:

*Like back in [home country] I, we, could interact very easily because we are the same culture, the same language and, um, even though we have staff from [foreign country], from say from [a foreign region] as well, it's easy. But here [...] I feel very much foreign here. [...] In my place, we don't have to be loud, you give your ideas – everybody will give their ideas and we will start talking about it – no one will be like, put aside, but here, that's what I feel [...] they don't bother with you because you are different. [deliberately unattributed]*

Cultural norms and associated participant behaviour in meetings are heavily influenced by institutional logics and wider societal culture, something that is highlighted in contexts such as the Arabian Gulf where there are large multicultural expatriate populations (Kemp & Williams, 2013). In light of Kemp and William's (2013) insights into meeting behaviour in a business environment in this regional context, the research suggests the possibility that in the same way that HEIs may tacitly assume that new international teachers will automatically know what is expected of them in terms of teaching (as discussed

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in Chapter 2), HEIs may also simply assume that teachers have a shared understanding of how to attend (or run) a meeting, with attendant scope for TCs such as those indicated above.

### **5.2.6 Technological infrastructure and demands**

The Omani government promotes the use of technology across society and there is ready uptake of this by its youthful population. In particular, the state views technology as essential to improving the quality of education (Oxford Business Group, 2017, 2019). As a result, Oman's HEIs typically have a well-developed technological infrastructure that underpins local TLRs (OAAA, 2009-2018). For a number of the participants, the technological infrastructure and systems that they were experiencing in Oman were considerably more advanced than those in their previous teaching contexts and this was a welcome surprise. For some participants, however, demands for use of unfamiliar technology were a source of significant TCs. Participant 13 revealed that:

*Fear comes to me – we cannot commit any mistake at the time of entering any information inside the system.*

This participant was used to manual systems for, for example, recording students' grades, and had no formerly enacted practices to draw on in this new context. In another case, the participant's TCs had a deeper foundation, challenging *conventions of appropriateness* about pedagogy; this participant continued to hold reservations about the HEI's expectations for teachers to make extensive use of technology for teaching.

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The number of participants who explicitly recounted TCs in this area was relatively small. These experiences, however, were significant for those concerned and reflect findings in other studies (Ndemanu, 2016).

### **5.2.7 General disorientating experiences**

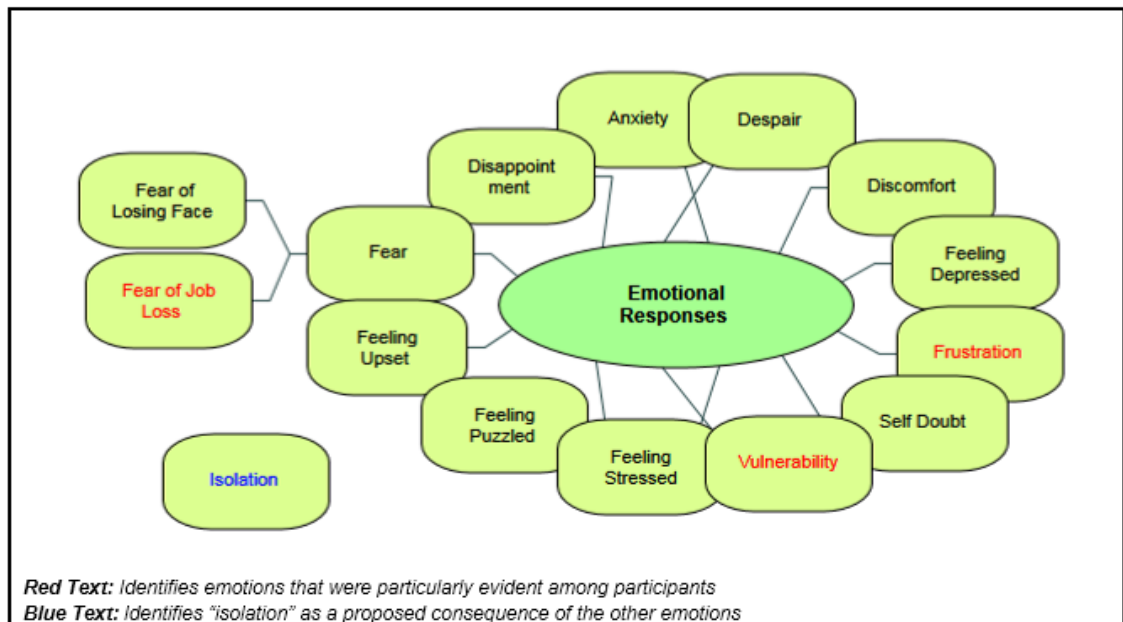
I interpreted some of the international academics' experiences as being generally disorientating rather than significant TCs. These experiences included: not knowing how to deal with Omani students' long names; discomfort about not understanding or speaking the national language of Arabic (and associated anxiety, for example, that students were talking about them); an expectation that parents would routinely engage with teachers about students' progress and finding that this was not the case; and confusion about unfamiliar HEI organisational structures. For example, with respect to the latter, Participant 5 recalled:

*In [home country] we have faculty of Engineering, IT, Law etc. [...] and our faculty itself, our dean and everything – because every faculty has a dean. Yes, unlike here – Yes. When I came here, what? The whole [HEI classification], there's the dean, so where is my dean? It's different!*

Where applicable, these disorientating experiences clearly added to the overall challenge of the international teachers' transitions. Such experiences make visible the wide range of taken-for-granted tacit knowledge, skills and behaviours that derive largely from the wider culture within which TLRs operate and which facilitate teaching in contexts in which teachers are enculturated.

### 5.3 Emotional Responses

The various experiences of “shock” and the range of “disorientating experiences” set out above provide insight into the kinds of teaching cultural distances that a new international academic teacher might need to navigate on transitioning to a teaching role at an HEI in Oman. TLR theory has highlighted how culturally deep-rooted some of the factors underpinning participants’ experiences appear to be. In cases where institutional, workgroup and learner expectations which were manifest through local TLRs conflicted with these complex foundations of former teaching practices it was perhaps unsurprising that negative emotions might be stirred – and alongside experiences of shock, most of the participants experienced at least one of the interrelated emotions shown in Figure 5.1 below.



**Figure 5-1:** Emotional Responses of International Teachers

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These emotions, and the basis for each, included the following: **disappointment** about students' limited ability to write in English; **anxiety** about being judged by others through processes such as student evaluation of teaching and pre- and post-assessment moderation; **despair** about students' weak performance (resulting in one teacher recalling "I was asking myself, well I cannot survive here"); **discomfort** with the perceived "tightness" of the UK system (experienced by a participant working in the HEI offering programmes leading to UK awards); **feeling depressed** about students' perceived lack of ability to grasp what was being taught; **frustration** about feeling excluded from workgroup discussions about teaching and people not speaking out; **self-doubt** about competence as a teacher when students appeared not to understand or performed badly in assessments; **vulnerability** about not being familiar with given technology; **feeling stressed** about wider information about programmes not being available to new teachers; **feeling puzzled** about students' apparent lack of understanding of what was being taught; **feeling upset** about the need to spoon-feed students and the overall weight of TCs (which had reduced two participants to tears); and **fear** of "saying the wrong thing", **fear of job loss** if students performed poorly in assessment, and **fear of losing face** about teaching practices being out of line with those of colleagues. Experiences of vulnerability and frustration, as well as the more specific emotion of fear of job loss (each highlighted in Figure 5.1) were particularly evident.

Individuals' emotions clearly changed over time and I interpreted these emotions as part of a dynamic, fluctuating system of meaningful experiences (Liu, 2016; Zembylas, 2007). In many cases, the classification of these

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emotions was derived from words used by the participants. For example, “**disappointment**” was derived from the comment “I was completely disappointed”. It is clear, however, that many of these categories of emotions potentially overlap and that there are different ways that these emotions might have been classified. Undoubtedly, different emotions were interrelated and nuanced in different ways for different individuals. Overall, however, the research highlights that such negative emotional responses were very characteristic of most participants’ experiences, particularly over the course of the first year within their new teaching context in Oman.

That such negative emotions tend to characterise the experiences of academics taking up international teaching positions (as identified in Chapter 2) is a concern both from the perspective of given individuals’ well-being and from the perspective of how this might affect individuals’ teaching practices and thus the learning experiences of students.

Emotions are identified as being fundamentally important for teaching and teachers for reasons that include the social nature of teaching, the interrelationship between teachers’ personal and professional identities, and teachers’ investment of values in their work (Nias, 1996; Uitto et al., 2015; Jokikokko & Uitto, 2017). These studies identify the need for favourable conditions to be created to allow for individuals’ emotional work and management, and hint at the importance of genuine collegiality to support this. There was, however, a strong sense of my research participants being nervous about sharing negative feelings in their respective workplaces. Reasons for this included teachers fearing job loss if they were felt to be not coping as well as

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some teachers' own general reluctance to be open about such issues. The following participant quotation exemplifies these reasons and also reflects how norms of expressing emotions differ across cultures (Uitto et al., 2015).

*Normally you see, one of the thing is, er, when there are foreigner teachers, they are not open, open in that sense, if I am facing a challenge or a barrier or any obstacle or any issue, they keep it with themselves, they say well if the management knows, it will be a problem for me. [...] You see, in a few cultures, there is no acceptability that I will do mistakes or I have problems or I have issues ... [deliberately unattributed]*

There was an indication that as a consequence of keeping their TCs and associated emotions to themselves, many of the teachers had experienced **isolation** particularly in the early stages of their transition into their new teaching role in Oman. It appeared that at this stage, these academics were lost between not being able to use their former teaching practices effectively and not engaging effectively with the workgroup to address TCs and at least potentially alleviate associated negative emotions. At that time, some appeared to have entered a vicious circle in which isolation exacerbated TCs and, in turn, TCs exacerbated isolation. One of the participants explained their isolation as follows:

*Because who will I talk to? Nobody is here to talk to. I cannot tell anyone else because they are they – they are not on my side.*  
[deliberately unattributed]

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In the early stages of transition to a teaching post in Oman, another teacher resorted to going home to their home country every month to deal with TCs, associated emotions and a sense of isolation. This was despite the fact that most the participant's colleagues were also from this country. The participant recalled:

*Even though we have financially not good at that time, I told [reference to spouse] every month I have to go to [home country] just to make my mentally fit – make myself mentally fit – so that when I feel like no one is there to support me here – sometimes I feel like that, since everyone is new to me, I cannot share my personal difficulties with them, so every month I used to travel to [home country]. [deliberately unattributed]*

Feelings of isolation identified among new international academics (Ferguson, 2011; Green & Myatt, 2011; Hutchinson, 2016a; Leask, 2004; Mählick, 2016; Qansah, 2017; Romanowski & Nasser, 2015, Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010; Thomas & Malau-Aduli, 2013) tend to be attributed to the new context in a relatively broad sense – that is, to the lack of shared history, culture and first language in the new country – and reported alongside other negative emotions. In some contrast, the findings of this study suggest two things. First, the study emphasises the extent to which isolation appeared to be *underpinned* by TCs and associated negative emotions, thus suggesting more of a consequential relationship between isolation and other negative emotions. Second, the negative emotions experienced by the participants appeared to derive principally from issues more directly associated with their

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teaching role than with wider sociocultural issues. In each case these emotions were experienced in relation to specific teaching issues. In contrast, positive perceptions about living in Oman were evident across the participants, with the general friendliness of the Omani people and the high levels of personal safety in the country being highly appreciated. For most participants there was a lack of cultural distance in the broader sense between their home countries and Oman. Except for the participant from Russia, all the participants were from either Asia or Africa and a number were explicit about Oman being a neighbouring country which was culturally similar in many respects to their home countries. Participants' experiences of this wider environment, however, were not systematically explored through the research. As such, the research could not determine the extent and way in which these experiences and other dimensions (personality, for example) may have contributed to negative emotions.

The teaching cultural distance – as opposed to the general cultural distance – experienced by most, however, was considerable, particularly for those teaching on programmes leading to UK awards. This suggests that local historical, political and economic factors as well as Oman's international engagement with other HE systems – and EQA systems in particular – have permeated local institutional logics and TLRs in ways that have not been paralleled in some countries which nevertheless form part of a larger historical and cultural entity of which Oman is a part and which share, for example, some common values, social institutions and codes of conduct.

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The sociocultural understanding of teaching that underpins TLR theory emphasises the importance of social interaction and engagement of teachers with their colleagues and overall teaching context. It can be envisaged that if international academic teachers engage effectively with their teaching context they will be better positioned to work through any TCs they are experiencing about their teaching. This idea aligns with the view that depending on how effectively teachers' negative emotions can be managed, these emotions provide potential to either stimulate or inhibit learning and professional development (Gilmore & Anderson, 2016). Any isolation of teachers, however, will clearly work against effective social interaction; as developed in the next chapter, the research identifies the danger of individuals becoming caught in a "transition trap" fuelled by TC-induced negative emotions that lead to isolation. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that, where applicable, countering feelings of isolation may be key to supporting the effective transition of teachers into new international teaching-in-HE contexts.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported on the start of the teaching journey of the international academics in their new teaching context in Oman. It has detailed significant TCs and associated negative emotions experienced at this time. TLR theory has helped to reveal TCs arising at least in part as a result of teaching cultural distances – that is, the distances between teaching cultures (TLRs) constructed and enacted in individuals' former immediate and wider cultural context(s) and the prevailing TLRs in the new context, as experienced by an academic teacher. The analysis highlights cases where individuals are not

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simply faced with new, visible behavioural norms that they need to adopt in the new context. Rather, it reveals cases where individuals still hold deep-rooted tacit assumptions and values which underpinned their former teaching practices and which are challenged in different ways in the new context through these individuals' interaction with students, peers, material objects and the new teaching context as a whole.

