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Author: Lamers-Reeuwijk, A.M.

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Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation has sought to contribute to the knowledge base of how to create a TNE teaching and learning environment that is congruent with the expectations of British programmes so that students can succeed academically, and how academics who teach on these programmes can be supported in their professional practice towards creating such an environment. It does so by investigating the teaching and learning environment of one such HEI offering TNE in Oman. There was a perceived need in this college, as expressed in the Quality Audit and confirmed by initial observations of classes, to set up a pedagogical framework that would harmonise the different, and often conflicting, expectations of the British programmes being offered, the expectations of the predominantly Omani students, and the expectations of the non-Anglophone expatriate academics teaching them. Based on the assumption that the teaching and learning environment plays an important role in students achieving the learning outcomes of the programmes, the research approach taken in this dissertation was to investigate this environment from different perspectives, i.e. the researcher's perspective as an observer and the teachers' perspectives on the usefulness of CPD elements, (Chapter 2), those of the teachers (Chapter 3), those of the students (Chapter 4), and how these different perspectives informed a long-term continuing professional development (CPD) programme (initiated in Chapter 2) eventually leading towards preparation for the recognition of teachers' professionalism in the form of HEA Fellowship (Chapter 5). The main findings of the four studies are summarised below as per their respective chapters, followed by a discussion of the general findings, and, finally, their implications for TNE practice and for further research.

6.2 Summary of the main findings per chapter

Chapter 2. *Moving out of their comfort zones: enhancing teaching practice in transnational education*

Both the Quality Audit report and initial observations highlighted the incongruity of teaching practice with the intended learning outcomes of the British programmes. This chapter reported the outcomes of a three-year long observational study from the perspective of the author as observer investigating how the teaching practice of a group of 44 expatriate, non-Anglophone, academics developed as a result of engaging with the CPD framework. The research questions that guided this study were driven by the researcher's perspective as an observer and the teachers' perspectives on the usefulness of CPD elements: (1) 'What might a new, more descriptive and context-sensitive evaluation tool suitable for TNE look like—one that might capture more teaching approaches than only information transmission?'; (2) 'How did the quality of teaching practice subsequently develop over a three-year CPD programme?'; and (3) 'Which elements of this CPD framework did academics find most useful?'. Descriptive statistics and qualitative interpretations were used to analyse the data.

The first version of the evaluation tool, presented in the form of a table, took existing teaching practice as the starting point. After preliminary observations, the pattern that emerged early 2014 was that there was too much variability among the lecturers in their approaches to

teaching, and at the same time too little variety in their interaction with the students, with very few or no learning activities for them to engage actively with the subject content. At the initial stage in 2014 the tool contained mostly descriptors of the lecturers' observed practice. Thus, the tool that emerged was originally more of a norm-referenced one as it situated the lecturers' teaching skills relative to those of other lecturers, yet it subsequently developed into a more criterion-referenced direction, and literature-derived criteria of best practice replaced some of the original terminology.

With regard to the second research question, over a period of three years and by engaging in the CPD programme, the majority of the lecturers made the shift from a teaching-centred approach (level 1) to a learning-centred approach (level 3 and up). The factor that was decisive in establishing a lecturer's level was a focus on teaching and information transmission as contrasted with a focus on learning with various learning activities to engage the students. In 2015 a sharp decline in level 1 was noticeable while at the same time the number of lecturers in level 3 doubled. The shift towards generally higher levels continued in 2016, with a few even reaching level 4. However, for a significant minority (one third of the group) this time period of three years was not enough to reach the desired teaching practice of focusing on the learning process (levels 3 and up).

As to the third research question, the items in the survey contained a broad conception of CPD with a total of 15 statements on both formal and informal elements of the CPD framework. Fifty-five out of the 69 lecturers rated the usefulness of these elements for their professional development during their time in the college. The main results were clustered into four groups: feedback on observed teaching practice, informal elements of professional development, workshops, and various other elements. Firstly, individual feedback on teaching practice, whether oral or written, was found to be most useful. Secondly, elements which were not deliberately introduced followed closely, with informal discussions with colleagues rated highly, followed by reading recent literature on teaching in higher education and discussions with their mentor when they first started teaching in the college. Thirdly, as far as the workshops were concerned, the ones given by the programme adviser of the partner university were found to be more useful than the ones on teaching and learning. Finally, the element which scored lowest amongst the lecturers as to usefulness was filling in the critical self-evaluation form after being observed.

In summary, chapter 2 provided insights into the teaching practice of non-Anglophone expatriate staff in TNE and how it for the most part improved over a 3-year period in which they engaged in the CPD programme that focused on the teaching and learning environment. It did so by taking into account the respective views of the observer and of the teachers themselves. The next step was to identify the challenges that non-Anglophone expatriate academics face in teaching transnationally in Oman so as to be better able to support them.