In other research, TLR theory has shown that teachers may resist academic development initiatives seeking to change teaching practices if the aims of these initiatives are based on principles that conflict with basic assumptions and values held by participants (Trowler & Cooper, 2002). For teachers entering a teaching context where there is a considerable teaching cultural distance, as is likely in the case of a new international academic teacher, the research shows that a broadly corresponding dissonance may be seen, instead, to engender *shock* in the first instance in the form of what might be very considerable TCs. By bringing to the fore the way in which wider societal culture and prevailing institutional logics affect local teaching cultures (TLRs), the analysis enables a nuanced understanding of individuals' experiences. In turn, as further developed through this thesis, this relationship between teaching cultural distances and individuals' experiences helps to provide a basis for conception of institutional responses to international staff support needs.

In addition, this chapter has identified feelings of isolation experienced by the teachers who participated in this study as being a likely *consequence* of TCs and associated negative emotions. It has identified management of this

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isolation as potentially critical in determining the nature of individuals' *onward journeys* of teaching in a new context.

Overall, these findings highlight how misguided any assumptions that new international teachers will somehow just know what is expected of them and how to adjust (Walker, 2015; Thomas & Malau-Adali, 2013) might be. The next chapter discusses *onward journeys* of the teachers, beyond initial experiences of shock and emotion, and inclusive of coping teaching practices and the possibility of teachers becoming caught in a “transition trap”.

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## Chapter 6: Coping Teaching Practices and Onward Journeys

### 6.1 Introduction

As a second step toward identifying requirements for institutional support for international academic teachers, the research examined how the participants *responded to TCs*, and why. This chapter presents findings under two themes.

The theme **coping teaching practices** presents findings that suggest that initial responses to shock tended to be characterised by teachers working in significant isolation from peers but with a heightened responsiveness to student behaviour. These findings are extended to generate the novel concept of a potential “transition trap” into which new international academic teachers might fall.

The subsequent theme of **onward journeys** comprises three main sections. These present findings that suggest divergent pathways that teachers might follow in response to their new teaching context – including premature departure from their teaching position. A number of factors and behaviours are identified that appeared to be associated with more positive outcomes. Findings under this latter theme bring to the fore *opportunities* experienced by the teachers, thereby addressing this aspect of the research questions.

### 6.2 Coping Teaching Practices

The weight of TCs and feelings of relative isolation appeared to leave some participants in “survival mode” in the early stages of their transition to their new teaching context in Oman. A range of “coping” teaching practices was adopted,

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particularly in relation to dealing with students who were perceived to be lacking in preparedness for HE and struggling to cope with the English language demands of their programmes. These practices were characterised by being driven to a considerable extent by teachers negotiating individualised ways forward with their students.

In some cases, these coping practices appeared to align across participants. For example, most teachers talked about how they had moderated their use of English by using simple vocabulary and speaking slowly and how they took time in class to revise and repeat earlier work. Daniels (2013) identified similar practices adopted by some teachers of international students in an Australian university. One participant, however, had taken a significantly different approach to coping with students' struggles with English: essentially the teacher enlisted the help of Arabic-speaking colleagues, Google Translate and WhatsApp in an approach aimed at enabling students to reproduce everything in Arabic. This teacher's explanation of this approach included the following:

*I will write it in Google Translate, get it in Arabic and send it through WhatsApp – so we have a group [...] and they will learn from that [...] But this methodology, other teachers they don't have with them – since I doesn't know Arabic, I approach this way of communicating with the students. [deliberately unattributed]*

This approach also contrasted with that of a colleague (also a research participant) in the same workgroup who, as revealed during their interview, was struggling to get students to stop using their mobile phones in class.

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In a different HEI there were also contrasting pedagogical approaches being adopted by teachers in the same workgroup, this time concerning students memorising course material. In order to deal with students' English language difficulties, one teacher spoke of deliberately instructing students to memorise:

*So I have come out with a technique, so I give them, I prepare some test questions, multiple choice, true false, at least I make them memorise [...] because they are good in memorising.*

[deliberately unattributed]

A peer teacher, however, emphasised during their interview how they were trying to engage students in any way to deter them from memorising course material.

During this initial period of their transition, some teachers appeared to be aiming to communicate to students the message that “whatever other teachers might be doing, this is how it will be in my classes”. Similar examples included: a teacher who had established that students would not copy from each other when he was invigilating; a teacher who had established that, with her, students would not be able to negotiate test marks; and a teacher who was working to convince students that, with her, they would get more marks and not fewer if they wrote exam answers in their own words rather than write memorised text. In each case it was implied that this was an individualised approach rather than a departmental or institutional one.

Through the lens of TLR theory, I interpret these examples as individualised, coping teaching practices that represent heightened levels of *subjectivities in*

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*interaction* – i.e. the individuality that workgroup members bring to their interaction within the workgroup and the construction of TLRs. It is reasonable to expect a new international teacher, initially, to be predominantly reliant on TLRs enacted in former contexts and this is identified as the basis of much of the shock experienced by the teachers in this study. TLR theory suggests that in time, individuals' teaching practices will undergo change as teachers are socialised into the new local teaching culture of which they become an integral part. As such, teaching practices across a workgroup might be expected to acquire relative coherence and harmony, while still accommodating individuality, still being subject to debate and contestation, and remaining dynamic. The study revealed, however, that heightened levels of individuality had remained among some of the participants well beyond their first year or so in their new teaching context. This finding suggests that such socialisation and relative harmony are not achieved quickly or easily. Moreover, and as elaborated below, the findings suggest that the socialisation of the participant international academic teachers into their new teaching context was typically hindered initially by teachers falling into, or at least experiencing, what I have conceived as a "transition trap".

### **6.3 Teacher Transition Trap**

As encouraged in the interviews, participants recalled their experiences of their new teaching context in Oman over time. This framed these experiences as individual journeys. What is described then, in the previous section and the previous chapter, is the study's identification of an initial stage during which new international teachers were typically experiencing: shock in the form of a range

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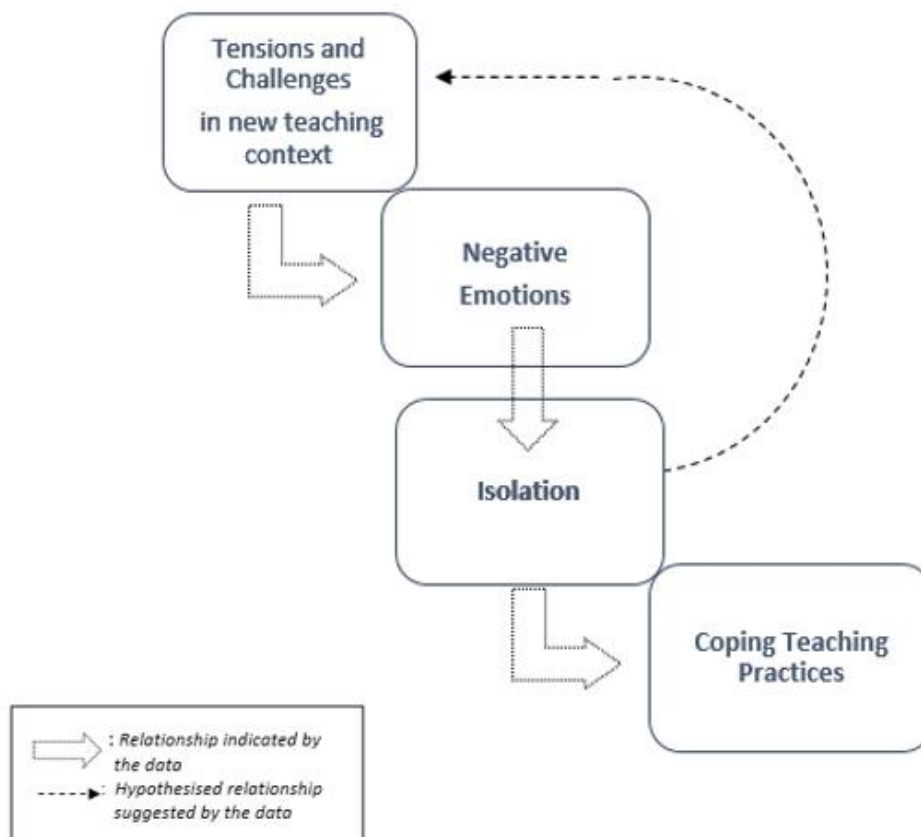
of TCs arising from their new teaching context; negative emotions; relative isolation; and the need to resort to coping teaching practices.

Figure 6.1 below shows the relationships between these experiences as indicated and suggested by the data. The figure portrays how, together, these experiences can be conceived as forming a *trap* that may hinder the effective transition of teachers into a new teaching context. The figure first shows negative emotions arising from teaching-related TCs. An example described earlier of a teacher's feeling of self-doubt about their competence to fulfil their academic teaching role, arising from students' poor performance, illustrates this relationship.

The figure then shows the consequential relationship between such negative emotions and teachers' feelings of isolation which is indicated by the data. Examples of this included the participant who, in the initial stages of their transition, felt unable to share teaching-related difficulties and associated negative emotions with peers and in this state of isolation, travelled back to their home country every month in an effort to keep themselves "mentally fit".

The figure then shows how such isolation appeared to result in teachers resorting to individualised and reactive approaches to teaching in an effort to cope in their new teaching role. While some coping teaching practices appeared potentially positive, the research reveals other practices, such as use of crude translation techniques, that conflicted with approaches adopted by peers and which might be considered by some institutions to reflect undesirable pedagogy.

Finally, the figure shows a tentative hypothesis suggested, but less directly indicated, by the data. This hypothesis is that individuals' isolation from workgroup peers hindered their ability to address teaching-related TCs and alleviate associated negative emotions and thus served to exacerbate both TCs and negative emotions. This potential vicious circle underpins the conception of the early stage of an academic teacher's experience of undertaking a new international teaching role presenting a potential *trap*.



**Figure 6-1:** International Academic Teacher “Transition Trap”

This initial stage encompassing TCs, negative emotions, isolation and possible coping teaching practices was experienced more recently and more extremely by some participants than by others. It was also variously tempered by a range

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of positive emotions, particularly in relation to wider sociocultural experiences of living in Oman. Nevertheless, as illustrated above, the research suggests potential for this stage to constitute a “transition trap” that may hinder the effective transition of academic teachers into a new international teaching context.

The research suggests that new teachers might respond to experiences during this initial stage by orienting themselves towards, and subsequently proceeding along, one of three divergent conceptual pathways towards, respectively, the following outcomes: premature departure from teaching role; continued “survival” but “under the radar”; or active engagement and an embracing of their teaching role. These “**onward journeys**” are discussed in the following sections.

#### **6.4 Premature Departure from Teaching Role**

None of the teachers who participated in the study indicated intention to leave their teaching posts. Participants who were asked, however, indicated that the occurrence of new international teachers resigning or having their contracts terminated prematurely was relatively common, although one participant added that it was less common in Oman than they had experienced in another Gulf State . Another participant referred to teachers departing prematurely from their teaching role as “casualties” when explaining what might happen if new international teachers did not have an appropriate background or receive sufficient support:

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*Otherwise it's just you throw someone in the sea and ask him to find his way out which is very difficult – and then there will be lots of casualties. **Do you know of cases where there have been casualties?** Yes, yeah, yeah! [deliberately unattributed]*

The appointment of international academic staff is quite highly regulated in both public and private HEIs in Oman. In both cases, minimum academic qualifications and years of teaching experience in HE are required and verified. Participants who mentioned cases of premature departure, however, indicated that the teachers concerned were not able to cope with their teaching role in their HEI in Oman. In no case in this study were other aspects of the context, such as remuneration or wider sociocultural issues related to living in Oman, mentioned as reasons for premature departure. This is exemplified in the following quotation:

*Based on what I have heard, the main reason is the cultural differences between the teacher and the student. So, the teacher couldn't adapt to how the students are learning here. [Participant 14]*

Roskell (2013) observed that few studies focus on why international schoolteachers might depart from their posts prematurely despite significant occurrences of this. There is a similar dearth of studies relating to international HE teachers. Studies of international HE teachers' experiences are nevertheless imbued with the potential for their premature departure (Szkornik, 2017; Mfum-Mensah, 2016). It can be envisaged how premature departure

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might be promoted by experiences of being caught in a “transition trap” of the kind described above. I suggest that in cases where international teachers depart from their teaching role prematurely, there will probably be no “winners” – neither teachers, students nor institutions. This potential scenario provides additional justification for why research into how institutions might best support international academic teachers matters.