Chapter 3. *Expatriate academics and transnational teaching: the need for quality assurance and quality enhancement to go hand in hand*

In Oman it is common to hire expatriate academics to teaching in TNE, and the challenges they experience have an impact on the quality of the teaching and learning environment. Chapter 3

reported on the teachers' perspectives by means of a survey study seeking to identify the challenges that non-Anglophone expatriate academics face in teaching transnationally in Oman, followed up by interviews. Additional desk research into the quality audit reports published by the Oman Academic Accreditation Agency was conducted in order to place this case study into the wider perspective of Oman which revealed that professional development and teaching quality were major concerns in the private HEIs. To investigate the challenges that teachers face in this teaching and learning environment a survey was designed, piloted, and subsequently completed by 37 academics in 2015. The same survey was repeated in 2018 for the new teaching staff and completed by 34 academics. The respondents added no other challenges in the comments box. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of those challenges semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve selected teachers. The research questions that guided this study were (1) 'What are the specific challenges experienced by the expatriate teaching staff?' and (2) 'To what extent do these challenges impact on the quality of the TNE teaching and learning environment?'. The survey results were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics; and the interview transcripts using qualitative content analysis.

Regarding the first research question, the challenges were clustered around four cross-themes: those related to students, to programme quality, to teaching adaptation, and to quality assurance. *Student related aspects* were found to be the most challenging, and all interviewees said that students rely heavily on their lecturers for support (new topics, vocabulary, what to do for independent learning, assignments, reliable websites, uploading assignments or checking for plagiarism). Where students' approaches to learning are concerned, FBMS and FCS lecturers' opinions as to how challenging this aspect is varied most and what might have accounted for this difference is that students in FCS often lacked the prerequisite knowledge the British programme assumes they have. Some interviewees had learned from their students that in their school system they were not expected to ask the teacher any questions so that they felt more comfortable asking their classmates for clarification, and that in school they were expected to memorise rather than comprehend concepts.

The second most challenging aspect was *maintaining the programme quality* which is closely linked to the quality of the teaching and learning environment. Interviewees talked at length about the challenges of achieving these learning outcomes particularly at higher levels, e.g. in applying theory to practice and developing critical thinking skills, and the need to take a learning-centred approach. In addition, students are assessed in English, yet fewer than half of the interviewees stated they see it as their responsibility to address English language issues, although they had identified the lack of critical writing in exam answers.

The two aspects that were perceived to be the least of a challenge were *teaching adaptation*, and *quality assurance*. Regarding *teaching adaptation* five lecturers specifically stated they had adopted a learning-centred approach. A matter for concern was that four interviewees equated achieving the learning outcomes with delivering the content, which suggests they took a teaching-centred approach focusing on information transmission. Practically all interviewees reported that, after the initial shock, they perceived external *quality assurance* by the British university as very useful and that they learned a lot in the process.

As to the second research question, quality assurance with its focus on assessment construction and marking made a valuable contribution to their professional development and teachers recognised that quality assurance was a thorough and robust system and that standards were thus maintained across the programmes. Practically all lecturers perceived this external quality control by the UK university (including the external examiners) as a positive impact on the quality of their assessments and marking. The face-to-face communication that they previously had during the boards and discussions regarding their modules and assessments with British staff was considered important by these expatriate academics. They regret that the boards are now conducted in a plenary session through videoconference. What teachers perceived as impacting negatively on the quality of the teaching and learning environment was a lack of prerequisite knowledge, particularly in Computing, and students' need for structure and support in moving from memorisation towards concept comprehension and critical thinking.

In summary, this study underlined that quality assurance by the partner university alone is not sufficient for dealing with the challenges that expatriate academics face, particularly regarding the students and maintaining programme quality, but that there is a distinct need for extensive in-house continuous quality enhancement both for new and existing staff. This is not restricted to this particular HEI, as the Quality Audits had also pointed to concerns about teaching quality, professional development and staff induction in many private HEIs in Oman.

Chapter 4. Addressing student challenges in transnational education in Oman: the importance of a contextualised, consistent pedagogy

The school system in Oman is one in which memorisation allows success and in which critical thinking has long not been prioritised. When entering higher education, this previous experience may be disadvantageous to students' learning as it is incongruous with the British programmes. This chapter reported on the Omani students' perspectives by means of a survey which was completed by 755 students in total, and aimed at identifying the challenges that the predominantly Omani students face when studying in TNE. It was followed up by interviews with a selected group of 12 Omani students. Omani students find themselves in a novel teaching and learning environment with a British curriculum and non-Anglophone expatriate academics, all with their own culturally embedded assumptions of what higher education entails. These different assumptions may be disadvantageous to students' learning experience and engagement in the classroom. Therefore, in order to gain insights into the student perspective of how a teaching and learning environment can be created in which they can succeed academically, this study was guided by the following research questions: (1) 'What challenges do TNE students face in this environment?'; and, (2) 'What type of support do students need as a first step towards creating an appropriate teaching and learning environment in which they can succeed academically?'. Descriptive statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were used for the survey in order to identify clusters of interrelating variables underlying the items in the student survey, and qualitative interpretations of the interviews.