### **6.5 Survival in Role – Under the Radar**

Some teachers explicitly framed their continued employment (beyond initial stages of shock and associated emotional responses) and/or that of others, in terms of “survival”. This echoes Hutchinson’s (2016b, p. 262) assertion that:

*... time is the great healer for the issues confronted by IPs [immigrant professors] – but they need to survive long enough for the future to unfold” [emphasis added].*

The data indicated that some international teachers were managing to remain in their teaching role – “surviving” – but in a manner characterised by behaviours such as: passive acceptance or superficial compliance with teaching requirements; resistance to change; and avoidance of active engagement with peers about teaching practices. I have conceptualised such behaviours as teachers staying “under the radar”. Perhaps understandably, the evidence for this suggested orientation and pathway was mostly derived from participants’ observations about others; these are not behaviours that most teachers would be expected to openly admit to.

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Teachers perceived by participants to be following this pathway were variously viewed as:

- lacking a passion to teach:

*e.g. Again here is a difference between staffs who [pause ] I don't know how I will say it, there are staffs here who are here for the job and the pay. There are staffs here, like me, who are here because I want to teach. I have a passion for teaching, so you cannot mix those things up. [Participant 5]*

- being stuck in a comfort zone:

*e.g. It depends, but what I found, maybe 30-40% of teachers are happy with what they are having, and they don't want to experiment with anything [...] So they are going to come and just do what they did back home – yes – people living here for the last five, ten years, maybe, the teachers I am talking about. They know the teaching challenges we face [but] very happily they don't want to change and they don't want the system to change. They are in their comfort zone. [Participant 9]*

- being fearful of change:

*e.g. There are some people that even if they try to change, they don't change wholly. You know, only partially change. So for example, if there is a class observation, he will put slides, but next class, he will switch back to bad habits [...] Some, in their subconscious, are still traditionalists. **What do you think***

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*underpins that? Maybe their fear of change maybe.* [Participant 4]

TLR theory suggests that a complex mix of basic assumptions and values are likely to underpin some of the resistance to engagement and change indicated in the quotations above. The teaching practices of such individuals can perhaps be conceived in terms of having become somewhat fossilised and/or compliance-driven rather than the result of an ongoing dynamic flow of social processes. There is a likelihood that any subsequent lack of engagement with peers by such teachers would contribute to this status. In some cases, this status might reflect teachers having entered and then moved on from the “transition trap” discussed above but only to a limited extent, perhaps to a stage of just tolerating TCs.

It is likely that the teachers who chose to participate in the study did so at least partly because of their active engagement in their teaching; the Participant Information Sheet made it clear that the research was focused around teaching practice and how “good” teaching might be promoted, and a clear passion for teaching emanated from some interviewees. The quotation below, however, illustrates what I have interpreted as very passive acceptance of a manager’s feedback on teaching by one participant:

*Observation is good. Because [if] we did something wrong inside the class we have to notice that it is not good for the students and at the same time they will give some suggestions – you have to improve your teaching like this. **What if you don’t agree?** [no*

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*answer] Were the things you were told useful, or did you think no, I don't actually agree with that? [Participant laughs]*

*No I accept all – I'm new – so that's why I will accept all that they suggest me. [Participant 13]*

The research could not determine whether or not Participant 13 was working to implement the student-centred approach to teaching they had been advised to adopt or the extent to which their teaching had undergone any real transformation. However, the teacher reports accepting the feedback provided because they are new rather than because they believe that it is the right thing to do. This scenario can be conceived in terms of the TLR moment of *power relations* assuming particular dominance over a perhaps diminished flow of social interaction in relation to other TLR moments. It is easy to see how passive acceptance or superficial compliance with teaching requirements might result from this. This possibility echoes the finding of Bovill et al. (2015) that instruction and feedback to teachers not enculturated in student-centred learning pedagogy can result in an illusion of transformation in teaching rather than actual transformation whereby new practices are underpinned by a shift in beliefs.

I suggest that for international teachers to remain “under the radar” is not the most desirable outcome for an HEI, its students, or the teachers themselves. This outcome may, for example, hinder an HEI's efforts to promote particular approaches to teaching, confuse students by subjecting them to fundamentally different approaches to teaching across their programme and undermine these teachers' potential to contribute to and benefit from their HEI's teaching

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endeavours. I suggest that a more desirable outcome is reflected in the third pathway that is described below.

## **6.6 Embracing Teaching Role – Towards Active Engagement**

The research indicated that following initial periods of time often characterised by shock, associated negative emotions, relative isolation and coping classroom practices, some teachers were moving towards, or had reached, a stage of embracing their teaching role through active engagement with their teaching context. While such individuals were certainly not free of TCs in relation to their teaching, their approach to teaching appeared to be beyond “coping” and in contrast to being “under the radar”. The following “journey” (the first part of which was quoted earlier) exemplifies this:

*Sincerely speaking, the starting point was really tough, really, really tough, I thought, OK, I think I cannot, I cannot bring myself so low down, and how am I going to teach them, and sometimes they cannot grasp what we are teaching and I feel very depressed and stressed. Then, then slowly time goes by through experience, and it's good – and then every year then I know, this is how we are going to guide them, how they will come to us, this is how ... [Participant 8]*

Further, in this quotation, the participant states “this is how **we** are going to guide them, how they will come to **us**” (emphasis added). The use of “we” and “us” suggests that over time this teacher had come to think in terms of being part of a teaching workgroup. There was also more direct evidence of teachers

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having progressed to active engagement with peers about teaching matters. This meso-level interaction was characterised by acknowledgement and sharing of teaching challenges, sharing and evolution of teaching practices and mutual support. As one participant explained:

*The good thing is that in this [academic unit] we have a very good relationship with all our colleagues – we have a very close relationship. Many times happened that like, for example, we go for lunch, we talk, OK how I am doing with my students, you also do this one [...] so we have this kind of exchanging, and you can say that the peer evaluation – we are doing it for each other – not in the form of the papers. [Participant 15]*

A second participant from the same HEI explained how a colleague had helped him to overcome problems with students disputing and negotiating assessment marks. With reference to this, the participant went on to explain how colleagues worked together to establish practice in this and other areas:

*I think that more or less, when people share this knowledge together, right, among each other, what happens is that it becomes standardised – you learn from the other person [...] So, end of the day, everyone seems to be doing similar things – so the evolution, everyone is part of it. [deliberately unattributed]*

I suggest that these two preceding quotations can be understood as reflecting a “healthy” meso-level culture in which at least some teachers engage productively with others as well as other aspects of their teaching environment.

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The quotations further suggest a certain degree of harmony among teaching practices across this academic unit. Through the lens of TLR theory, this scenario can be seen as one in which the social work of constructing and enacting teaching practices is supported by a relatively free flow of social processes in relation to TLR moments rather than individual moments assuming a high level of dominance. This contrasts, for example, with two scenarios described earlier: teachers working in relative isolation, conceived in terms of the TLR moment of *subjectivities in interaction* assuming dominance; and the new teacher readily bowing to direction of a manager conceived in terms of the TLR moment of *power relations* assuming dominance – and in this latter case possibly promoting a response of superficial compliance in adopting given teaching practices. A “healthy” meso-level culture is thus conceived not as one in which TLRs prevail in the absence of challenge, dialogue or debate – Trowler (2008) highlighted both the unlikelihood and the undesirability of this – but one in which there is active engagement of individuals with the departmental context of which they are a part.

TLR theory suggests that a “healthy” meso-level culture will be reflected in TLR moments such as *discursive repertoires* and *codes of signification* being evident. As explained in Chapter 2, these can be understood, respectively as: terms which frame teaching practices and how they are conceptualised, developed and used by the workgroup; and connotations of a particular feature or aspect of a workgroup’s teaching context developed and attributed by the workgroup. With respect to the former, participants from one HEI, for example, were mutually engaged with efforts to support what they termed the “challenged

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students” (students at risk of failing academically) and appeared to have a shared will and belief that these students could achieve academic success. As Participant 15 explained:

*We are keep telling each other, do this, do that, especially the challenged students is really on the top of the discussion.*

With respect to *codes of signification*, across participants from another HEI, mention of “handouts” for example, was couched in negative terms, indicating a broadly shared connotation that had developed about these across this group of teachers.

The majority of teachers who participated in the research appeared at least orientated towards this third pathway of active engagement. It is reasonable to assume that students benefit from teachers who are engaged and who also engage with each other about teaching. It is also generally in the interests of institutions to retain staff. For these reasons, it is reasonable to suggest that this third pathway is the most desirable for institutions, teachers and students. I therefore interrogated the data to identify factors that in some cases appeared to have supported participants’ orientation to, and progression along, this pathway. This resulted in identification of three sets of interrelated factors that I categorised as: **pull factors; facilitating behaviours and facilitating factors**. These are summarised in Table 6.1 and detailed below.

<b>Pull Factors</b>	<b>Facilitating Behaviours</b>	<b>Facilitating Factors</b>
<i>Passion to Teach</i>  <i>Empathy with Students</i>  <i>Recognition of Opportunity to Learn</i>	<i>Seeking, Creating and Using “Safe Spaces” for Support</i>  <i>Seeking to Engage with Peers</i>  <i>Being Open to Change</i>	<i>Prior Experience of Teaching Abroad</i> <i>Prior Experience as an International Student</i>  <i>Prior Local or Regional Experience or Knowledge</i> <i>Shared Language or Religion with Students</i>  <i>Possession of a Teaching Qualification</i> <i>Supportive Departmental Atmosphere</i> <i>Fellow Nationals as Peers</i>

**Table 6-1:** International teacher characteristics associated with an orientation “towards active engagement”

### 6.6.1 Pull factors

A ***passion to teach*** was particularly evident among participants from the two HEIs located in the interior of Oman (as opposed to the HEIs located in the capital area). Possession of this factor appeared to correlate with evident ***empathy for students***, as reflected in the following quotation:

*To my understanding, academically, yes, the students are weak, but what is my role then? This is my role, this is my responsibility. [...] I don't have to blame from where they are coming!* [Participant 3]

Similarly, and explicitly demonstrating empathy with students' lack of preparedness for English-medium HE, Participant 18 explained:

*I understand that the students are coming from a background where they have had very little exposure to English, so as a result, at the beginning, if I was in their shoes, I will also be at the same*

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*level as they will be. If I was asked to do a course in Arabic, I would be the same as they would be.*

In other cases, empathy with students' difficulties with English language was based on teachers' personal experiences of struggling with English at the time that they themselves were international students.

The research also aimed to identify *opportunities* experienced by the international teachers. Such opportunities were evident in the form of some teachers' **recognition of the opportunity to learn** about new teaching approaches and practices. As Participant 2 commented:

*There is some work pressure – I don't say that everything is rosy, I mean – but despite all that, we have takeaway things, we learn many things.*

Some teachers were either anticipating or had already engaged in sharing these "teaching takeaways" (newly acquired knowledge and skills about teaching, learning and assessment) "back home". Others were anticipating the acquisition of skills and attributes that would facilitate their "survival" in other foreign teaching contexts:

*[...] the spectrum of experience that I got from different people, working with different approaches, you know, introducing myself to the [country reference] system, with transparency and QA [...] I can say that my experience in Oman made me a better teacher and a better scholar, so I can survive anywhere. [Participant 4]*

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The experience reported in the quotation above lends support to Kim's (2017, p. 994) notion of an emerging "transnational academic tribe and territory" comprising academics with a set of generic skills and attributes – "transnational identity capital" – that might allow "survival anywhere".

These pull factors (that is, passion to teach, empathy with students and/or recognition of opportunities to learn within a given teaching context) that the research findings suggest can promote teachers' active engagement with their teaching can be conceived as factors that potentially energise and lubricate the flow of social processes through which teaching practices are constructed and enacted and continue to evolve. While any number of things may work to engender these pull factors within individuals, it is reasonable to suggest that institutions may benefit from effort to deliberately nurture factors such as these.

### **6.6.2 Facilitating behaviours**

Particularly in the early part of their teaching experience in Oman, a number of teachers sought or created and then used "**safe spaces**" for support with teaching-related TCs. Various, this involved: making the most of assigned mentors; seeking out informal mentors; working out norms of social interaction among peers; working out who to trust; and developing friendships and social networks.

Generation of these spaces was generally independent of, and in one case a substitute for, institutional systems. In the latter case, although the teacher was formally assigned a mentor, it was another colleague with whom the teacher had formed a relationship of trust during the recruitment process to whom the

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teacher turned for support. Other examples included a new teacher turning immediately to a group of fellow nationals and a teacher gradually coming to trust a small circle of colleagues. Others turned to “safe spaces” outside their HEIs. For one this meant sharing her TCs with her husband who was also teaching in Oman but at another HEI, and another, as mentioned earlier, resorted to flying back to their home country each month.

This finding reflects the recognised importance of teachers’ “backstage” conversations in supporting them in their teaching – that is, informal conversations within or outside the HEI (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2015; Szkornik, 2017). In the same way that “safe classrooms” might be required in some contexts to support learners’ engagement in “difficult conversations” and critical thinking (Gayle et al., 2013, p. 5), participants had sought out “safe spaces” for themselves as teachers to have difficult conversations about teaching (as further discussed in Chapter 7).