This EFA resulted in two main components: *continual adaptation*, and *achieving learning outcomes*. It also created a third factor with only two items that appeared to have nothing obvious in common. In contrast to the first two components, it showed a low Cronbach's α of 0.419 and this third factor was therefore disregarded. The mean scores for the survey

statements lay quite closely together, but the high standard deviations for each statement indicated that students differ greatly in how they perceive their studies in TNE, presumably depending on their diverse backgrounds. However, a more plausible explanation for the high standard deviation in the survey was found in the interviews, as there were multiple interview participants who described a wide variety in teaching approaches ranging from very negative to very positive experiences, and the extent to which they had found certain aspects challenging depended on the teaching approach taken by the teacher.

With regards to the first research question, the student survey revealed that the *continual adaptation* throughout the years to the progressively more demanding cognitive and linguistic skills required by the British Bachelor's programme was challenging. Particularly challenging aspects within this component were the adaptation of their own approach to studying as there is no longer an exclusive focus on memorisation that characterised their school system; new advanced vocabulary being introduced in every module; and high teacher expectations, specifically regarding independent learning. Adapting to different styles of teaching was challenging as teachers were reported to vary too much in their approaches. The extent to which understanding module content was challenging depended on support and structure offered by the teacher, more than on the difficulty of the concepts or on the vocabulary used. The development of critical thinking skills was perceived as quite a challenge because students come from a school system where this has long not been prioritised, and students feel that teachers vary too much in their support.

Where *achieving the learning outcomes* is concerned, it was paradoxical that students did not see how the English needed for their studies relates to academic literacy, when writing was the most challenging aspect identified in the survey, and this was confirmed by almost all the interviewees. First and foremost, writing long answers in exams was challenging (issues being: task fulfilment, organisation, concision, time constraints in exams, accessing advanced vocabulary), followed by writing assignments (totally new type of assessment, collecting data, referencing, length, short deadline, formal register). It might also be the case that students are not sufficiently familiar with assessment verbs used in exams and assignments. A case in point is that the interviewees only talked about problem solving rather than critical thinking.

The interviews, however, led to the unexpected finding that one item of the third factor 'Studying with other students' was particularly important for students as nine of them were in study support groups they had set up themselves.

Regarding the second research question, interviewees expected a high level of support from their teachers both inside and outside class. Inside class for setting up group discussions (problem solving), writing and referencing support, content or vocabulary explanations, or directions for independent learning. They did notice that teachers varied too much in their approach and this presented a challenge, but they appreciated the ones who took a learning-centred approach. Getting support outside class was also challenging, as teachers were not always available. Six students reported seeking additional explanation regarding the module content or the assignment instructions, or comments on a draft of their writing. The kind of practice that these TNE students believe to be effective and particularly suitable for them is

cooperative learning set up by the lecturer inside class so that they can develop their problem solving and critical thinking skills, and collaborative learning outside class.

In summary, chapter 4 provided insights into the aspects of studying in TNE that Omani students find challenging and into the kind of good practice that supported them both inside and outside class. Four interviewees called explicitly for teaching improvement, and the majority of them reported a wide variation in teaching approaches, which would be a plausible explanation for the high standard deviations in the survey. This points to the need for a consistent, context-sensitive pedagogy.

Chapter 5. *The UK Professional Standards Framework in transnational education: the importance of context*

The long-term CPD programme initiated in 2014 and reported on in Chapter 2, culminated in an evaluation of the extent to which the expatriate academics had become skilled practitioners in teaching and learning in TNE. This chapter reported on the professional development perspective and presented an evaluation study of the quality of the evidence submitted against the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) in the form of personal professional development portfolios written by 42 TNE academics in preparation for an application for Fellowship, which would soon become a requirement. The UKPSF, however, was designed for and by the sector in the UK, and this study investigated to what extent TNE academics teaching on British programmes were ready for gaining recognition for their professional practice. It therefore focused on the following research questions: (1) 'What is the level of reflective practice as shown in the portfolios of TNE academics?'; (2) 'What is their teaching philosophy?'; and (3) 'What are their professional development needs in relation to an application for Fellowship?'. To assess academics' level of reflection on professional practice, the study used a tool developed by Larrivee (2008), in combination with a content analysis of the teaching philosophy statements.

According to the guidance notes, an application for Fellowship requires a reflective stance on one's professional practice, incorporating relevant subject and pedagogical research. Hence each portfolio was analysed for its level of reflective practice, and coded for Larrivee's (2008) four reflection levels (pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection, and critical reflection) with their respective practice indicators. The teaching philosophies were coded for the UKPSF statements in each of the three dimensions (5 statements for Areas of Activity, 6 for Core Knowledge, and 4 for Professional Values), plus references to scholarship. Similarly, self-assessed CPD needs were clustered under the UKPSF dimensions.