This study could not throw any light on whether international teachers who withdrew from their post prematurely engaged in this “facilitating behaviour”. It can be suggested, however, that an absence of such a space may be detrimental to the transition of a new teacher. As noted in Chapter 2, Mårtensson and Roxå (2015, p. 109) described these backstage conversations as being where teachers “negotiate, formulate, and maintain their beliefs about teaching”. The research suggests that in the case of international teachers, such spaces and conversations serve a need for teachers to air values and assumptions that have surfaced as a result of being challenged in their new international teaching-in-HE context.

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There was evidence of some teachers deliberately working to cross meso-level cultural barriers to engage with colleagues about teaching matters. This work of **seeking to engage with peers** is exemplified in the following quotation:

*It was actually difficult in the beginning. Because in our department, the majority of them are from India, so basically they understand each other well in terms of language, culture and everything, so for me, I am also the only lady – and who is coming from a different country, so it was really difficult. My fellow [nationality] are both male so it was really difficult for me. So in the beginning, in meetings, I sit down, I keep quiet and I observe. And then slowly, since they are also speaking to me, they are open, so I try to immerse myself into them. It started with small talks and we came to a point where we already became confident with one another and we can already share things about the work.*

[deliberately unattributed]

This is not to say, however, that all attempts to engage in this way were successful; cultural barriers between teachers of different ethnic origins, lack of trust and a general fear of speaking out still hampered the efforts of some.

**Being open to change** appeared to be an additional factor that supported some teachers' orientation to a pathway of active engagement. The following quotation provides an example of this:

*For instance even [senior person within the HEI] knows that I was not very comfortable with [name of virtual learning environment*

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*(VLE)] in the beginning, this technology in the beginning. But I set a plan for myself, and I said OK I will do it. If everybody's doing it, I will do it. Then I'm fine, I'm fine with it – everything I'm doing online. So you have to be open minded – you have to be open to change. [Participant 4]*

Continuation of this interview provided convincing evidence that this teacher was indeed using the VLE. This change in teaching practice can be understood through the lens of TLR theory as this participant's fledgling practice of using the VLE having come about as a result of a flow of social processes through interrelated TLR moments, facilitated by the participant's commitment to making a change and directed in part by *power relations* in the form of peer-pressure – “If everybody's doing it, I will do it”. The comment “I'm fine with it” suggests that this new practice is underpinned by a moderated *convention of appropriateness* held by the participant; as identified in Chapter 3, TLR theory supports the notion that teachers may well change the way they teach if they believe in the new approach. In turn, this suggests the potential for such changes in belief systems to be deliberately nurtured by institutions.

Like the “pull factors”, these “facilitating behaviours” appeared to work in different ways to promote engagement with the context and thus the flow of social processes that support ongoing construction and enactment of teaching practices.

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### 6.6.3 Facilitating factors

Five of the seven facilitating factors identified (see Table 6.1) relate to attributes of the international teacher. These are: prior experience of teaching abroad; prior experience as an international student; prior local or regional experience or knowledge; shared language or religion with students; and (possession of a) teaching qualification. The remaining two factors are attributes/perceived attributes of the new teaching context: namely, the presence of fellow nationals and a supportive departmental atmosphere.

Some of these attributes may have helped individuals to develop “transnational identity capital” – that is, generic, psychosocial competences to engage with ‘otherness’ that ease the ability of individuals to move in and out of culturally diverse groups and contexts (Kim, 2017; Larsen, 2016). Through their prior exposure to otherness (e.g. as an international teacher or student or through learning about different pedagogical paradigms) individuals are likely to have accrued tacit knowledge of different norms with respect to teaching and learning in different contexts and an appreciation of the different wider societal cultures and institutional logics that underpin these. It is perhaps likely that such experiences render teachers more willing and able to surface and question their own basic assumptions and values and thus be more receptive to different ways of seeing and doing with respect to teaching in HE in different contexts. It can be envisaged that the presence of fellow nationals and a supportive departmental atmosphere in a new teaching context would support use of this capital to navigate teaching cultural distances.

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The participants who had had **prior experience of teaching abroad**, and had survived this, appeared particularly well orientated to this third pathway of active engagement. One participant, for example, spoke about a prior international teaching experience in which they had for the first time: taught in English; worked alongside peers of mixed nationality; encountered practices such as assessment moderation; and experienced students negotiating marks. Reflecting on this TC-dominated experience, the participant observed how well it had served as preparation for teaching in Oman – essentially confirming how well it had served to help them navigate the teaching cultural distance they experienced in Oman:

*With the diverse environment I went through coming to this [teaching post in Oman], I feel like I am very much prepared, and after that experience, I feel like there will be no difficult path to cross, it was like a preparation for me. [Participant 16]*

While this participant appeared to be confidently engaged in their teaching, their voluntary engagement with others about teaching matters nevertheless appeared more inclusive of teachers of their own nationality than with others. The extent to which prior experience of teaching abroad facilitated engagement, however, was not always clear. For example, one participant, who had had prior experience of teaching abroad in two different Asian countries appeared to be drawing limited support from these experiences. Perhaps there were limited teaching cultural distances between these contexts and the participant's "home" teaching context or perhaps possible benefits of these experiences were simply not surfaced in the interview. The nature of

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such prior experiences will obviously vary along with the complex array of interrelated factors impacting the experiences different individuals. As such, reductive associations between variables should not be sought. The study's overall finding that suggests that prior experience of teaching abroad may well facilitate engagement nevertheless aligns with research findings in other contexts (Haque, 2017; Qansah, 2017). Qansah (ibid), for example, found prior overseas experience to be one of the strongest determinants of (successful) cross-cultural adjustment of international academics working in the UAE.

On the one hand, participants' *prior experiences as international students* appeared to evoke feelings of empathy with students, particularly for those students struggling to manage their HE in English and in turn this empathy acted as a "pull factor". On the other hand it appeared that individuals' (sometimes quite traumatic) experiences of being an international student had perhaps engendered a tacit understanding that the "education system distance" (Kelly & Moogan, 2012) that they experienced at that time resulted in part from a weight of wider cultural factors impacting on and shaping the prevailing TLRs as experienced by themselves as students. In turn, it can be seen how such a tacit understanding coupled with prior first-hand experience of otherness in the form of different approaches to teaching and learning may facilitate navigation of a new teaching cultural distance; such a teacher is likely to be more receptive to otherness and has an expanded frame of reference to support meaning-making in a new context.

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Some **prior local or regional experience or knowledge** was held by most of the participants, either through their home countries being relatively near to Oman or through them having once held teaching posts in the region – or, in the case of the one participant not from an Asian country, through prior travel to the region that led the participant to comment:

*I liked the region, I enjoyed and appreciated the culture, I felt pretty much comfortable.* [deliberately unattributed]

Given the embeddedness of TLRs in wider societal culture and associated institutional logics, it can be assumed that this attribute may have facilitated navigation of the teaching cultural distance for these teachers to some extent. In some cases, this attribute may have facilitated engagement as a result of teachers' feelings about the prevailing wider culture being positive and this positivity engendering "approach behavior" – that is, behaviour that motivates individuals to engage with novel people, ideas and situations (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1368).

A **shared language or religion with students** (Arabic and Islam respectively) appeared to be particularly important in facilitating the teaching journeys of the minority of the participants sharing with Omani students either or both of these cultural attributes. The importance of these attributes is perhaps exaggerated in Oman's context because Islam is also the state religion and because students in their own country are studying in a foreign language (that they may also be struggling with).

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Sharing the students' religion appeared to give those teachers a ready understanding of some basic assumptions, values and behaviours of students as learners and an awareness of how expectations rooted in religious beliefs and practices emanating from the wider societal culture and institutional logics shape educational practices. As one Muslim (though not Arabic speaking) teacher commented:

*See, the religion to know is very important because in this region there are certain limitations. Religion is very, very important for an academic teacher. This is going to impact on the teaching and learning process. [deliberately unattributed]*

It appeared evident that Oman's international Muslim teachers would avoid TCs associated with religious observances, understand the "red lines" with regard to intellectual debate or criticism about matters relating to religion and have a good understanding of how prevailing logics relating to Islam and associated family and community norms would influence student behaviour and student expectations of teachers, including in terms of pedagogy. It can be seen how these consequences of sharing the students' religion could facilitate understanding of local TLRs and support navigation of teaching cultural distances.

A shared language or religion with students also appeared to facilitate engagement with the teaching context by facilitating teachers' ability to build a rapport with the students. This is illustrated in the quotations below:

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*Especially in teaching, you have to understand the psyche of the students, and I'm wearing the same, culturally, the dress, and most of the students feel it like I am Omani, so this gives them confidence [...] because I think so two things that I have observed over here – in the class especially [...] how you can take the confidence of the class, how the students they will trust on you [and] that you have to feel them, you have to create a friendly environment for them – it's very important [...] they should not be hesitant in a sense that they are shy to ask the question, because maybe if I am foreign and they are not able to speak in English, and they feel shy about it ... [original emphasis] [Female Muslim but non-Arabic speaking participant]*

*... and if you are talking in the same language they will respect that, very much. [Muslim, Arabic speaking participant]*

Teacher-student relationships is an area that is under-researched both in HE and in relation to how these relationships affect teachers (as opposed to students) (Marquis et al, 2019). In the case of this study, however, it is perhaps likely that the respect and trust inherent in the positive teacher-student relationships described above contributed significantly to the affective dimension of teacher-student relationships that in turn promoted teacher engagement with the teaching context in general.

The final attribute of an international teacher identified as a facilitating factor was the possession of a **teaching qualification**. Like prior experiences of

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teaching abroad or being an international student, only more so, this attribute evidently afforded the qualified teachers with additional means to help make sense of their new teaching context and associated institutional demands or student responses to their teaching. Programmes leading to teaching qualifications are likely to have exposed individuals to different ways of thinking and doing in relation to HE and likely to have raised awareness of cultural factors that shape these. Through this, teachers are likely to have already undergone a surfacing and perhaps questioning of their own basic assumptions and values about teaching and learning (Booke & Willment, 2018; Robinson & Hope, 2013) and how these have been shaped. The following quotation exemplifies how teachers possessing a teaching qualification appeared better placed to manage teaching related TCs:

*In fact, in terms of teaching, I would say that I was quite, you know confident, because I did a higher diploma in teaching. [...] – that helped me because the ideas are already there – I know about theories, methodologies of teaching, syllabus designing, so I have that in mind, so it's not all new to me – but you know putting it in practice or putting it into a different form, OK that was new to me. So with that background, I was imagining, if someone did a Masters in [discipline] but with no background in teaching, he will find it really difficult. [...] They should not hire someone who does not have professional certification in teaching.*

[deliberately unattributed]

The identification of **fellow nationals** present in the teaching context as a

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facilitating factor was evidenced, in particular, by the apparent significant TCs and isolation experienced by a teacher who had no compatriot colleagues. This finding echoes findings about new international teachers in a South African University (Jeannin, 2017). Jeannin (ibid, p. 243) interpreted support afforded by fellow nationals as resulting from their ability to help new international academic teachers make sense of their environment by “sharing keys of understanding”, based on their shared cultural and teaching backgrounds. This suggests that fellow nationals may facilitate engagement by making aspects of the teaching cultural distance being faced by individuals more immediately explicit and providing helpful insight into how they might be addressed.

In this Oman-based study, it appeared that in some cases dialogue with fellow nationals was also dialogue in a safe space in which individuals were perhaps comfortable with productively questioning their teaching practices and assumptions. The presence of fellow nationals, however, did not always serve new international teachers in this way, at least not in the early stages of their transition – as in the case of the teacher who returned to their home country each month described above. I interpret this exception as highlighting the complexity and dynamic nature of factors at play in teachers’ navigation of teaching cultural distances.

The importance of a **supportive departmental atmosphere** in facilitating engagement was explicitly recognised by some participants. In one case, a teacher with prior experience of teaching abroad as well as at another HEI in Oman, was making a deliberate, self-initiated effort to contribute to creating a supportive departmental atmosphere so that new international teachers would

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face less TCs than they themselves had endured in these earlier posts. These earlier international teaching experiences appeared to have given this participant both a helpful skill set as well as the motivation to undertake this informal role. The participant's reflections on this role emphasises a perceived importance of trust among peers to enable this work:

*See, in our [unit] it's a quite good environment [...] so that family environment, if in beginning is created, then people start trusting one another, people start depending on one another, people start relying on one another. [Participant 3, original emphasis]*

This finding echoes the importance of collegiality and trust that other studies suggest are important for teachers' engagement in constructive emotional work (Nias, 1996; Uitto et al., 2015; Jokikokko & Uitto, 2017) and critical to productive conversations about teaching assumptions among HE teachers (Booke & Willment, 2018; Stabile, 2014).