Regarding the first research question about the level of reflective practice displayed in the portfolios, the majority of indicators was found at the *pre-reflection* level, closely followed by *surface reflection*. While a third of the indicators was found at the *pedagogical reflection* level, there were but five portfolios that showed these indicators solely, all in FCS. *Critical reflection* was not apparent in the portfolios. The second important feature of the portfolios was the general absence of what teachers' values are. The third finding was that many academics did not support their beliefs and assertions with evidence from experience, theory and research, despite explicit portfolio guidelines.

Where the second research question is concerned, what was noticeably underdeveloped in the teaching philosophy statements (TPS) was what had influenced their teaching philosophy, such as the *literature relating to pedagogy, reflections on practice, or views of how students learn*. Collectively, the topics covered in the TPS reflected the content focus for assessing applications, yet per individual teacher they were not covered comprehensively. Only a few teachers regarded *evidence for teaching effectiveness* as an element that informs their teaching philosophy, and teachers only wrote minimal responses to these sources of evidence.

Concerning the third research question, self-assessed CPD needs focused on further developing aspects of their Core Knowledge, particularly appropriate methods for teaching, learning, assessing, and Moodle. Some were also interested in research skills, an aspect of Areas of Activity, and a few also in soft skills, an aspect of Professional Values.

In summary, chapter 5 provided insights into the relatively low levels of reflection on the professional practice of TNE academics, and some indication as to their teaching philosophy and their professional values. The context in which these academics work might be an explanation for these findings.

6.3 Discussion of general findings

In the sections below, the general findings of the four studies are discussed in terms of their contribution to the knowledge base of how to create a TNE teaching and learning environment that is aligned with the expectations of British programmes so that students can succeed academically, and how academics who teach on these programmes can be supported in their professional practice towards creating such an environment.

The studies have contributed to the knowledge base by investigating a number of aspects that are typical for this teaching and learning environment from both the teacher and student point of view in the same institution (Chapters 3 and 4), something which in TNE has only been done in a small-scale study in Qatar by Prowse & Goddard (2010) focusing on learning styles. The combined insights gleaned from these studies show that the teachers found student related aspects the most challenging, both in 2015 and in 2018, while the students said in the interviews that the extent to which they had found their continual adaptation to the progressively more demanding learning outcomes of the British programme challenging depended on the teacher. Taking into consideration the questionnaires and the interviews in these two studies, the survey amongst UK providers of TNE (O'Mahony, 2014), the OAAA quality audits, and the longitudinal observations, there seems to be agreement that the quality of the teaching and learning environment in the host institution is a challenging aspect. Furthermore, the subsequently necessary support for TNE teachers can capitalise on those CPD elements that teachers found useful (Chapter 2), and can be extended in order to develop their professional practice (Chapter 5).

6.3.1 Aspects that impact on the quality of the teaching and learning environment

The four studies presented here confirm to a large extent that the TNE teaching and learning environment is a challenging one, as studies elsewhere have shown (Bovill et al., 2015; Hoare, 2013; Holden, 2018; Keay et al. 2014; Leask, 2006; O'Mahony, 2014; Pyvis, 2011; K. Smith, 2009). These challenges may impact negatively on the quality of the TNE teaching and learning environment. Whether the TNE environment is academically successful depends on the degree of convergence of the different, culturally embedded, expectations of the UK provider, the Omani students, and the expatriate academics.

Inconsistency in teaching approach

Particularly at the initial stage but continuing into later years, these expectations are different and potentially conflicting, and for students to succeed academically teaching practice needs to be congruent with the British programmes. It is cause for particular concern that the students here noted an inconsistent approach to teaching across their teachers, and that some students explicitly called for teaching improvement in the interviews (Chapter 4), reflecting the earlier observational study (Chapter 2) that had shown that a considerable minority did not improve their teaching practice over a three-year period. This inconsistency impacts negatively on teaching quality, which is ultimately a concern for the whole institution as well (Wilkins, Butt & Annabi, 2017) and nationally for TNE too, as the Quality Audits showed (Chapter 3).

Teaching as information transmission is an aspect of the school system that Omani students are used to (World Bank, 2013) so traditional lecturing by expatriate academics is not an approach that they will initially question. In turn, with the UK partner university only providing the slides for each session, expatriate academics may very well assume that traditional lecturing is what is expected from them. The teachers will not question this, either, if it is consistent with their own beliefs about teaching in higher education. However, the literature indicates that traditional lecturing is counterproductive to optimal learning (Loughran, 2013), and Virtanen and Tynjälä (2018) found that lecturing correlated negatively with the learning of generic skills such as problem solving and critical thinking, exactly what the British programmes expect from the students. Traditional lecturing will also confirm the student expectation that their established learning behaviour of memorisation will get them a pass, creating a false sense of self-efficacy similar to what Holden (2018) noted with TNE students in Bahrain. When there is a pedagogical-didactic disconnect between the programmes and students taught, the academic success of the TNE student in a British programme will be at risk, especially since Omani students expect extensive support from their teachers, which lecturing did not facilitate.

Challenges facing expatriate academics teaching in TNE

At the same time, the teachers found aspects related to the students and maintaining programme quality the most challenging, and there are several aspects essential for teaching in TNE: understanding the students' approach to learning and the school system they come from, and addressing students' needs and providing support so that Omani students achieve the learning outcomes of the British programme. This support requires a focus on structuring teaching and learning activities along lines of relevant skills and knowledge, knowledge

construction and comprehension; problem-solving techniques; and developing critical thinking and critical writing skills.

The majority of teachers, however, did shift to a learning-centred approach (Chapter 2), a teaching practice that the interviewed students appreciated. Moreover, in contrast to what an earlier study revealed in TNE in Malaysia (Dobos, 2011), the study presented in Chapter 3 found that most teachers did not consider this adaptation of their teaching much of a challenge. The descriptors of what constitutes effective teaching practice in TNE are found in levels 3 and up (Chapter 2): these are congruent with the expectations of the British programmes, and in line with the literature on effective teaching in higher education in general (e.g. Biggs, 2012; Kuh, et al., 2006; Maclellan, 2015; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Trigwell, et al., 2005).

Assessments

Particularly the study into student challenges (Chapter 4) brought to light that writing long answers in exams and writing assignments were what students found the most challenging aspects by far. Coming from an exam-oriented school system, assignments are forms of assessment students have not previously encountered, and they take many forms that students are not familiar with (e.g. essays, reports, portfolios, online forum discussions, presentations). Although students are well acquainted with exams, these focused on the regurgitation of memorised facts, whereas the critical writing required in response to an open question is totally new to them.

In parallel, for the teachers these assignments are often new as well, and sometimes also exam questions that move beyond the regurgitation of facts. Constructing assessments that are aligned with the learning outcomes of the modules was something that the quality assurance by the British university ensured, yet this was initially a very challenging aspect for teachers and took one of two semesters to learn (Chapter 3). Additionally, constructing and using marking criteria, together with exam moderation were aspects new to most of them, too, as previously in their own HE system they had full autonomy in this regard.

Context

There are several contextual aspects that are generally not known outside the country. The nature of the contracts on which expatriate academics are hired, described in Chapter 5, may explain why some teachers are less committed to long-term professional development, whether personal or institutional. It may also explain why they strategically choose to attach more importance to responding adequately and timely to external, visible sources of feedback on their performance, such as quality assurance processes, external examiners' comments and formal evaluations, rather than their own reflection, which will go unnoticed by the powers that be. Their teaching load may suddenly increase at the beginning of the semester as well, and staff-student ratios may be high. Furthermore, there is a gap between the school system Omani TNE students come from and the British programmes in terms of expectations: rather than memorisation, it is critical thinking and problem solving that are important for academic success. Hence, for interpreting the UKPSF in TNE it is important to understand the context in which these TNE teachers work.

6.3.2 The social aspect of learning and knowledge construction

What emerged from the studies was that personal interaction with others was a valuable component of the learning process, both for the Omani students and the expatriate academics. The students (Chapter 4) pointed to cooperative learning with those teachers who set up learning activities in class, and to collaborative learning in the study groups outside class as vital support in achieving the learning outcomes. This is in line with earlier research that found that academics' teaching practices can play a crucial role in supporting students' adaptation of learning behaviour (Eaves, 2011), and can have a positive influence on the quality of the learning (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006; Zepke & Leach, 2010), together with peers playing a positive role (Peregrina-Kretz et al., 2018). Students meeting outside class to help each other in understanding the content and the vocabulary, is a core aspect of learning communities (Brouwer & Jansen, 2019; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Furthermore, interaction with staff and peers was found to be conducive to learning critical thinking and problem solving, similar to what Virtanen and Tynjälä found (2018). Hence, part of the solution of alleviating the challenge of students being overly dependent upon their teachers would seem to lie in setting up group work thus capitalising on students' preference.

The expatriate academics, too, (Chapter 3) highlighted the importance of face-to-face communication with British staff, whether the programme adviser or the external examiners, a situation when quality assurance in TNE may lead to quality enhancement (Keay, May, & O'Mahony, 2014; Pyvis, 2011; Keevers et al, 2014). In addition, they also perceived personal feedback on an observed class, as well as discussions with colleagues and their mentor as useful contributions to their on-going professional learning (Chapter 2). It therefore seems likely that for the future requirement to gain recognition for their professional practice (Chapter 5), the mentor assigned to them will play a vital role in gaining Fellowship, even more so than studies in the UK had found (Asghar & Pilkington, 2019; Botham, 2018; Spowart et al., 2019).