The research did not seek to generalise behaviours or the consequences of given attributes either across participants or to wider populations of teachers and HEIs. Rather, the behaviours and factors identified above applied variously to different individuals and appeared to help orient these teachers to, and along, a pathway of active engagement with their foreign teaching context. These teachers were thereby better equipped to manage their TCs. These factors and behaviours are not tightly defined and they are not exhaustive. Nor is it suggested that individually, or collectively, these are sufficient to ensure "positive" outcomes in terms of an "onward journey" of a new international

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teacher. The presence of any number of the “facilitating factors” identified above may have played out differently for different teachers, in this or other contexts. For example, the profile of teachers who had left any of the study’s HEIs prematurely, and the factors experienced, are unknown.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has identified engagement of some research participants in “coping” teaching practices in apparent response to their early experiences of shock, negative emotions and isolation. These elements have been conceptualised as potentially forming a “transition trap” that influences transition outcomes and might contribute to new teachers continuing in an “under the radar” manner. While the research does not show this, it is possible that experience of a “transition trap” might contribute to the premature departure of a new international academic teacher.

Factors and behaviours are identified that might facilitate teachers’ progression along a desirable pathway of teachers’ active engagement with their new, international teaching context. In different ways, these work to counter isolation and enhance teachers’ apprehension of and engagement with the teaching cultural distances they are navigating.

The next chapter’s consideration of the research participants’ lived experiences of support for teaching furthers understanding of how a productive engagement with teaching cultural distances might be promoted.

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## Chapter 7: Support for Teaching

### 7.1 Introduction

As the third step towards better understanding institutional support requirements for international teachers, the research identified what *support for teaching* the participants received and how they experienced and responded to this, and why. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that, in most cases, *formal* institutional support which focused on approaches to teaching and classroom practices was limited in both substance and efficacy. By contrast, quite widespread useful experiences of *informal* support were identified.

The three main sections of this chapter address experiences of formal support, experiences of informal support, and associated implications.

### 7.2 Formal Support

Formal institutional support for teaching roles experienced by participants from three of the four HEIs was limited to very limited. The more extensive formal support experienced by participants from the other HEI (HEI-1) resulted from what appeared to be well-embedded systems that worked as part of a UK-TNHE arrangement. Even so, the research indicated some lack of efficacy of this support in the local context. Formal support experienced at HEI-1 is discussed in Section 7.2.1.

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### 7.2.1 Apparent formal support

Participants from HEI-1 had received a more comprehensive induction to their new teaching post than had participants from the other HEIs. Their induction began pre-arrival in the form of receipt of relevant module-descriptors. HEI-1 participants were also formally allocated a mentor at this time. There was, however, limited indication from participants of the extent to which the formal part of the induction that took place on teachers' arrival referred specifically to approaches to teaching and classroom practices. All participants from HEI-1 spoke positively about the mentoring system but, again, they gave no indication that mentoring paid specific attention to approaches to teaching and associated practices. As implied in other contexts (Walker, 2015; Thomas & Malau-Aduli, 2013), one might question whether this academic staff induction system might have been underpinned by a tacit assumption that teachers will automatically adopt pedagogical approaches implied by teaching methods indicated in module-descriptors.

It became apparent that HEI-1 also operated a formal peer teaching observation process. While only one participant from HEI-1 mentioned this when asked about support they had received for their teaching, for this teacher, experience of this process in the early days at HEI-1 had proved significant. A series of formal observations resulted in this teacher (who was the observer) reflecting productively on a range of student profile characteristics and teaching practices that were new to them:

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*The way the other teachers taught, they were very slow and they were asking the students questions, they were asking them to do, so for one problem at a basic level, they took a lot of time and a lot of interaction happened, till the student got [it] themselves, and even at times, they pushed the students to do it, even though there may be a few students who are very lethargic, they don't carry notes or pens or anything – so they were picking them and asking, Where is your pen? Write it down. So all these things, and they gave things to do for homework – not homework really – I never had that kind of thing there in [home country] (laughs). So then I realised, OK fine, so what I am doing is not right – this is a different set of students with a different mind-set with different learning exposure – so I learnt from them to be honest. [deliberately unattributed]*

Through the lens of TLR theory, this quotation can be seen to highlight things that conflicted with the new teacher's previously held *tacit assumptions* (for example about student preparedness in terms of level of prior knowledge) and *conventions of appropriateness* relating to both student and teacher behaviours (for example, that students would come to class without a pen, or a teacher would devote time to "lethargic" students and give "homework"). Further, the statement that "a lot of interaction happened" suggests that this was not a characteristic of this teacher's former teaching practice. This in turn suggests that former TLRs experienced by this teacher were underpinned by *implicit theories of teaching and learning* that perhaps favoured teaching as the

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transmission (rather than the construction) of knowledge. In a non-threatening environment, this teacher had been able to question, in a productive way, their own values, assumptions and associated expectations critical to the teaching cultural distance that they were facing. Such surfacing and questioning of presuppositions can be seen as a prerequisite for productive dialogue about teaching, and associated negotiation of meaning and receptiveness to change (Englund et al., 2018).

HEI-1 teachers were also provided with workshops that seemed to play a key role in introducing new technology that teachers were then encouraged to use. As indicated under the earlier theme of “shock”, however, it appeared that some teachers continued to question the value of using technology in teaching over “traditional methods”. The TCs that these teachers continued to experience suggest that such workshops in themselves may fall short of engendering real change.

Overall, the extent to which even the comprehensive formal support systems in place in HEI-1 catered adequately to individuals’ needs and supported a degree of overall harmony in the implementation of institutionally-desired teaching practices was not clear. For example, while institutional promotion of “student-centred learning” was mentioned by participants in this HEI (and the other HEIs too) it was not clear that there was a common understanding of this. The participant who engaged in the class observations mentioned above, when responding to a question about advice they would give to a new international teacher, appeared to still be grappling with this concept and to have interpreted

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it more or less in terms of the extent to which either teachers or students are speaking in class:

*Just forget about the lecture method. Because they are very much on lecture method, Indians, even actually me, I was that, and still sometime I get into that [...] These days students don't want to listen to a teacher talking, you know – but I don't know, you know it depends on the subject, for example, if they are teaching accounts or they are teaching mathematics, they need to talk – I don't know – again it's a matter of, it depends on the subject. In [name of subject] I can keep my mouth shut and get students to talk, but in an accounting course, I don't know how far it will work.*

[deliberately unattributed]

This account suggests that while this teacher's surface-level observable practices might have changed, there may have been dissonance or confusion between these and their beliefs about teaching and learning in terms of *theories of teaching and learning* and *conventions of appropriateness*. By contrast, a participant from another HEI held a different perspective about “student-centred learning”, perhaps informed by their possession of a teaching qualification:

*They are encouraging student-centred learning [...] Here in this country, or here in this [HEI classification], I don't want to generalise it. OK let me just leave it there. In the department, where I am teaching, with the type of students that we have, you*

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*cannot fully implement student-centred learning – because students are still very much dependent on teachers. [Participant 5]*

These different views highlight how institutional directives may be received and understood very differently by different teachers in similar teaching contexts; TLR theory reveals how such directives will be interpreted by individuals in light of their existing deep-rooted and thus taken-for-granted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving about teaching. This understanding clearly has implications for institutions wishing to provide support for teaching to new international teachers from very diverse backgrounds.

Overall, these findings suggest that the formal support systems for teachers imported through TNHE arrangements may themselves be underpinned by a tacit assumption that most teachers receiving such support will hold basic assumptions and values that more or less align with those of each other and those inherent in the practices being promoted. Such systems may work well in the “sending” country if most teachers themselves have been educated and enculturated in that same wider culture. It is not clear, however, that such systems necessarily cater adequately for contexts where new teachers have nuanced, heterogeneous teaching cultural distances to navigate and are thus facing multiple unfamiliar norms within the new teaching context.

### **7.2.2 Lack of formal support**

An overall lack of formal attention to teaching practices during induction was experienced by participants from the three remaining HEIs although experiences did vary among participants from the same HEI. These differences

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may reflect institutional changes that have taken place over time, particularly as institutions across Oman are now striving to meet national institutional accreditation standards that include formal requirements relating to teaching quality as well as to staff induction (OAAA, 2016). Where a lack of attention to approaches to teaching or classroom practices was experienced, this was variously experienced as problematic, or not. The following two (deliberately unattributed) quotations from different participants from the same HEI reflect these different perspectives:

*You are chucked in because you are experienced because of four years you get your Masters, four years' experience and then you are eligible to come, so they just chuck you in to survive [...] I don't [know] about the others in later years, but during my time, no, there was no induction. Induction was just the HoD just telling us this is the department and taking us around – but there is no induction as in telling you OK this is the methodology we are going to use, nothing like that. Because usually in [home country] we do have that.*

***Was there anything about teaching? So teaching philosophies, teaching styles, anything? [long pause] No.***

From the overall context of the interview, I interpreted this second quotation as it not having occurred to the participant that such matters might be covered during induction rather than, for example, a reluctance to admit that this was not the case. Other studies suggest that some institutions hold a tacit

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assumption that teachers will just “teach”, thus diminishing or negating the need for associated formal support (Walker, 2015; Thomas & Malau-Adali, 2013). The scenario reflected in the quotation immediately above suggests that some teachers may also hold this tacit assumption.

At a different HEI there was an indication that attention to institutional support and direction of teaching practices might have increased over time but that considerable freedom in approaches to teaching prevailed. One participant from this HEI deemed the lack of attention to approaches to teaching that they experienced at the time of joining the HEI to be problematic:

***Was there any institutional sense of preferred teaching methodologies, teaching philosophies ... Are you kidding me? ... what might go on in the classroom? The only philosophy is go to the classroom and make them busy – right, OK, and another perspective, if we don't hear anything from students, it means everything is OK, so right, OK [laughs] this is it! [deliberately unattributed]***

A more recent arrival at the same HEI had a slightly different and more positive view that could reflect developments in the institution over time. The participant referred to syllabi that detailed teaching methods and also stated that training on different teaching methodologies was provided. Another participant from this HEI, however, indicated that in fact the first and only relevant workshop in six years (on “effective methods of assessment, active learning, and similar stuff”) had been conducted very recently.

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Participants did not emphasise how small teaching team meetings (such as those involving a small group of teachers teaching a single course in parallel to multiple groups/sections of students) supported, or promoted changes in, their teaching but there was evidence to suggest both of these, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

*If it is more than two or three sections, then we will have like a formal meeting with the coordinator [...] specifically about the teaching methods and all [...] with the coordinators we discuss – because they are coordinating all the sections. **How much debate is there about teaching? How much debate, commonality, because there are challenges?** Yes I may be happy teaching one way and another teacher may not be happy – these are matters of opinion, but still we discuss and we try to convince each lecturer and we try to go with the same. [Participant 21]*

TLR theory suggests that a lot of what underpins teaching practices is tacit and changes are incremental over time and ongoing. It is therefore likely that teachers do not have a heightened awareness of all changes, or how these came about. The teacher quoted above made the point that “teaching methods and all” are discussed with course coordinators rather than in departmental meetings. Given the overall nervousness among participants of “speaking out” it is possible that such small team meetings have the potential to provide relatively “safe” spaces for open discussion; such safety, as well as an underlying sense of trust, is necessary if productive questioning about teaching-related TCs and pedagogical approaches by teachers rather than

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defensiveness is to prevail (Lee et al., 2018; Booke & Willment, 2018). This finding suggests significant potential for active engagement and desired teaching practices to be promoted through such small group activities.

### 7.3 Informal Support

The research suggested that informal teaching support systems were critically important in some cases. This appeared to be emphasised by the finding that participants who had experienced the least *formal* institutional attention to approaches to teaching and classroom practices appeared to have developed among themselves the strongest *informal* support system.

The research found a range of informal teaching support mechanisms in operation including induction, observation and mentoring. The following quotation provides an example of informal induction.

*When I was at the hotel, one of my colleagues, he visited me and he debriefed me on the subjects and he gave me all the materials and so I knew more or less what I was teaching and everything even before I stepped foot to the [HEI classification] [...] And then I had another colleague who was also from [home country] [...] he also briefed me on certain things that I should know in terms of managing the students and stuff like that. [...] **Was that a kind of formal process?** Informal. [Participant 18]*

In the same way that formal peer observation appeared significant in the journey of a teacher from HEI-1, one participant from a different HEI spoke

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about how they had learnt from other teachers by staying in an IT lab while classes were in progress and observing informally. This participant's recollection of this informal teaching observation suggests that a similar productive questioning of their own teaching practice resulted from this experience:

*The teaching style is totally different from one staff member to another staff member. **OK, why do you say that?** Because they are having their own style – like inside the classroom – their teaching is totally different from my style. [...] I saw at the time of teaching, those who are teaching in the class, so I learned something from them. [...] So I watched and thought I have to follow this kind of, the kind of activity they are doing inside the classroom. [Participant 12]*

International teaching experiences have been found to trigger reflection and stimulate receptiveness to change (Smith, 2009, 2013; Hoare, 2013). As in the example of formal teaching observation described earlier, the quotation above suggests that observation of other teachers might be a powerful way to promote such reflection and responsiveness by promoting teachers' engagement with TLR moments that are not normally surfaced, and *inviting* change.

Participants' experiences of informal support for teaching also highlighted how well fellow nationals are positioned to provide support to newcomers. This reflects the findings of other studies (Jeannin, 2017) as well as identification of the presence of fellow nationals as a potential "facilitating factor" towards active

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engagement identified in this study. As Participant 18 recalled in relation to a fellow national in the new teaching context who had quickly become a friend:

*He understood the background from which I came, so he was able to tell me the differences between here and there.*

This implies a probable shared understanding of values and assumptions that characterised the participant's previously enacted TLRs and thus a shared appreciation of the teaching cultural distance being faced. It suggests that the friend may have been able to help illuminate how and why some aspects of the teacher's former TLRs were not a good fit in the new context thus allowing TLR moments comprising predominantly tacit and implicit elements to be surfaced and perhaps questioned by this teacher. For other participants too, fellow nationals appeared to fulfil an effective informal mentoring role.

Informal discussion in "safe spaces" was experienced as a valuable form of support for teaching across participants from all HEIs. Often, this support was experienced over a cup of tea or lunch:

*Sometimes in a formal setting we are talking about these things [teaching matters]– in an informal setting we are talking a lot about these things" [original emphasis]. [HEI-1 participant]*

*By having a cup of tea, whatever, getting together, and just informally we will be discussing and sharing things, but to formalise it is a little bit difficult, you can say that a little bit people are having their own concerns. [HEI-2 participant]*

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*So, again especially for our community, our [nationality] community, so when we get together, especially during lunch time, we can hear stories ... and then you may adapt some approaches or they can take some approaches from you. [HEI-3 participant]*

*See, we normally sit whenever, whether it is officially, unofficially, formally, informally, even when we sit for a cup of tea, we always share the experience during the class. That helps us a lot. [HEI-4 participant]*

Such discussions about teaching with peers are increasingly recognised as central to teachers' learning in what is a contextually contingent process of negotiating and meaning making (Englund et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018). The importance of such discussions in the co-construction of teaching practices is perhaps emphasised in multicultural contexts, such as those exemplified in Oman, where interactions develop out of multiple systems of culturally-rooted assumptions, values and taken-for-granted behaviours. Attendant implications are discussed below.

#### **7.4 Support for Teaching – Implications**

Notwithstanding the uncertainty about the efficacy of standardised induction workshops for newly recruited academics and those teaching transnationally (Billot & King, 2017; Keevers et al., 2017; Pherali, 2012), the research suggests that carefully tailored attention to teaching practice at the time of the international teachers' initial induction might have helped to alleviate at least

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some of the TCs they went on to experience. The research implies that teaching observation that *invites* change may be valuable to a teacher who perhaps feels vulnerable; it shows how observing peers teach has the potential to promote reflection and receptiveness to change whereas more formal direction might perhaps risk pushing a teacher to an “under the radar” mode of operation. Some participants variously experienced helpful formal support through course team meetings, having their own teaching observed and, increasingly in some HEIs, staff development workshops and seminars. Of these mechanisms, the findings suggest, in particular, the potential value of small group meetings, especially if not overly formalised (and thus potentially threatening).

Perhaps partly in response to a general lack of formal support for teaching and partly in response to teachers’ general sense of insecurity, it appeared that a lot of what was central to the TCs of all participants was being addressed within informal spaces of institutional activity. Informal support within institutions appeared to be widely sought and appreciated, and deliberately engineered by some teachers. Some behaviours identified earlier as potentially working to orientate teachers towards a pathway of active engagement with their new teaching context were central to enabling this support – for example, *seeking, creating and using “safe spaces” for support and seeking to engage with peers*. It can be seen how a *supportive departmental atmosphere* (identified as a “facilitating factor”) might emerge, or perhaps be deliberately promoted by an HEI nurturing peer teacher interaction. Potentially, such interaction could help to counter isolation and the risk of new teachers being caught in the “transition trap” described earlier. Nurturing peer teacher interaction would also align with

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recognition of the importance of communication and dialogue in the construction of TLRs and of learning being located in practice (Boud & Brew, 2017; Englund et al., 2018).

A further implication of the findings is that institutions need to recognise that socialisation into a new teaching context takes time. This research suggests that in Oman's context the time period required for socialisation may be exaggerated as a result of the complexity of peer interaction. As reflected in the study's expanded TLR framework, interactions between teachers from multicultural backgrounds are dynamic relational processes that develop out of differing frames of societal culture and institutional logics (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). In such contexts, it will take time for teachers to develop the level of trust required among colleagues that is needed if substantive discussion of classroom contexts, teaching and learning challenges and pedagogical techniques is to take place (Lee et al., 2018).

The findings of this research indicate that valuable teaching support for new international teachers might be afforded through them having a carefully selected mentor and a schedule of observations of other teachers that together provide both time and "safe spaces" for new teachers to engage constructively with meaning-making in the new context. This suggests value in international teachers initially having reduced teaching loads (as found by Green & Myatt, 2013) to allow for such engagement. Institutional action as simple as ensuring that teachers have plenty of opportunity to congregate informally during tea/coffee breaks and over lunch could prove helpful, particularly if coupled with sensitive encouragement of discussion about teaching and learning. This would

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broadly align with Fanghanel's (2009, p. 205) call to foster "a culture of collaboration to harness some of the tensions within TLRs".

There is a risk, however, that informal support could in some cases support the construction and enactment of teaching and classroom practices that conflict with assumed or desired institutional practices (Hoare, 2013). This scenario highlights the possibility that the *power relations* moment of TLRs could be appropriated sensitively by academic managers to help guide "informal" support for teachers. The research suggests, for example, that leaders of small course teams or mentors (perhaps of a specific nationality) could be highly influential in providing support by facilitating individuals' productive questioning of their assumptions and values about teaching and prevailing TLRs and promoting engagement in this way. This might call for a blurring of the lines between some formal and informal activities and while this might frustrate quality assurance mechanisms, it may nevertheless help to enable institutional provision of helpful, directed support.

Although not evidenced directly in the empirical findings of the study, a further consideration for HEIs is that the whole concept of support for teaching and academic development may conflict with some teachers' basic assumptions and values. In 2013, for example, Fink (2013, p. 2) reported "little or no faculty development activity [...] especially in Africa, the Middle East, Asia ..." and, as identified in this Oman-based study, some teachers may have come from contexts in which they were considered to be "elite". Within the culturally-situated different norms and expectations about support that will prevail among new international teachers from diverse backgrounds, cultural biases towards

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anyone with a formal academic development remit may also come into play – inclusive of aspects such as academic rank, gender and even age. This further implies the need for sensitivity in conceiving support initiatives.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the international academics' experiences of support for teaching and the implications of these. It highlights that *formal* support mechanisms that directly addressed teaching matters were typically not very evident and were of uncertain efficacy. It attributes the former to a likelihood in some cases that tacit assumptions may prevail among some institutions and teachers that pedagogic skills and practices are easily transferable across national and cultural borders. The uncertain efficacy highlights the need for support systems to accommodate deliberately the heterogeneity of the culturally-embedded prior teaching experiences of new international teachers from diverse contexts and cultures.

This chapter has argued that for teachers negotiating a considerable teaching cultural distance and potentially feeling vulnerable, teaching support mechanisms such as induction, mentoring, peer observation, teaching-group meetings and workshops may be more effective if not experienced by new teachers as being overly formal. It is suggested that reduced formality may better promote productive surfacing and questioning of values, assumptions and associated expectations that individuals hold in relation to the teaching cultural distance that they are facing and which may be underpinning TCs that they are experiencing.

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## **Chapter 8: Conclusions**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings together the key findings of the research and clarifies its contribution to understanding institutional support requirements for international academic teachers. Limitations and challenges of the research and possible future studies suggested by the findings are considered.

### **8.2 Research Context, Questions and Approach**

The aim of the research was to advance understanding of institutional support requirements for international academic teachers in what is an increasingly internationalised global HE context. Contributing to this under-researched area is important because of: the increasing international mobility of academic teachers; knowledge that academic teachers may face considerable challenges in navigating cross-national and cross-cultural teaching contexts; the increasing cultural complexity of academic teaching contexts; and the typically underdeveloped conceptions and provision of institutional support for international teachers that the literature reveals. With its heavy dependence on international academic teachers, Oman's highly internationalised, teaching-intensive HE sector provided a rich empirical case through which to realise the research.

Through a qualitative, interview-based methodology, the study was intended to: identify TCs and opportunities experienced by the international academic teachers as well as any support for teaching that they received; consider individuals' responses to their teaching and support experiences; and from this

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empirical basis, consider the theoretical and practical implications for institutional support.

This approach provided for participant teachers' navigation of a range of different national and cultural divides to be examined and enabled theoretical focus on two areas which were identified in the literature review as being under-researched: the cultural distances specific to teaching that need to be navigated by international teachers and the negative emotions that tend to characterise academics' international teaching experiences.

Methodologically, the rigour of the research depended in part on the international teachers who participated responding to interview questions with candour. Deliberate effort to put participants at ease was helped by the use of flashcards to support the interviews. The experience of this research adds to evidence of the potential value of visuals to support data collection through interviews (Bates et al., 2017 Comi et al., 2014).

### **8.3 Key Findings of the Research**

#### **8.3.1 Overview**

This research has introduced the term **teaching cultural distance** to conceptualise the cultural differences – and thus distances – between “home”/other teaching contexts and a new international teaching context as experienced by individual teachers. The proposed value and contribution of this concept is to encourage and support a nuanced appreciation of the cultural border-crossing profiles inherent in different individuals' transitions into

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international teaching roles that in turn can help to inform institutional support initiatives. This concept highlights the finding that when teachers take up an international teaching role, they will experience cultural differences specific to this role that may be more or less extensive than the cultural differences they experience outside this role. In this study, 'nested' cultures emanating from TNHE initiatives and multicultural teaching workgroups contributed to this difference.

In accordance with TLR theory (Trowler, 2008), the thesis argues that teachers' routinised ways of seeing and doing with respect to teaching in HE reflect a given teaching culture or cultures into which they have been socialised. A second and key contribution of the research that furthers understanding of these cultures – and thus teaching cultural distances – is that it highlights the embeddedness of the departmental teaching cultures that TLRs describe in wider societal culture and conceptualises this link through the concept of institutional logics (Jacks, 2017; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

This theoretical understanding of teaching cultures is further expanded by the development of a relational classification of TLR components. This classification builds on the concept of components of culture being present at different depths (Schein, 1984; Spencer-Oatey, 2008), and thus at different levels of awareness to individuals and others, i.e. from behaviours that are visible and audible to taken-for-granted assumptions that are invisible and may remain at an unconscious level. Because of these different levels at which culture is manifest, it follows that values and basic assumptions held by teachers that underpin their expectations and routinised ways of seeing and

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doing with respect to teaching will be embedded in given cultures in ways that they have only partial awareness of.

The argument, then, is that when teachers encounter a new teaching culture in an international teaching context, some of the multiple unfamiliar aspects that they might experience in their teaching role may cause TCs because basic assumptions and values that they hold may conflict with those underpinning these new aspects. Moreover, the basic assumptions and values that they hold may still not readily be surfaced or productively questioned, and TCs may therefore continue. In making this argument, the research therefore builds on the finding that teachers may resist professional development programmes that are founded on principles that conflict with values and basic assumptions that underpin their existing teaching practices (Trowler & Cooper, 2002).

This research endorses findings from a range of studies (see Chapter 2) that negative emotions often characterise the experiences of international teachers. The research advances these observations as follows. First, it is explicit in suggesting that effective management of these emotions (or not) may prove critical to teachers' transition outcomes – including, possibly, whether they transition into a new international teaching context at all, or just leave. Second, it suggests a *consequential* link between teaching-related TCs and isolation. Third, as an additional key contribution, the research then theorises the potential development of a '**transition trap**' whereby TCs experienced by a new international teacher lead to isolation that in turn leads to the teacher engaging in potentially undesirable "coping" teaching practices. It hypothesises that isolation (from workgroup peers in particular) hinders ability to address TCs

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and alleviate negative emotions, creating a potential viscous circle and, thus, a trap. Development of a trap would clearly hinder effective transitions.

This research calls for institutional support initiatives for international teachers that work deliberately to counter isolation and encourage the surfacing and productive questioning of basic assumptions, values and associated expectations about teaching that may be giving rise to TCs. The research identifies a number of factors, behaviours, and mechanisms that appeared to assist in meeting these aims, some of which offer potential for a “modicum of generalisation” (Bryman, 2004, p. 285). These include teachers’ possession of a teaching qualification, recognition of opportunity to learn and access to and use of “safe spaces” for informal discussion about teaching.

Findings and conclusions drawn from pursuit of RQ1 and RQ2 that provide the basis for these theoretical insights are elaborated in the sub-sections below.

### **8.3.2 Tensions and challenges**

The research participants all experienced considerable teaching-related TCs despite the varied cultural distances individuals were navigating and the fact they were all experienced academic teachers. TCs included those relating to teacher authority and status, student behaviours and expectations, academic systems, student preparedness for HE, peer diversity and interaction, and technological infrastructure and demands. The exact nature and extent of these TCs are not necessarily representative of other international academic teachers in Oman or elsewhere. When added to the findings of other studies, however, they help to demonstrate the range of TCs that are faced by international

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teachers across the world. These findings thus invite comparisons in other contexts.