6.3.3 Continuing professional development

There were several aspects that contributed positively to the TNE teaching and learning environment. First of all, the emphasis placed by the British university on the quality assurance of assessments led to a steep learning curve for expatriate academics regarding assessment construction and marking. Teachers also valued face-to-face communication with British staff, corresponding to what Keevers and colleagues (2014) found with TNE staff in Malaysia. Secondly, the initial focus of the long-term in-house CPD programme on teaching practice led to improved teaching for most teachers, and they found individual feedback the most useful for their professional development followed by informal discussions with colleagues. Therefore, this requires HEIs to make available the necessary resources in terms of time and academic development specialists who deliberately create opportunities for consultation sessions and facilitate the sharing of good practice within the faculty as these activities may contribute to transforming teaching and to a consistent teaching approach. At a later stage, CPD needs to focus on aspects that both the teachers (Chapter 3) and the students (Chapter 4) found challenging. Thirdly, the close cooperation initiated by the Centre for Quality Enhancement in the college with Quality Assurance and the Academic Registrar facilitated sharing institutional

data and learning analytics. Thus, quality enhancement at an individual level is reinforced by quality enhancement at an institutional level. Yet with regard to the HEA requirements of evidence-based applications, for example student evaluations of teaching or student results, it was problematic that only a few teachers regarded *evidence for teaching effectiveness* as an element that informs their teaching philosophy.

Also, in a teaching-intensive context such as this one academic staff need to demonstrate dual professionalism: to be experts in their field and in TNE pedagogy. With regards to whether the literature on what constitutes good practice in teaching in higher education has percolated down to the expatriate academics teaching in TNE, the findings are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, in the first study teachers indicated that they find reading recent literature on teaching in higher education useful (see table 2.2). Yet on the other hand, in the last study there are but few references to the literature in their professional development portfolios and those that were listed refer mainly to discipline-related publications.

The general lack of self-reflection accords with a TNE study (2015) in Iraq where Bovill and colleagues (2015) found that staff were inexperienced in reflecting on their own teaching experience. The paucity of self-reflection was evident from the studies presented in chapters 2 and 5: that teachers did not find it a useful CPD element may have been a precursor for the low levels of self-reflection in the portfolios. In chapter 2, *self-reflection* and *responding to student feedback and results* as descriptors of teaching practice appear only at level 4 (highly effective), and there were but a few teachers who reached this level after a period of three years. Similarly, in chapter 5, what was noticeably underdeveloped was what had influenced their teaching philosophy, such as the *literature relating to pedagogy, reflections on practice, or views of how students learn*. Many academics did not support their beliefs and assertions about teaching with evidence from their own experience, theory or research. With regards to the HEA requirements of adopting a reflective stance and embedding applications in the literature, these findings are problematic. Once the requirement for Fellowship is imminent, teachers need to be supported in two areas: taking a scholarly approach and engaging with the literature on pedagogy in HE, and developing their reflection skills and reflective writing. Since they found individual feedback and discussions with colleagues useful CPD elements (Chapter 2), the following two aspects may also support them in writing applications: feedback from a few critical friends on a draft version, and dialogue and reflection with colleagues on their professional practice.

6.4 Implications

6.4.1 Contextualisation in TNE

There are several implications emerging from these studies. To start with, few quality assurance frameworks have developed indicators for assuring the contextualisation of foreign programmes in the host country (Latchem, & Ryan, 2014), and Oman is a case in point. Teachers are simply told to contextualise the modules they teach so as to make them relevant for students with different educational and cultural backgrounds. Since in Oman these teachers are predominantly non-Anglophone expatriate academics, this raises the question of how they can ensure giving students local examples that are sufficiently contextualised for them to be able to

link new concepts to their society or workplace. Far more than is now the case, teachers need to share these examples with newcomers and/or consult with the Omani teachers for examples.

In addition, contextualisation is often understood in a narrow way as in giving local examples that students can relate to, thus making content comprehensible during teaching activities. What would transform learning, however, is to expand the term so as to include context-sensitive pedagogy, which in this case would mean alternating instruction with learning activities in order to stimulate teacher-student and student-student interaction. The instruction part includes teaching activities in which the teacher explains, models, demonstrates, and illustrates by a combination of lecture slides, video clips, mind maps, photos, worked calculations, etcetera. However, what would create a teaching and learning environment in which TNE students can succeed academically are learning activities that draw on local and regional case studies from the Gulf. These learning activities need to be in line with the intended learning outcomes of the British programmes, requiring both lower and higher order thinking skills and working in pairs or a group. Teachers need to set up this pair and group work, and can make cooperative learning in class more effective by giving clear task instructions and structured procedures, by setting students pre-reading tasks to be discussed in their study groups, by providing structured discussion questions in class, or by designing worksheets. These learning activities need to be actively monitored by the teacher, who scaffolds dialogues and debates skilfully and unobtrusively towards higher order thinking skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and analysis. During monitoring the teacher notices gaps in prior knowledge, adjusts activities as and when necessary, is aware of misconceptions related to content or key vocabulary, and gives timely and formative feedback on this.

Furthermore, in a TNE context such as described in this dissertation, it is of paramount importance that students are actively supported in acquiring the academic literacy within their discipline. This would include, but is not limited to, explaining and paraphrasing advanced discipline-specific vocabulary, and giving relevant examples of key terms. Even more crucially, teachers need to support students in how to transform ideas discussed in groups to writing these up in slides for student presentations or notes for assignment drafts. Again, students' preference for pair or group work could be utilised to assess peer work and identify how the written text can be improved, before moving to their own writing. And last but not least, teachers need to explicitly support students in understanding assessment verbs while ensuring that assessments are contextualised as well. Given the often-disharmonious English proficiency profile and the high orality of their society, Omani students would benefit from more opportunities to be assessed orally rather than in writing.

Universities offering TNE would do well to explicitly embed English language proficiency and academic literacy into their programmes, by including these in the learning outcomes of each programme. This would make it more likely that teachers actively pay attention to developing these in their students rather than leaving it for the students to learn through trial and error, sometimes with dire consequences for individual students. A further reason for including academic literacy and English language proficiency in the learning outcomes is that students who wish to continue on a Master's programme need to show proof of an IELTS 7.0 and they will need to be supported in attaining this.

In addition, TNE HEIs need to actively encourage students to form study groups and facilitate for them to meet. Initially, they might need to be guided by teachers, or maybe more senior students, whereas later on they can move to be more independent and teachers would only direct them to further engage with content through providing useful links on the Internet or YouTube. Study groups offer students a platform for discussions, revising, translating key vocabulary, critical reading and writing, and preparing group assignments.

An alternative way of creating a context-sensitive pedagogy that holds particular promise is the use of the flipped classroom for TNE students studying in a second language as it shifts the instruction part to recorded lectures which can be watched at home with all the technological advantages of pausing and replaying parts and being able to watch it at a convenient time; after all, in Oman, the majority of the TNE students are already in paid employment. Class time would then offer more opportunities for teacher-student and student-student interaction, focusing on the learning process with activities related to the learning outcomes of their programme and the development of academic literacy.

6.4.2 Implications for CPD

Academics teaching in TNE need to be supported in creating such a context-sensitive pedagogy in several ways. First of all, through induction, including discussions with their mentor; secondly, through in-house CPD programmes which need to be specifically developed in response to the challenges that teachers experience; and thirdly, by further developing their professionalism through discussions about teaching and supporting learning with their colleagues.

Judging by the challenges that expatriate academics face when teaching in this TNE environment, more emphasis at later stages of an in-house CPD programme needs to be given to aspects that are related to students and to maintaining programme quality, particularly at the higher levels of the programmes (Chapter 3). Although the challenge of developing critical thinking is not restricted to transnational education, given that in the students' previous education system critical thinking has long not been prioritised, this is an aspect that needs more explicit attention in TNE. Inextricably linked to this is how teachers can support their students in the aspect that they find the most challenging: academic writing (Chapter 4). It is paradoxical that most students think their level of English is good enough for their studies, when they find writing long answers in exams and writing assignments the two most challenging aspects by far. Since writing conventions are discipline specific, it requires a faculty embedded approach rather than a generic, whole institution approach.

Given that teachers found discussions with colleagues useful for professional development, small, supportive groups of teachers can play a key role in identifying issues in the programme they teach and working out a common approach. Taking a more scholarly approach to teaching and learning would be fostered by deliberately creating opportunities for collaborative action research, reflection and dialogue with others. Teachers also need to be supported in reflecting critically on their own teaching practice, responding to student questionnaires and previous exam results, and adapting how they teach the programme accordingly. They may prefer to do this together with a few trusted colleagues, rather than in large-scale workshops. Additionally,

for Fellowship applications, these discussions need to be followed up by reflective writing. Establishing a group of critical friends who can act as peer reviewers commenting on draft versions would be in line with another element that teachers found useful for their professional development, i.e. individual feedback. Together, these CPD elements contribute to promoting teaching excellence in the faculty, and in the wider context of the whole college by sharing good practice across disciplines.

6.4.3 Fellowship

For academics to further professionalise their teaching and to prepare for gaining Fellowship, they need to take a more scholarly approach and engage with the literature on key concepts in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education, while at the same time developing their reflective practice and reflective writing. The UK provider university will have an important role to play in supporting TNE teachers with Fellowship schemes, not only because TNE teachers have few shared points of reference with the UKPSF, but also as the provider university will have to assign British mentors to TNE teachers. This would benefit the UK university in two ways: it can demonstrate to the QAA that it takes its responsibility for the quality of learning opportunities in TNE seriously, and individual UK Fellows can show that they remain in good standing by mentoring TNE staff. In addition, it would be welcomed by the TNE staff who expressed a wish for more interaction with British staff since they had previously facilitated professional learning with regards to assessments.