Analysis of these TCs revealed apparent links between departmental TLRs and Oman's wider societal culture that illuminated different teaching cultural distances being navigated and provided the basis for theorising the embeddedness of TLRs in wider societal culture. So, for example: Oman's national religion of Islam was found to deeply permeate students' behaviours and implicitly frame norms for, for example, the appropriateness of given teaching materials; national requirements for HE to be English-medium were shown to drive local practices to address low proficiency in the use of English among students, such as use of "handouts" rather than textbooks; social hierarchical norms were found to render international academics with limited power relative to students and HEIs; and local state norms were experienced as implicitly limiting "speaking out".

Correspondingly, ways in which TLRs that were experienced in teachers' former teaching contexts were rooted in the wider societal culture of these contexts were revealed. So, for example, experience of TLRs in other national contexts rooted in historically-embedded professional academic logic that privileges academics' authority and autonomy (Brooks, 2016) – and in an absence of "new public management" logic (Canhilal et al, 2016) – gave rise to TCs relating to perceived loss of authority and status. In particular, these TCs included those relating to EQA mechanisms operating in Oman that privilege student views. Former TLRs rooted in professional logics of security of employment for academics and academic freedom (Sundar, 2018) underpinned TCs relating to

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faculty voice and job insecurity. Other examples included experiences of former TLRs rooted in institutional logics that normalised a culture of competition (Hayward & Kemmelmeier, 2007), highly selective HEIs (Altbach, 2014) and the notion of HE as a private good that gave rise to TCs relating to perceptions of students' poor preparedness for HE and poor motivation to study.

Examination of TCs experienced in relation to these TLR roots revealed how international teachers may experience a relatively small general cultural distance in their day-to-day living in a foreign country but may experience a much larger *teaching* cultural distance. The study's theoretical framework that theorises the links described above suggests that this is because historical, political and economic factors, and a nation's international engagement, continue to permeate local institutional logics and TLRs in a range of ways that may or may not align closely with cultural changes in national contexts that are nevertheless part of a common larger historical and cultural entity. In this research, it was the UK-based TNHE arrangements operating within one of the HEIs and the impact of EQA systems benchmarked to 'Western' HE systems that contributed, in particular, to participants experiencing a much greater *teaching* cultural distances than general cultural distance.

### **8.3.3 Responses to tensions and challenges**

The research has identified three pathways reflecting potential "onward journeys" of international teachers following likely initial experiences of shock in the form of TCs and associated negative emotions.

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Firstly, a teacher might depart from their teaching role prematurely, seemingly a lose-lose scenario for the teacher and their institution. This scenario provides an explanation of the possibility of international teacher “casualties” alluded to in other studies (Szkornik, 2017). The second pathway is “survival” of the teacher (as in their continued employment) but with teaching being carried out “under the radar” in a more perfunctory rather than engaged manner, and thus characterised by behaviours such as superficial compliance with teaching practices being promoted by an institution.

The identification of these two pathways provides a nuanced perspective to the often cited position that transition to a foreign teaching context engenders receptiveness of teachers to make changes to their teaching practices (Smith, 2009, 2013; Hoare, 2013). Rather, the research supports the findings of Lamers and Admiral (2018) that this receptiveness is by no means a given. The research was not able to establish the extent to which experiences of the “transition trap” described above were determining in orienting teachers to either of the pathways, but the likelihood that this was a significant factor is nevertheless suggested.

The study has identified factors and behaviours associated with participants’ apparent orientation towards a third pathway, that of a more active engagement and embracement of their teaching role. These were categorised as pull factors, facilitating factors and facilitating behaviours. In a more or less direct manner, these appeared to work to counter isolation from peers and to promote the productive surfacing and questioning of assumptions and values about teaching.

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The pull factors, such as empathy with students and recognition of opportunities to learn, are theorised as supporting individuals in becoming increasingly proactive in the social work of constructing and enacting teaching practices. The facilitating factors, such as prior experience of teaching abroad and shared language or religion with students, are theorised as serving to expand a teacher's individual frame of reference for sense-making in their new teaching context. The facilitating behaviours, such as seeking, creating and using "safe spaces", are theorised as directly enabling the productive surfacing of values, assumptions and expectations that might have been challenged in the new teaching context. This particular finding aligns with recognition of the role of candid conversations about teaching among teachers in supporting the construction and enactment of teaching practices across teaching workgroups (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2015; Fanghanel, 2009) that then broadly align (in the form of TLRs).

Individuals' experiences will be more complex than the above pathways might suggest but these findings nevertheless have implications for the support of academic teachers who take up international teaching positions.

#### **8.3.4 Support for teaching**

A not uncommon tacit assumption of HEIs is that teachers, essentially, just teach (Walker, 2015; Thomas & Malau-Adali, 2013). The study's findings reflect the apparent lack of recognition by some HEIs of the cultural embeddedness of academic norms relating to teaching. The study further suggests that this assumption is also held by some teachers. There was little evidence that TCs

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relating to teaching were significantly alleviated as a result of formal institutional support mechanisms, even in the one case of quite extensive formal support for new teachers being provided through a UK-TNHE arrangement. It appeared that the latter did not sufficiently accommodate the extent and heterogeneity of the different teaching cultural distances being experienced by different teachers.

In this research, various mechanisms central to addressing the TCs of participants were occurring in private spaces and in the margins of institutional activity – and in some cases, in spaces external to the institution. These informally-generated support mechanisms included informal mentoring and peer observation as well as generation of “safe spaces” where teachers could chat about teaching. These mechanisms were generally characterised by: being non-threatening; promoting interaction and trust among peers; and then, like the factors and behaviours mentioned above, promoting productive discussions about teaching.

#### **8.4 Implications: Institutional Support for International Teachers**

The research has suggested that institutional support for international academic teachers should be underpinned by institutions’ recognition of, and deliberate engagement with, the following factors:

- Teaching is a culturally embedded and determined social practice and deep-rooted assumptions and values about teaching in HE held by new international academic teachers may engender considerable TCs and resistance to change. In simple terms, and by way of example, this

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means that if a new teacher holds basic assumptions and values about teaching that accommodate assessment moderation practices, they may simply need to be informed about how these practices work in a new teaching context where assessment moderation is the norm. But as indicated by Trowler and Cooper (2002) and endorsed by this research, where such practices conflict with the basic assumptions and values of a new teacher, a different approach that explicitly addresses this dissonance is called for.

- The embeddedness of TLRs in wider societal culture is a dimension of their complexity that contributes to the demands of navigating teaching cultural distances.
- If a teaching context includes many international teachers from diverse backgrounds, this will increase the dynamic cultural complexity of the teaching environment. There will be attendant potential for this complexity to generate its own teaching-cultural-distance-induced TCs.
- TNHE initiatives may result in international teachers in a single HEI teaching on foreign programmes from one or more third-party providers. Each programme will be imbued with the local and wider culture of its country of origin and nested in the local and wider culture in which the HEI is situated. In this scenario, the country/countries of origin of the programmes become an additional dimension of the complexity of associated teaching cultural distances being navigated.

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- The extent and nature of teaching cultural distances being navigated by different international teachers will be diverse; as identified by Keevers et al (2014), support initiatives need to accommodate the heterogeneity of international academics' prior experience.
  - There is a probability of heightened emotional sensitivity of international teachers and a danger of them becoming entrapped in a cycle of negative emotions, isolation and coping teaching practices in the form of the “transition trap” identified above.
  - Teachers may well be willing to teach differently if they believe in a particular alternative (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009a)

The study suggests that support systems should work to promote constructive, teaching-focused interaction among teachers. Such interaction would encourage productive surfacing of existing beliefs and could be nurtured towards engagement with desired institutional approaches to teaching or the development of new innovative approaches. The research suggests a number of practical actions that an institution might take to achieve these aims and thus help to realise the potential of their international teachers. These actions include the following. Firstly, new international teachers could undertake an initial period of teaching observations prior to them being required to teach their own classes. The aim of this would be to create conditions that “invite” teachers to begin to surface their existing assumptions and values about teaching and learning. Secondly, the research suggests that a schedule of such observations could helpfully be coupled with these teachers being provided with a mentor –

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and choice over who might act in this role. One aim of this would be to provide a “safe space” in which the new teacher might feel comfortable in reflecting on local practice that appears to conflict with assumptions and values they hold about teaching and learning; the mentor would work deliberately to promote reflection that is productive. Thirdly, the research suggests that new international teachers could be further supported in productively surfacing existing beliefs by taking part in small workgroup meetings during which approaches to teaching and learning are discussed. The research emphasises the importance of such activities not being overly formal; teachers who feel vulnerable may feel threatened by more formal processes and so, in turn, such formality may serve to inhibit productive reflection. Correspondingly, the research suggests that the institution should make deliberate effort to promote collegiality during workgroup meetings and that deliberate use of institutional facilities for tea/coffee or lunch may support this effort. Support initiatives could include identification and, where possible, deliberate nurturing of factors and behaviours likely to facilitate individuals’ transitions into an international teaching position.

By contrast, the research highlights that a lack of support for new international academic teachers, or perhaps the wrong kind of support, has the potential to result in a greater number of “casualties” (that is, teachers leaving) and/or to allow circumstances to prevail that might push teachers into isolation or “under the radar”. Less harmonious (and potentially undesirable) teaching practices may then prevail.

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These implications call for HEIs to provide committed pedagogic leadership and sufficient resources to engage productively with both the teaching cultural distances being navigated by individual teachers within given workgroups as well as the complex and dynamic entanglement of these distances when considered collectively.

### **8.5 Reflections, Challenges and Limitations**

Ongoing reflection and reflexivity allowed various challenges and limitations inherent in the research to be recognised.

As a fellow expatriate, I remained keenly aware of the research participants' job insecurity. This created a need to both engender participants' trust in the research process and to ensure their well-being. These needs were addressed through careful attention to ethics procedures and the arrangement and conduct of interviews, and ongoing reflection during the reporting and discussion of the research results to ensure participant anonymity was maintained.

The ongoing ethical considerations nevertheless impacted some aspects of the design and execution of the research and its presentation and dissemination. Participant recruitment was via gatekeepers and although the aim was to recruit participants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and former teaching-in-HE contexts, all but one of the participants were from Asia or Africa. This limited insight into the experiences of international teachers for whom Oman presents a greater general cultural distance than was experienced by the participants. In particular, such cases may have given some insight into the entanglement of

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emotions arising from TCs relating to teachers' experiences of the wider host culture and those more specifically related to experiences of teaching. In order to protect the identity of the research participants and their institutions, some possible avenues of analysis that could have provided more nuanced insight into individuals' experiences in relation to their specific personal profiles and cultural and experiential backgrounds were not pursued and reported on. There was, for example, scope for greater analysis of gender-related sociocultural issues, particularly concerning female international teachers who in Oman's context are typically in the minority. Similarly, scope for teachers' experiences of public versus private HEIs to be more closely examined was not pursued. The commitment to a five-year embargo on publication of the thesis to help protect participants will delay dissemination of the complete study. Within this five-year period, however, scope remains for publication of aspects of the research in a way that does not undermine the intent of the embargo.

The identification of two of the potential "onward pathways" of the international academic teachers (premature departure and "under the radar") was based principally on research participants' perceptions of *others'* experiences. This unanticipated layer of interpretation generated scope for misinterpretation. Attentive interview questioning, careful transcription and reflective discussion of results with my supervisor helped to ensure rigour in interpretation of the data in these areas.

Assertions are made about HEIs but the research design did not provide for an institutional perspective on teaching or institutional support provided for teachers. Acknowledgement of this helps to frame the research.

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The expanded TLR framework was helpful in advancing understanding of teaching cultural distances. The relational analysis of TLR moments and the proposed relationship between TLRs and institutional logics helped to identify possible sources of TCs and suggest the kind of support that might be required to address these. Greater understanding and elaboration of the relationship between TLRs and institutional logics, however, would further the understanding of given TLRs; in turn, this would further the understanding of teaching cultural distances. Also, the teachers' experiences of navigating teaching cultural distances and their transition outcomes will have been impacted by a dynamic interplay of other aspects of their lives that the research did not explore, and the framework was not conceived to explain, including, for example, personality and identity.

Recognising and working with these challenges and limitations has allowed the rigour of the research to be enhanced and the research to be framed with more clarity. As such, these challenges and limitations do not deny the various contributions that the research makes.

## **8.6 Future Research**

The increasing mobility of academics is currently being addressed from the perspectives of globalisation (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017a), rapidly evolving TNHE environments (Henderson et al., 2017) and some of the more hidden and darker narratives of academics' experiences of working internationally (Morley et al., 2018). In addressing recognition of the need for better institutional support for such teachers, this thesis relates to imperatives arising from these

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studies and feeds into ongoing identification of TCs faced by academics teaching in HE internationally (Hutchinson, 2016a). Research that focuses on academics who depart from international teaching roles prematurely would be a valuable addition to this field, as would institutional perspectives on teaching support for international academics, particularly in contexts in which practice in academic development is less developed.

The potential for more elaborate theorisation of the relationship between TLRs and institutional logics to then further understanding of teaching cultural distances is alluded to above. Because the study found that heightened levels of individuality remained among some of the participants well beyond their first year or so in their new teaching context, it invites further research into TLR construction and enactment in contexts characterised by a majority of international teachers and high rates of teacher turnover.

There is an emerging interest in emotions in teaching in HE (Quinlan, 2016). In response to this, the study's identification of TCs and associated negative emotions invites enquiry into how these TCs and emotions relate to any TCs and emotions arising from teachers' wider sociocultural experiences of moving to and residing in a foreign country and to how associated entanglements of all these factors play out over time.

The research adds to increasing recognition of the value of academic teachers' informal conversations about teaching and learning (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2017; McCune, 2018). In light of this, pursuit of how such conversations might be

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nurtured and to what effect – perhaps through use of an action research approach – would be a productive line of future research.

### **8.7 Final Thoughts**

The dynamic complexity of academic teaching contexts that increasing internationalisation generates increases the need for HEIs to be responsive to change in a range of areas. Academic staff have diverse and practical expertise that can help HEIs to navigate change (Curnalia & Mermer, 2018). International staff, in particular, add to this potential. There is therefore a clear incentive for HEIs to embrace the potential that the cultural diversity of different international teachers affords. The research findings have the potential to support institutions in realising this wider potential.

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## Appendix One: Excerpt from interview schedule

Phase / Approx Time	Main focus + Possible Questions / Prompts	Relationship to Research Questions/ Purpose	Relationship to Theoretical Framework
Phase 2  15 mins	<p><b><u>First Experiences of Current Teaching-in-HE Context</u></b></p> <p>Can you tell me about your arrival at the College/University and your experience leading up to the first class that you taught?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- During this time, how did you feel?</li> <li>- Were you the only new arrival in your department or were there others?</li> <li>- What do you recall that felt familiar, and what do you recall that felt foreign to you?</li> <li>- Did you share/ discuss your feelings with anyone during this time?</li> <li>- How did you prepare for this first class? Was any support provided? If so, what was the nature of this and how did you feel about it?</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p style="text-align: center; color: blue; margin: 0;">Flashcard 2</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Picture of Omani HE male and female students in a general setting</p> </div> <p>Can you tell me as much as you can about this first class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What exactly did set out to do and what actually happened?</li> <li>- What was your first impression of the students?</li> <li>- How did the students respond to you – and you to them? Can you recall any specific events?</li> <li>- In what ways was this class similar or different to classes / students you had taught in your home country / previous position?</li> <li>- How did you feel during the session?</li> <li>- How did you feel after the session?</li> </ul> <p>Did you discuss this first class with anyone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If so, with whom? And?</li> </ul> <p>Overall, how is/was this teaching environment similar/different to teaching in your home country / your previous post?</p> <p>Was it different to how you imagined it might be?</p>	<p><b>RQ 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What tensions, challenges and opportunities do different individuals experience in their teaching role?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do different individuals respond to these in terms of teaching practices, and why?</i></li> </ul> <p>+ limited focus in relation to RQ 2 about support for teaching and participants' responses to this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>To reveal <u>initial</u> perceptions and experiences of the teaching-in-HE context in Oman, which may lead to reflection on changes in teaching practices that participants' have since enacted</i></li> <li>- <i>To get participants to explain their home teaching context and see from their eyes how the teaching context is different for them in Oman</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>In particular, recollection of these first experiences has the potential to reveal <b>tacit assumptions, recurrent practices and conventions of appropriateness inherent in the practices participants' initially sought to enact.</b> Reflection on any challenges to practices may illuminate, or allow to surface, <b>implicit theories of teaching and learning</b> held by participants.</i></p> <p><i>Questions about discussions with others aims to provide data about the social interactions – formal and informal – that participants engage in- i.e. the social context in which they engage in their teaching. Responses may illuminate, or allow to surface, <b>discursive repertoires and codes of signification</b> inherent in previously enacted TLRs apparently shared, or not, in the current context.</i></p>

## Appendix Two: Excerpt from the final data coding “codebook” extracted from NVivo™

Name	Description	Sources	References
<b>Theme 1: Experiencing Shock</b>	Tensions and challenges (TCs) in teaching role in new teaching context experienced initially as “shock” in terms of being unfamiliar and/or unexpected.	21	326
<b>1.1: Loss of Authority and Status</b>	TCs interpreted as arising from perceptions of: loss of authority arising from loss of power relative to students and the institution; loss of authority arising from loss of autonomy in teaching role; loss of subject authority as an academic due to a lack of research and teaching unfamiliar subjects; and overall loss of status relative to former teaching context.	18	43
Lack of Power, Autonomy and Status	Includes TCs arising from, for example, perceptions of: a need for teachers to undertake low level administrative tasks; a lack of teacher autonomy in assessment arrangements; non-deferential student behaviours towards teachers; and overall job insecurity.	14	29
Lack of Research and Professional Development	Includes TCs arising from a perceived lack of research and/or professional development opportunities - and associated lack of career development and personal growth and status as an academic.	6	9
Requirement to Teach Unfamiliar Subjects	Includes TCs arising from being required to teach subjects at the margins of or outside own academic discipline – and associated pressure of not being a subject authority.	4	5
<b>1.2: Lack of Student Preparedness for Higher Education</b>	TCs interpreted as arising from perceptions of students’ lack of preparedness for higher education. In particular, these include TCs arising from perceptions of students having inadequate English language proficiency, a generally low academic level and a lack of independence as learners.	19	79
Low English Language Proficiency	Includes TCs arising from perceptions of students having low levels of language proficiency relative to the demands of HE programs.	15	39
Low Academic Level	Includes TCs arising from perceptions of students having a lack of relevant pre-requisite subject knowledge and skills as well as a lack of awareness of the general demands of higher education.	10	15
Lack of Learner Independence	Includes TCs arising from perceptions of students lacking skills and attributes required to learn independently.	11	18

*Note: Sources and references aggregated at shaded nodes*

## Appendix 3: Excerpts from iterative work on refining codes and developing themes

	Significant Overall Shock	Significant Overall Shock	Significant Overall Shock
CS - Micro	<p>Classroom Management</p> <p>Use of Mobile Phones</p> <p>Language Barrier</p> <p>Local Cultural Aspects and Practices</p> <p>Gender interaction</p> <p>How to start the first class</p> <p>Islamic Practices and Beliefs</p> <p>Student Motivation Attitude and Behaviours</p> <p>Student Power</p> <p>Student Evaluation of Teachers</p>	<p>Teacher Role and Status</p> <p>1. HEI Power</p> <p>2. Student Power</p> <p>3. Lack of Research and PD for Expats</p> <p>4. Parental Role in Students' HE</p> <p>Requirement to hit the ground running [Moved to "shock enhancers"]</p> <p>5. Requirement to teach new subjects</p> <p>6. Teacher role and autonomy in assessment [Only some coded at 1 – the rest to be coded under unfamiliar academic system]</p> <p>7. Teacher evaluation – being judged</p>	<p>Loss of Authority and Status</p> <p>1. Lack of Power and Autonomy</p> <p>2. Lack of Research and PD</p> <p>3. Requirement to teach unfamiliar subjects</p> <p>Note: [include classroom management issues in 1.]</p>
SCS Meso	<p>Norms of Formal Interaction</p> <p>Not speaking out</p> <p>Organisational Structure</p> <p>Parental Role in Students' HE</p> <p>Staff Diversity and Interaction</p> <p>Majority and Minority Ethnic Groups</p> <p>Norms of Informal Interaction</p> <p>Social Norms of Muslims versus Non-Muslims</p> <p>Teacher Role and Status</p>	<p>8. Lack of Student Preparedness [student preparedness and expectations?]</p> <p>9. Student Performance in Assessment [add in to the other two]</p> <p>10. Low English Language Proficiency</p> <p>11. Low academic level</p> <p>12. Lack of Learner Independence</p>	<p>4. Lack of Student Preparedness</p> <p>5. Low English Language Proficiency</p> <p>6. Low academic level</p> <p>7. Lack of Learner Independence</p>

Former TLRs and Teaching Context	Tensions and Challenges Experienced in New Teaching Context	Early Emotional Responses to New Teaching Context	Subsequent Positioning	
			Responses in Practice	Associated Factors
<p><b>Overt TLR components</b></p> <p><b>Recurrent Practices:</b> the taken-for-granted ways of doing things, which have been developed through the workgroup engaging in practice</p> <p><b>Discursive Repertoires:</b> terms which frame teaching practices and how they are conceptualised, developed and used by the workgroup</p> <p><b>TLR components that may or may not have been surfaced</b></p> <p><b>Power Relations:</b> the power relations which develop and continue to flow through the workgroup and impact practices;</p> <p><b>Subjectivities in Interaction:</b> the individuality that workgroup members bring to their interaction within the workgroup and the construction of TLRs;</p> <p><b>Codes of Signification:</b> connotations of a particular feature or aspect of a workgroup's teaching context developed and attributed by the workgroup.</p> <p><b>TLR components not normally surfaced</b></p> <p><b>Tacit Assumptions:</b> collective assumptions about teaching and learning which are generated by the workgroup and underpin practice, but are not surfaced (at least not normally)</p> <p><b>Implicit Theories of Teaching and Learning:</b> theories of teaching and learning, such as perceiving teaching as the construction rather than the transmission of knowledge, that inform practice (and are perhaps generated outside the workgroup)</p> <p><b>Conventions of Appropriateness:</b> behaviours in the teaching context that the workgroup has generated a shared understanding of as being appropriate – and thus behaviour that feels normal in terms of practice</p>	<p><b>Cultural</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <p><i>I feel like, at the beginning, I felt that this is too much freedom or power to give to students – they are empowering students too much – and sometimes I will say, OK how can my students can judge me, with all my experience and all my qualifications? [...] I talked to friends, colleagues, How come that, you know, how can my students can judge his teacher? (students)</i></p> <p><i>"Very foreign, I feel very much foreign here. Because that's how, I think that is how they live when they were in their country, you have to speak out, you have to shout, you have to be loud or no-one will listen to you, but in my place, we don't have to be loud, you give your ideas – everybody will give their ideas and we will start talking about it – no one will be like, put aside, but here, that's what I feel..." (department)</i></p> <p><b>Academic</b></p> <p>For example: <i>I think in HE it is supposed to be independent learning but here it doesn't seem to be like that // They are encouraging student centred learning. [...] If, in the department, where I am teaching, with the type of students that we have, you cannot fully implement student centred learning – because students are still very much dependent on teachers.</i></p> <p><i>Well back home you should be more prepared for classes than you are here – back home students are more demanding, but more demanding for knowledge, but here the students are demanding, "teacher help" what does it mean, it means not like please explain me something, no, it means give me marks.</i></p>	<p><b>Disappointment</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <p><i>"Initially, after the examination, while I am I'm marking the paper, no, I feel like why the students are giving very less answers – that was the first time, I was a little disappointed, no, even though we teach a lot of explanation, so why there is no explanation, only like two lines of answer, I was completely disappointed."</i></p> <p><b>Self-Doubt</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <p><i>"See, um, once I marked the quiz, [...], see, ur, the first thing I was asking myself whether I'm not good to teach this subject."</i></p> <p><b>Fear /Insecurity</b></p> <p>For example: <i>"...some fear actually, because it is totally different environment, because I am working with, in my department, all of them are friends, but here, there is no friends here."</i></p> <p><b>Frustration</b></p> <p>For example: <i>Because they are not even – they don't even look at textbooks – so they focus on the notes that we have – just a little – they are not used to textbooks and things like that – so it's very difficult to teach.</i></p> <p><b>Isolation</b></p> <p>For example: <i>"... normally you see, one of the thing is, ur, when there are foreigner teachers, they are not open, open in that sense, if I am facing a challenge or a barrier or any obstacle or any issue, they keep it with themselves,</i></p>	<p><b>Embracing of role</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <p><i>"Sincerely speaking, the starting point was really tough, really, really tough, I thought, OK, I think I cannot, I cannot bring myself so low down, and how am I going to teach them, and sometimes they cannot grasp what we are teaching and I feel very depressed and stressed – then slowly time goes by through experience, and it's good – and then every year I know, this is how we are going to guide them, how they will come to us, this is how..."</i></p>	<p>Safe spaces for discussion</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>New friendships</p> <p>Social networks</p> <p>Proactive engagement with colleagues</p> <p>Proactive engagement with learning and sharing opportunities</p>
			<p><b>Acceptance of role</b></p> <p>For example: <b>Find this</b></p>	<p>Resistance to change</p> <p>Staying under the radar</p>
			<p><b>Withdrawal from role</b></p> <p>For example: <i>"I have seen some instructors, they find it very difficult and subsequently they resign their job and they leave, because they find it difficult. Sometimes students are, one is how to manage them, and the other is how you teach – just because you have an academic qualification, does not</i></p>	