6.4.4 At national level

At national level, Fellowship may be particularly important for TNE in Oman as academic staff are on teaching-only contracts and would then need to demonstrate professionalism in teaching. Considering the issues identified by OAAA regarding teaching quality and professional development in TNE, such a requirement would ultimately improve and enhance the TNE teaching and learning environment. Given the large number of TNE students in Oman, this would benefit not only the individual students in TNE, but also the country as a whole.

There are several other issues that could only be addressed at national level. Firstly, since TNE in Oman is privatised and operates on a for-profit basis, staff-student ratios tend to be high, particularly in Business & Management studies. Taking into consideration the extensive support that Omani students need to address the challenges that they face in British programmes, the number of staff hired is often inadequate, which is compounded by lengthy visa procedures. Private investors in TNE are reluctant to hire nationals as they need to offer them much more beneficial salaries and packages and are near-impossible to fire if student numbers should drop. Secondly, Ministry regulation allows just-in-time registration so there are no prognoses as to the student numbers every semester, and they can therefore unexpectedly rise steeply. Oman would benefit from a central registration system for higher education well ahead of the academic year or semester, so that institutions can plan properly.

Despite the fact that TNE is well-established in Oman, there remains a gap between the secondary school system and higher education. Until and unless higher order thinking skills such

as analysing, problem solving and critical thinking are fostered in the school system, this divide is likely to remain and teachers in higher education will need to actively support students in the development of these skills. Similarly, the development of English language proficiency needs to be strengthened so that students start higher education with sufficient knowledge of all the four language skills – reading, writing, listening and speaking. As it is, students often enter higher education with a disharmonious profile where the latter two skills are much better developed than the former two which are essential for transnational higher education.

Furthermore, since according to the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, UK providers are ultimately responsible not just for academic standards but also for the quality of learning opportunities (Chapter 3), there is a clear need for the provision of a champion of the UK university to be embedded in the host institution, similar to the contractual provision for quality assurance. Such a person would need to have enough seniority, expertise and credibility to drive change and continuous enhancement of teaching, learning and assessments. A single provider cannot enforce this, so here lies a task ahead for countries such as Oman to make this a requirement for TNE or for the worldwide sector as a whole.

And last but not least, current staff profiles are insufficient for teachers to competently support TNE students in the development of academic literacy, so the English proficiency for teaching staff needs to be raised to a minimum of C1 or IELTS 7.0, when they are proficient users of the language. Only at levels higher than B2 or an IELTS 6.0 are language users able to express themselves fluently on academic topics (Council of Europe, 2018), both in speaking and writing. The requirements set by the Ministry of Higher Education for Omani teaching staff are often lower than for expatriates, yet this would put the benefits of a British programme at risk, not just for the individual students but ultimately also for the nation as a whole.

6.5 Future research

The studies reported here were conducted in one HEI and, taken together, resulted in useful indicators of an effective teaching and learning environment that have contributed to improved practice over the years. The teaching and learning environment was investigated from different perspectives in order to get a holistic view. However, in order to obtain a wider consensus of what an optimal teaching and learning environment in TNE would look like, it is of key importance for future research to be expanded to include more TNE HEIs in Oman, or institutions in the UAE or wider Gulf Region where the teaching and learning environment is similar.

At the institutional level, a future area for research could be how TNE would benefit from requiring additional qualifications from teaching staff in terms of setting an IELTS 7.0 as a minimum and gaining Fellowship within a year of teaching in the British system. These measures would be within their remit and they would not have to wait for them to be set nationally. Such research could investigate how these additional requirements contribute to higher progression and retention rates in TNE, and higher classification of student results. The role that leadership plays in creating an optimal TNE teaching and learning environment was not included in this dissertation, and would be a further area worthy of more research in future.

And finally, considering that levels of reflection were relatively low in the portfolios, future research interviewing TNE staff may reveal why this is the case, and it would also be interesting to investigate how teachers move to higher levels of reflection and from reflection to improved professional practice.

6.6 Concluding remarks

With regards to the first part of the dual central aim of this dissertation of how to create a TNE teaching and learning environment that is in line with the expectations of British programmes so that students can succeed academically, its contribution to the knowledge base lies in a context-sensitive pedagogy. The results presented in Chapters 2 and 4 point to specific and effective indicators of what this entails. Where the second part of the dual central aim of this dissertation is concerned, i.e. how academics who teach on these programmes can be supported in their professional practice towards creating such an environment, the findings in Chapters 2 and 3 indicate that individual feedback on teaching practice, discussions with colleagues, in-house long-term CPD programmes, and quality assurance of the assessments by the partner university, were the main aspects that contributed positively to their professional practice. The future requirement to gain Fellowship (Chapter 5) is likely to further contribute to this.

UK universities are often approached by foreign institutions to engage in TNE based on their ranking in the league tables, either nationally or globally. However, whether TNE programmes are world class depends not so much on high rankings or the quality of the programmes that the partner university provides as on the professionalism of the academics who teach on them.